

## Chapter 21

# Thoughts, Feelings, and Talking in Therapy

*We're almost done. Can you feel it? Yet as far as discussing talk therapy, we've only just begun. Okay. So yes. You knew this already. But did you also know that these two feelings are some of what people should feel throughout the course of talk therapy? After all, we are one of the deepest mysteries in the Universe. Human beings. Then again, the real mystery here is where what we think and feel comes from. As well as whether our memories contain what we think and feel. Never thought about it? Well you should. Especially since being asked what you think and feel in therapy conflicts with what I've been saying about the mind and body. Not sure what I'm getting at? You're about to find out, in this chapter of Plain Talk about Talk Therapy.*

### What The F Are Thoughts and Feelings?

In the opening chapter I joked that the standard bad therapist's line, so how does that make you feel?, should be a signal to run for the door. Yet we all know, intuitively at least, that in the service of getting to know ourselves, that we'll need to answer these kinds of questions. Again and again, in fact.

The thing is, despite knowing we'll need to endure these somewhat vapid requests, we're never told directly what we're being asked for; what a feeling is. Let alone where we should be looking for this information.



## How Memory Gets Recalled

(how our thoughts and feeling get created on the fly)

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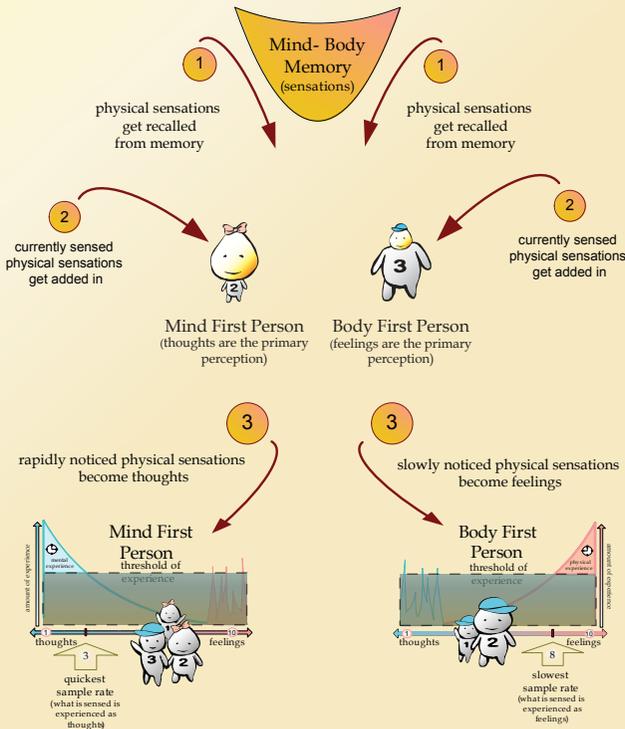


### What Happens When We Try to Recall Thoughts and Feelings?

Because we store only physical sensations in memory, whenever we attempt to recall thoughts and or feelings, we recall only the physical sensations stored in memory. These sensations then get summed with our current physical sensations.

Then, by noticing this sum, our thoughts and feelings get created on the fly.

Again, this explains why we can never experience the same set of thoughts and feelings twice, even if we try.



Imagine if the guys behind the deli lunch counter did this. Or the salesman at the car dealer. Or the customer service woman at the bank help desk. Or the head of sales at the realty office. Imagine what it would be like if they never told you what they need from you. You'd never get what you want. Not sure what I'm saying? Well consider this. Consider how talk therapy usually unfolds.

**Tom, the decent therapist:** *"So Sidney, when your teacher, Ms. Wordsworth, scolded you, what did you feel?"*

Here the therapist is asking Sidney what is perhaps the most common question a therapist could ask a client; *for the client to recall what he felt in a certain situation*. The underlying assumption? That we record, and can recall from memory, our thoughts and feelings. Can we? Common sense observations point overwhelmingly to that this is highly unlikely. As well as to that we probably make this stuff up on the fly. However, because of the way therapists voice this question, we can infer therapists believe the opposite; that they believe we do record our thoughts and feelings in memory. Moreover, because this unspoken assumption is a mainstay of the therapy, most clients then respond to these requests without ever questioning this assumption.

**Sidney, the ADD client:** (a long blank pause, followed by) *"Well, doc, I don't know. Mad, I suppose?"*

Here the client offers the therapist what is perhaps the most common answer a client could offer a therapist; *a guess voiced as a question*. That this answer is voiced as a question is a sure sign the client is asking the therapist if this is what he *should* have felt. To which a decent therapist might respond by offering Sidney some help, probably in the form of some possible answers for what he might have felt. A great therapist, on the other hand, would bypass this question by asking Sidney to check in with his body. In other words, to notice where and what he was physically feeling, if anything. His here and now sensations. Tightness. Heaviness. And so on. As well as what he felt about being asked this question.

**Tom, the decent therapist:** *"Well Sidney, when you tell someone to go F themselves, usually you are feeling mad."*

Since Tom is a decent therapist, not a great one, he suggests a possible answer. This answer assumes not only that Sidney recorded his feelings in memory but also that his feelings make logical sense. And while this kind of

logic is often absent from what people feel, when a therapist suggests a logic with which to frame feelings, people usually feel better. More so when what they say they felt pleases the therapist. Which then prompts the client to say things like the following.

**Sidney, the ADD client:** *“Well then I guess that is what I must have felt. Yes. Mad. That’s it. I was mad. Really mad.”*

Here Sidney the client agrees to say he recalls feeling what the therapist suggested. Including that what he felt makes logical sense. By this point, Sidney may even be feeling this anger in his body as the body often takes it’s lead from the mind.

**Tom, the decent therapist:** *“That’s great Sidney. You’re doing a good job of getting in touch with what you felt then.”*

Here the therapist rewards the client for fabricating the proper feelings. Decent therapists describe this process as that the “client has gained insight.” In reality, there is no way to know for sure this is what the client felt. Or if the therapist has instilled these feelings in the client. We can only know that the client is now sure this is what he must have felt, and that he feels better knowing that what he felt makes sense.

Okay. So not all therapists are this cliché. Still, when therapists ask clients to recall their thoughts and feelings, this is what they are asking their clients to do. And when clients ask therapists to clarify what they are asking for, therapists often have no way to do this. Other than to rephrase the question with different words, or to offer the client logically possible answers.

Why don’t therapists have a better way to explain what a feeling is? Over the years I’ve asked myself this many times.

I’ve also struggled to find a way to answer these requests. After all, it is me who is asking folks to tell me what they feel. Shouldn’t I be able to clarify for them what feelings are?

The truth? I should. But until now, I haven’t been able to. So what have I done? I’ve done what many other talk therapists do. I’ve danced around the question, with everything from showing pictures of faces labeled with feelings words to long winded dissertations on the nature of emotion. All the while hoping, I guess, that the person would intuit what a feeling is.

How does this usually work out? More times than not, between the two of us, we somehow manage to make this work. Probably because most people are quite willing to fish for their feelings the same way that I do, all the while

supposing, I guess, that they will somehow stumble onto the “right feelings.” At which point hopefully my face lights up so that we can both assume, they and I, that they now know what it was they thought and felt back then.

Does this fishing for feelings do any good?

In many cases, it does. People get to see how dumb therapists are. And that we’re no better off than they are. With regard to naming our feelings anyway. On the other hand, if you were to ask me to seriously consider if this process helps people, in the grand scheme of things, I’d say it probably does as more to confuse people than it does to heal them.

This then has been the state of talk therapy. People asking other people to fabricate feelings on the spot, all the while assuming people store their feelings in their memories. In hindsight, I feel amazed by this. As well as by the fact that we have somehow been helping anyway. This said, I cannot count the number of times I’ve felt at a loss as to how to teach people what feelings are. As well as worried that what I am saying might be biasing them away from their truth.

So let me ask you. Has this even happened to you? Have you ever felt pressured to put this vagueness we call feelings into words that feel true? And have you ever tried to define for someone else what feelings are only to come up against this very vagueness?

Of course, the proof for this vagueness lies in the very books with which we define our words; our dictionaries. Including my old standby, the massive twenty three volume OED. To its credit though it does offer us our first clue. That the word *feelings* derives from Greek and Latin words, both of which mean *the palm of your hand*.

What does this imply? It implies that feelings derive from sensations. After all, palm is an obvious reference to that feeling things means touching things. But touching what? Touching the wall? Touching moments? What do we touch when we feel things? Unfortunately, the OED does not say.

Then there’s the vagueness surrounding this word in everyday life. For instance we commonly use the word *feelings* to refer to what we experience in our heads. As in what we *feel* about something; our opinions about it. At the same time we also use the word feelings to refer to what we experience in our hearts. What we *feel* period. Our emotions.

Here then is our second clue; that the word *feelings* can refer both to our thoughts and to our emotions. As in this word can refer to two variations of the same thing.

Then there is our third clue; that at the same time, we also use these two words, thoughts and feelings, to refer to two separate and distinct experiences. Each with its own set of rules and such.

For instance when the word feelings refers to what is in our hearts, feelings

can be neither right nor wrong. As in, feelings aren't facts. Yet when the word feelings refers to what is in our heads, feelings are right. Or wrong. Or both. As in the "right thinking" of Buddhism. And the right way of thinking in politics.

So what is a feeling? A thought? An emotion? And which is it, can they be wrong or not?

To me, these questions define one of the major dilemmas in talk therapy today. The dilemma? That we refer to thoughts and feelings as if they are two varieties of the same thing while at the same time, we refer to them as being two different things. One of which can never be wrong, the other, frequently wrong. Or even inconsequential at times as in, "it's just your opinion."

Now take a breath. And still your mind. Now notice your body while you consider this.

I've just suggested we have three clues as to what the word feelings actually means. One. That feelings derive from physical sensations. Two. That feelings, as thoughts and emotions, are two aspects of the same thing. And three. That we treat thoughts and emotions are two separate and distinct things.

Now consider how what I've just told you so parallels what I've been saying about views of the four philosophers on the mind and the body. As well as the views of more modern folks. Scientists and such.

To wit, I've told you that some folks, the materialists, believe our feelings arise from our bodies. From what we feel in our bodies. Sensation itself. Thus here we have a whole lot of folks who believe feelings stem from sensation. Which explains why we would use the word feelings to refer to sensations.

I've also told you that Spinoza believed that the experiences of the mind and body were two aspects of the same thing. Thus here we have clue two; that our thoughts and feelings are two aspects of the same thing. Which would explain our using the word feelings to refer to both.

In addition, I've told you that Descartes believed our experiences of the mind and body were two separate and distinct things. And if we use the word feelings in the clue number three sense of how we commonly use it to refer to emotion, we can say that Descartes two separate and distinct things were thoughts and feelings. Again, a usage we already use, and the root of our having two separate and distinct rules by which to live.

Now add in that when we apply Herbart's threshold of perception to Descartes and Spinoza's ideas, we see how all these things come together. You see Herbart's line is the threshold of sensation. Above which we experience thoughts and feelings as if they are two separate things, thoughts coming from the mind and feelings from the body. And below which thoughts and feelings turn out to be two aspects of the same thing, a single continuum extending from the mind to the body; from thoughts to feelings.

Finally add in my recent discoveries about the mind and body. That the speed at which we sample our physical sensations is what determines whether we experience physical sensation as thoughts or as feelings and you have solved one of the greatest mysteries in human personality. What a feeling is. So what is it? It's all the things I've just described and a whole lot more. Starting with the ideas we've just discussed, all of which already appear in our everyday language. The ideas?

- That feelings derive from the physical sensations we sense along our spines. This roughly approximates the path described by the existential mystical practice of yoga in ancient India and by doing so, honors many modern day healing practices. Note this does not imply the materialism of modern western medicine; that the body gives rise to the mind. Rather, by including the brain in this vertical path, we infer Descartes mind / body interactionism; the idea that not only does the body give rise to the mind, but also that the mind gives rise to the body. As in we can mentally imagine sensation which then gets physically felt in the body.
- That the speed at which we sample these physical sensations determines which of Descartes two conscious experiences we have. Either mind sensations / thoughts, which are the things we sample at the faster rates, or body sensations / feelings, which are the things we sample at the slower rates. Here thoughts would include all reasons and logic and attempts at reason and logic. Whereas feelings would include all emotions as well as our intuitions and gut reactions.
- That beneath these two experiences this lies a single continuum of sensation, consistent with Spinoza's idea that the mind and body are two aspects of one thing. Expressed as physical sensation, it runs from the top of the head to the base of the spine and includes the rest of the physical body at heights approximating the points at which the limbs and such attach to the spine. And expressed psychologically, it runs from the fastest sensations; pure thoughts, to the slowest sensations; pure feelings.

Now add to all this that we can easily observe all these things in ourselves. Including that we each have a default preference for which of these two ways we experience life, either as quickly sampled thoughts or as slowly sampled feelings.

Here then is the thing talk therapists have been needing all along; a way to define what they have been asking us for. And yes, this does not address the

ambiguity present in our everyday day language, as far as the word feelings referring to everything from physical sensation to thoughts and emotions. However, it does at least begin to address what underlies this ambiguity.

This then leads us back to the action part of these requests; that we recall our thoughts and feelings. And to my assertion that we cannot do this. That we do not store thoughts and feelings but rather make them up on the fly. As we sense them. Even about the past.

So where do thoughts and feelings come from? This is what we're about to explore. Starting with what to me is a rather amazing coincidence. The idea that this possibility; that we make up our thoughts and feelings on the fly, has been around for a hundred years. Including as one of the main beliefs of one of America's first psychologists. Harvard professor, William James.

What did James have to say? Let's look.

## **Do We Remember Thoughts and Feelings?**

Here I go again, mentioning one of my heroes, William James, who as the author of the first American text on psychology is considered to be the father of American psychology. So what did James have to say about what we claim we can remember? Start with this.

One of James' fundamental assumptions about the mind was that it did not store literal records of the past. No exact catalog of what we saw happen. No precise historical truth to be recalled. No court witness version of what happened in our past. Rather he believed our minds contain only a "humming buzzing confusion." A sort of mixed up jumble of raw materials somehow assimilated from what we have experienced.

So what did James think was happening when we recant the past? He believed we were recalling a newly revised and edited version of our personal histories. A latest revision of sorts of what we need to believe today.

In other words, James thought we constructed our memories on the fly, rather than recalling facts. Not that we never recall facts, mind you. Just that the way we recall them; the order, focus, emotional content and so on, varies from moment to moment.

Now consider how different this view is from what we commonly assume. Including that this way of conceptualizing the mind and memory differs markedly from what most people believe today. Including most current personality theorists. Thus most people today, including most of today's personality theorists, believe we record in memory what we have experienced. Including what we thought and felt at the time.

Now consider how this belief affects what we do in talk therapy. We assume talk therapy helps people to make sense out of their lives by assisting them in

recalling and reviewing some literal personal truth. This means when a therapist asks something like, “So tell me Sidney, what do you remember feeling when Miss Wordsworth sent you to the principal’s office?” The therapist is assuming Sidney can recall from memory his actual thoughts and feelings. Including that what comes out of Sidney’s mouth is what he actually thought and felt then.

If James was right though, and the evidence points to that he is, then this is not what comes out of our mouths in these times. Rather, according to him, what we recall has very little to do with actually happened in our past. Rather, it has more to do with what we currently think and feel about the sensations we can actually bring to mind.

Oddly no less than Freud himself remarked on this very thing in his seminal book on the nature of dreams. And yes, he was referring to the nature of dreams not the nature of the whole mind. Still, when he says things like that “experiences from the day which has most recently passed” are found in every dream, he is saying something very similar to James. And when he remarks on that the content of dreams undergo tremendous *condensation* when compared to what we later say about them, he is inferring again that we end up with much more than what is stored in dreams.

Freud of course denies this and clearly states what we say is in there. No coincidence then that his beliefs underlie much of our current assumptions as far as that we do store thoughts and feelings along with sensations in our memories.

But if we don’t then what does this means about how we assume the therapist is helping us to forensically reconstruct the past? Certainly this is a risky assumption on which to build our future happiness.

Still not clear as to what I’m saying here? I’m saying that according to James, when we are asked to recall something from the past, that in some way, we create these so called “memories” on the fly. Moreover, rather than that we recall what really happened, he infers we combine the few details we actually do store in our memory with whatever we are currently or have recently sensed. Thereby pragmatically fabricating our historical pasts so as to be useful to us in the present.

Now consider what this means if this is true.

If this is true, and I think it is, then we need to entirely throw out, or at least grossly revise, much of what we believe about how talk therapy works. Including that what we recall is anything like a literal truth. And yes, this flawed and fabricated content does have value in that it allows us to see our currently held beliefs. However, as court witness type material for making sense out of what has happened? Not even close.

Can this be true though? Can we have been basing talk therapy on a bril-

liantly fabricated lie; that we store and can recall what we once thought and felt? In a moment, we'll delve more deeply into this possibility. Before we do though, I need to ask you to further consider what this means about talk therapy. And about our some of most basic assumptions period. Including that we have an unconscious which stores thoughts and feelings from our past.

Start with this. When therapists ask people to recall what they thought and felt, if the majority opinion is correct, then what we recall is actually what we thought and felt. And yes. We all assume this recall to be a flawed and imperfect version of what happened. But at the same time, we assume it is a version of some literal truth nonetheless.

If James was right though, then we are not recalling history when we say we remember such and such. Rather, we are doing what philosophers and scientists accuse all historians of doing; that the winners write history. Here the *winners* would be whomever we are in the here and now present. And this means that as we change, so does our history.

Who is right then? The evidence points to James. And to that Freud was right but misinterpreted what he saw. Thus even if we simply go by what we can observe, James' conclusion appears more plausible. For instance, in my experience, while people often say they are certain the way they remember things is accurate, rarely I have seen people able to repeat these so called certainties. Moreover if you add to this that the recall process is itself often quite charged, then the idea that we can correctly recall things like a heated marital dispute or a traumatic childhood event seems dubious at best.

On the surface then, and from all we can derive from observing the process of talk therapy, we do not store thoughts and feelings. And although we obviously do store things in our memories, it seems whatever this something is can never be reduced to a single truth. At least, not to an accessible factual truth.

Thus when therapists ask people to recall what they think and feel, for the most part, they are asking people to do the impossible. And yes, as I've mentioned, doing this has great value. But only when we see this as a means to know the person's current thoughts and feelings. And not as some way to historically reconcile past hurts and losses.

Am I saying then that we should throw out what we know about talk therapy and start a new? For that matter, why go to all this trouble to question what we so take for granted; that we store literal memories? Why? Because we build our entire hopes for becoming more healthy on this very belief. And because if this belief is false, then what is it we are building our hopes on?

Does what I'm suggesting here sound hard to believe? That we store in ourselves no literal truth. No real recorded history. No unchanging truth.

How about it being difficult to grasp? For instance, have I totally lost you

when I suggest we have no literal memories? Rather we store sensations only and create what we think and feel based on our here and now recall of these experiences?

If I have totally lost you, then consider this. What I'm suggesting here is that we reevaluate talk therapy. Not all of it. Rather, our basic assumptions. Beginning with that our minds do contain a single truth. Do they?

Know that for years now, this question has stumped me. Why? Because conventional talk therapy functions largely on the assumption that we get to the bottom of things by forensically reconstructing a literal truth.

Strangely I've been bypassing this question for years. How? By assuming that it does not matter. That the only thing which matters is that I help people.

I've also been influenced by the having studied the work of folks like M.D., Brian Weiss, and Jungian Analyst, Rodger Woolger, both of whom practice the strange art of past life regression therapy. Sound like crazy stuff? It is. Until you consider that both men openly admit to being uncertain as to the truth of what people recall. And that in essence, all that matters is that it helps.

Woolger in particular has had a great influence on me, particularly in how the following quote has influenced my practice and my life. He says:

*But as a therapist and not a philosopher I am perhaps fortunate in that I am not shackled by the problem of belief or disbelief; I am not obliged to delay my session until the learned jury of parapsychologists and metaphysicians is in on these matters. Not that they do not have important observations to make . . . but for the therapists, there is another kind of truth, psychic truth: that which is true for the patient. (Other Lives, Other Selves, R. J. Woolger, 1987)*

So what do we store in our minds and bodies? Do our memories hold a literal record of what has happened? Or do we, as James suggests, revise history on the fly, based on whatever we think and feel here in the present? I think a clue lies in what one of James' contemporaries, Pierre Janet, inferred, not about the nature of memory, but about the nature of wounds. What did he say? He referred to wounds as "fixed ideas." Thoughts and feelings which somehow cannot evolve along with us in the present.

Thus, while Janet does not state per se that the mind creates memories on the fly, he does infer this by referring to wounds as fixed ideas, "wounded" ideas which we store in memory as if they have but a single preordained outcome. As opposed to normal ideas which involve the past but evolve in response to the present.

Why mention Janet? Because like Descartes and Spinoza, I think these

two men are right as well. I think that James is right as far as that we revise our histories on the fly, based on what we need to address in the present. And I think Janet is right in that psychological wounds are the exception to this rule, in that they are indeed fixed ideas, wounded ideas which get recorded in memory with a preordained outcome. Including at times some of what we thought and felt.

How does this hypothesis bear out in my almost twenty years of practice? Exactly as these two men predict. In fact, I've never seen a person who did not revise their thoughts and feelings on the fly. As James predicts. And I've never seen a person who could revise a wounded idea at all. Wounds do indeed revolve around fixed ideas whose outcome is forever fixed. As Janet posits.

The problem of course is how to explain all this. For instance, if it's true that we constantly recreate what we think and feel, then how can we ever depend on our memories for anything? And if this is so, then what is it therapists are asking people to do when they ask people to recall what they once thought or felt? Fabricate their memories so as to create a less disturbing vision of the past? Stretch the truth so as to reconcile irreconcilable differences? Alter the logic and emotions present so as to revise the meaning of their life? Make logical sense out of a pitifully flawed recall so as to eliminate the pain of confusion?

The answer to all this of course lies in us knowing how such a thing could be happening. What is stored in our memories? And in what way could we be revising this so as to create our memories of the past?

When it came to questions like these, James was never sure. Hence his description of the mind as a "humming buzzing confusion." And herein lies yet another clue to what the truth really is. You see, while James calls the mind a "humming buzzing confusion," he never tells us exactly what this humming and buzzing is.

So what is it?

Sensation. The only thing we store in normal memory.

Along with Janet's fixed ideas which indeed do include at times thoughts and feelings along with sensations.

So where do our thoughts and feelings come from? And what makes me so sure sensation is what is stored in our memories? This is what we'll look into next.

## Where Do Thoughts and Feelings Come From?

Let's start with what we can empirically test about thoughts and feelings. What can we test?

Amazingly, we can empirically test for the main supposition here; whether we create our experiences on the fly. How? It's simple. Ask someone to say something to you then say it back to you again. Identically. One minute later.

Do you think people can do this? Well try it. Or try it yourself using a digital recorder. Say a few normal sentences. Then wait one minute. Then say what you said again. Identically.

Now play this sequences back noting any differences present and I guarantee there will be many differences. In tone. In pace. In content. In inflection. Which means what? Which means you ability to recall even simple things from the prior moment is seriously flawed.

Think you might get better at this with a bit of practice? You will. So why don't you try this again. Only this time, pick a line from a magazine article. Or from a newspaper article. Now read it into the tape. Now try to repeat this a second time. Only this time, do it without reading from the page.

How'd you do? Did you even come close? Most people can't. In fact, even if you can come close, do you realize what this means about us and about our ability to recall thoughts and feelings. The thing we've been calling our truth?

Okay. So we cannot recall even the simplest of thoughts or feelings within minutes of having them. So what? Don't we at least remember the gist of what we've thought or felt? Moreover isn't this, after all, what we are looking for in talk therapy?

The answer? No. We cannot recall the gist of what we thought or felt. Do you doubt me? Then try doing this a third time. Only this time try to read the line with the exact same thoughts going through your head. As well as with the exact same feelings going through your body.

Can you do it? Don't worry. No one can. At least, no normal person. And yes. This is what we are looking for people to do in talk therapy. Which is why I keep pointing this problem out. We assume we can do this yet we can't even recall things from a single moment before. Especially what we thought or felt.

Why is this a problem? Because we base our belief in talk therapy on that talk therapy can get us to do this. Unfortunately, we cannot do this even for emotionally neutral events which occurred but minutes before.

Now take a minute to let all this sink in. Now consider once more what this means.

Most of us share a common belief; that the mind stores thoughts and feelings right along with sensation. Yet it seems this belief is empirically false based on simply obvious evidence. Moreover, the more delve into the implications of what I've discovered about the mind and body, the more I reach what for me is certainly a startling conclusion. That our thoughts and feelings exist only in our here and now noticing activities. And not in our memories.

If true then unprocessed life events do not generate thoughts and feelings unless and until we notice them. Which means the act of noticing sensation itself is what creates our thoughts and feelings.

Not sure what I'm suggesting? I'm suggesting that life events affect us the way the sounds from speakers affect our ear drums. In other words, all sounds move our ear drums. However, some register below the level of our ability to perceive. Thus some sounds we hear. Others we do not. And of those we do hear, some will occur to us only later, while others will never occur to us.

I and many others have been calling the sounds which occur around us but which we do not notice until later, sounds we heard "unconsciously." This is like saying we heard these sounds but at the same time, did not hear them. The thing is, we cannot both hear a sound and not hear it. This is a logical impossibility.

How then have we been explaining this logical impossibility? By saying that we store these unnoticed life experiences in a secret compartment to which we normally have no access but can gain access under special circumstances. Hence the idea of an unconscious.

In addition, we've been assuming that what we store in this secret compartment includes not only the sensory information from these events but also what we think and feel about this sensory information.

The thing is, if this was true, then why can't we recall these thoughts and feelings only minutes later and given free rein as far as how much effort we can make?

This leads us to a very startling conclusion. That we do not store our thoughts and feelings in memory. Nor the meanings these thoughts and feelings lead us to.

So what do we store? We store patterns of pressure change and neurological stimulation. Including everything from the most subtle brush on the skin of your forearm all the way to complete visual recordings. This means we feel feelings and think thoughts only when we notice these patterns of changing pressure and neurological stimulation.

And when we do not feel feelings and think thoughts about this information? Then this stored data exists only as potential patterns of pressure. Patterns recorded in our very tissues. Pattern which replay when we focus our attention on them. Including both in the tissue of the brain in our head and the our brain in the gut.

Here than is why I say our thoughts and feelings resemble the experiences we have of hearing sound come from speakers. Or anything physical we have yet to notice. This makes unnoticed life events more like the ingredients in an unbaked cake than like an already baked cake we have yet to notice on the counter.

What are these unbaked life events before we think and feel them then?

Before we think and feel them, they exist only as stored patterns of stress and or pressure change. Here the possibility of a cake exists. But until we bake it; by noticing it, we cannot call these life events *experiences*.

In other words, to call what is in our unconscious, “experience,” is like calling an unbaked cake, a cake. *Experience* is the act of thinking thoughts and feeling feelings about these sensory life events. This makes what we think and feel the already baked cake and anything less the as yet unbaked ingredients.

Now consider the implications of this hypothesis.

If we store only sensation and not thoughts and feelings along with these sensations, then we do not store conversations. We only store the sensations these spoken words once made on our ears. And on our spines. And on our guts. And on our minds.

What kind of sensation does sound make on the mind? The same kind of impression music makes when it flies by our ears unnoticed and then, when someone says, did you hear that, we recall this sound and go, “oh, yea.”

We hear conversations the same way. Which is why, if, much later, we try to recall what we felt during conversations, we can. But only what we felt in our bodies. The sensations. And not what we thought or felt. The experiences of these sensations.

The exception of course is when we have wounded ideas. Janet’s fixed ideas. Here, we may record some of what we thought of felt. Or we may not. Either way though, we have limited abilities as to what we can later feel and think about these events. Including each and every sensation involved.

How would this effect how we try to treat problems in therapy? For instance, how would this affect overeating?

Begin with what I’ve been telling you about the mind; that sensation is not an experience until we notice it. And even then, our experiences are never a single true experience. Rather, they are our experiences du jour, meaning, our on the fly interpretations of whatever we once sensed. Combined with what we sense now.

Now consider what this means about the idea that we eat to stuff our feelings. Can this be? Well if we do not feel them until we notice that we are eating, then this creates yet another logical inconsistency. You see, overeating exists solely because we do not feel the physical sensations of eating while we are eating. Therefore we can’t be stuffing feelings. We have yet to even feel them.

And what about the common belief that we take drugs and drink alcohol to numb our feelings?

Here, there is probably a good deal of truth to this idea. Why? Because drugs and alcohol do literally reduce our ability to physically sense things. This means, when we drink alcohol, and when we do mind altering drugs, by altering our ability to record sensation, we impair our ability to ever have accurate thoughts and feelings. Even given help and time and will power and intelligence.

Now consider how difference these two kinds of experiences are. With

overeating, we do it because we cannot physically sense what we are eating. And with alcohol and drugs, they in and of themselves decrease our ability to physically sense things. Finally, consider how this also explains why we feel and think such painful thoughts and feelings about traumatic events. Why? Because with normal situations, we are free to create what we think and feel on the fly, in the present, based only on what we've stored of what we physically sensed. But with trauma, we store not only what we physically sensed but also the instant of thought and feeling we thought and felt in the peak moment of the event.

This explains how we can constantly rewrite our inner history based on our current needs. Including the needs of a talk therapist, a spiritual advisor, or a friend or spouse. But why we cannot do this with regard to trauma. Certainly not without the help of a trained professional.

Here then is the truth about where our thoughts and feeling come from. They come from our noticing physical sensation. Moreover, we can call these physical sensations, "experience," only after we think thoughts and feel feelings about them. Before then they exist only as potential or actual sensation.

What I'm also saying is we do not actually store our thoughts and feelings. Rather, they get created on the fly, whenever we pull physical sensation into our awareness. Including from the past, from the present, and from what we envision to be the future. And from both literal sensations we have stored in memory and from what we imagine these physical sensations were, are, or will be.

This means, when we assume we think or feel something before we think and feel it, we are probably making a mistake. And while I see much value still in the idea that we have an unconscious, the more I understand how the mind and body connect, the more I see the unconscious as the repository for unprocessed sensation rather than for already thought and felt experiences.

Next we'll look take a side trip into the realm of processing speed. And at how the speed at which we sample physical sensation is the basis for our tests for intelligence.

## **Speed and Clarity as the Basis of Intelligence**

Most people know that if you say students are "quick," you are inferring they are smart. And conversely if you say students are "slow," you are inferring they are dumb. "He's slow." God. What parent would want to hear this! Come on. And dumb? Wow! What an insult.

Of course, when it comes to how the so called "slow" kids feel, while they may indeed be slower when it comes to getting the gist of words, they can also generally sense feelings at something like twenty times the speed of the Mind First kids. Which is odd when you consider that the kids we used to call retarded are simply the extremely slow version of being like this. Quick to sense

feelings and slow to sense words. Which is why they are probably some of the most sensitive beings on the planet. Along with babies, of course, who also do pretty well in the feelings department. And for the very same reason. They are quick to feel feelings. And slow to respond to words. Duh! Doesn't this tell you something?

Some may now be asking themselves why I just used the word, "retarded." And yes. Many folks now see this word as a pejorative term. As well as an outdated term. The thing is, despite our current habit of calling these folks developmentally disabled, saying they are retarded is probably closer to the literal truth. After all they are slow mentally. And really quick emotionally. Which is why, even before my recent discoveries, I used to tell people retarded folks were never retarded emotionally. Just the opposite, in fact. They are brilliant emotionally. No kidding.

As for our topic here; how speed is seen as the sign of intelligence, let's look at a few psychophysical examples of these differences. Stories wherein the laws of physics reveal the psychological characteristics of people.

Where do we begin? Let's start with a camera. And with how a camera lens works. Do you know? For instance, do you know how the aperture (which is the size of the opening in the lens where the light comes in) and the shutter speed (a term which refers to how fast this opening opens and closes; how long it's open for) combine to create the camera's depth of field (how much of the photo, from camera lens to horizon, is clear and in focus)?

Too technical? Too quick? Too many words? Let me try again.

There are several things to consider when learning how to take pictures. Two main things really. One is the size of the hole in the lens. The other is how long you keep this hole open for.

Let's start with the size of the hole.

The lens (the camera's glass eye) has different size openings. Big holes. Small holes. And in between sized holes. And each hole has a number which refers to how big it is.

The confusing thing is, these holes are numbered backwards with regard to how you'd expect them to be numbered. You see, the smaller the hole, the bigger the number. And visa versa. Which means someone somewhere screwed up there. Probably a Mind First person with a very abstract way of thinking.

Whatever the case, with cameras, the main thing to know with regard to the size of the hole in the lens is that the bigger the hole, the more light that hits the film. This is it. The bigger the hole. The more light that gets in. Not a hard concept. At least until you find out that experts call these hole sizes, "F stops." And no, Sidney, didn't make this up. In fact, like Miss Wordsworth, it might be best if you just forget I ever told you this and just move on.

Okay. So big holes mean more light hits the film and little holes means less light. This is all you need to know about the sizes of holes in lenses photographers call F Stops. And the second idea?

That keeping this hole open longer also means more light hits the film.

Now putting these two things together, bigger holes mean more light hits the film. And holding the hole open longer means more light hits the film. So bigger holes held open for a longer time mean a lot more light hits the film. And visa versa.

The thing is, in order to expose the film correctly, you need the right amount of light to hit the film. Which means, if you make the hole smaller but keep this hole open longer, you can let in the same amount of light as when you make the hole bigger but keep it open for less time.

Did you catch that last part?

I said there are a number of ways to get the right amount of light to hit the film. And all this depends on is that you get the right combination of hole size and time open.

Okay. So there are several ways you can correctly expose the film to the right amount of light. Is there any difference then?

Yes, there's a difference. Something called the "depth of field." Which for those who have never heard of this term, means the amount of the picture, depth wise, which is in focus.

Lost? Ready to scream? Because you don't get it? Because you know all this already? Okay. I'm getting to the point right now. You see, if you take a photo of a beautiful rose and want to make it romantic, you take the photo with a big hole held open for a short amount of time. Which makes everything in the photo out of focus except the rose.

Can you picture this kind of photo? Have you ever seen this done? Roses, and baby's faces, and magic moments look best when photographers do this. When they make everything out of focus except for the thing you want to highlight.

What about if you want to take a photo for a rose bush catalog though? In this case, you wouldn't want anything to be out of focus. Thus, you'd want the whole rose bush to be in focus and clear. Which means what exactly? Which means you'd take this photo with a small hole held open a longer amount of time. Why? Because this would make everything in the photo clear and in focus.

What's my point?

Romantic rose photos make you *feel* something, whereas rose bush catalog photos make you *think* something. All this difference just from how the photo was taken. More important, we do something very similar. And this difference determines whether what we are looking at makes us *think* something or *feel* something. Clarity or fussy focus.

Where has all this been going? To what makes Body First people different. You see, Body First people, most of which have ADD, *feel* things more than they *think* things. Not just emotionally. Physically. Moreover, these differences exist for exactly the same reasons we experience these two kinds of rose photos differently.

In effect then, folks with ADD and most Body First people in general literally picture life more warm and physically fuzzy and with blurry detail. Whereas their literal opposites, the Mind first folks, especially those with Asperger's, picture life more as cold and mentally well defined and with sharply focused detail.

Please know, this similarity is much more than mere metaphor or psychological analogy. The mechanics by which camera lenses work and the laws by which we respond to these kinds of changes are literally analogous. Why? Because the same laws which govern cameras govern people. And because we respond to these laws similarly no matter what the situation.

For instance, how many photos do you see in focus. Most of them, right? And how many photos are blurred so as to create a warm mood? No where near as many. Right?

And what would you think of a technical photo which was blurred so as to create a mood? Would you find it less credible for instance?

We judge people very similarly. And for the exact same reasons. Moreover, the same two laws of physics are at work here. The size of the opening and the speed of the exposure.

What I mean is, people who can get the gist clearly with a small window into the learning are seen as more intelligent. And people who need more time and who see things with somewhat fuzzy edges are seen as less intelligent.

At the same time, how many movie scripts have as their point a fast paced word based leader realizing the value in slowing down and smelling the roses? Is this seen as dumb then? Not. And the person who cannot learn to see this lesson? A tragedy, to be sure.

## This Chapter's Session Notes

So where has all this been going you ask? Obviously not where most folks would have thought were they to have been asked to guess at the beginning of the book.

What would most people have guessed? That this was a book on the current nature of talk therapy with a few new tweaks and twists thrown in. Yet here we are, one chapter from done, and nothing could be further from the truth.

In addition, I'm still dropping big ones about the nature of talk therapy, and about the nature of the mind and body. The main one being that we do not

store let alone remember our thoughts and feelings. Rather we create them on the fly. Just as William James inferred.

I've also mentioned the one exception to this rule. That when we get wounded, we get fixed ideas. Intrusively powerful, stored physical sensations which unlike normal memories, include a painful jolt of thoughts and feelings. Just as Pierre Janet suggested.

I've also explained in simple language the way to test for this. Try to recall anything you've done with the same thoughts and feelings. It can't be done. Yet we base talk therapy on that we can.

In addition I've just explained what makes addictions to alcohol and drugs differ markedly from overeating. In essence, why overeating cannot be an addiction. A compulsion? Yes. Compulsions are feelings. But an addiction? No. It's physically impossible.

Finally I've also explained why the speed at which we convert physical sensation to thoughts and feeling is the basis for our tests on intelligence. And why this bias our society so badly that we treat Body First people like defective people. Folks to be medically and psychologically corrected. Including children. Including geniuses.

So now. Let me ask you. Do you see all this as me looking through the distorted lens of romance? Or do you see evidence that I've included in all this the crystal clear lens of logic and sense?

Is your learned jury still out? Well, okay. I still have one more chapter. Until that next chapter then.

I hope you are well,

Steven