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ABSTRACT

This action research study used narrative analysis to explore the role of the body in the writing process of creative writers. Specifically, the purpose of this action research study was threefold: it was first to examine how professional creative writers describe their writing process with particular attention to their perceptions of the role and awareness of the body in the writing process itself; secondly, it was to engage these writers in a series of exercises about body awareness; finally, it was to explore their perceptions about the effects of an increased body awareness on their writing process. The theoretical framework of the study was grounded in the phenomenology of the body of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the work of psychologists who have studied writing and healing. The study focused on four creative writers who explored their body awareness as it informed their writing process. Data collection consisted of two participant interviews, one at the beginning and one at the end of the study, and journals kept by the participants during the six-week period where they were engaged in exercises intended to increase body awareness. The participants’ narratives were analyzed for emergent themes and connections.

The findings revealed first, that participants shared stories of being encouraged to write as children, and how writing became a source of creativity and consolation. Second and related, their writing became an effective tool for coping with emotional and physical turmoil revealing implications for healing. Third, their engagement in activities intended to increase body awareness seemed to increase their ability to get into a state of flow, where they were able to tap into embodied knowledge, thus writing from a more holistic
and embodied perspective. The study ends with a consideration of the findings in light of the theory, and offers implications for adult education practice and further research.
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DEDICATION

When I was growing up, I never thought I would be able to go to college. It seemed out of reach financially, and my motivation to succeed in school was questionable. I will never forget being eight years old, whining because I just didn’t want to go to school, the teacher was mean, it was cold outside, and I hated math. My Grandpa said to me, “Jenny, you need to get an education.” At the time I didn’t quite understand the implications of his direct and plain statement, but I could tell by the tone in his voice that it was serious and meant something.

Thirty-something years later there are still days when I don’t want to go to school, now I’m the teacher, and math still does nothing for me, yet I can hear my Grandpa’s message still ringing loudly in my ears. He has provided me with the foundations of who I am today. His voice and words have always been incredibly important and influential to me and have motivated me to keep pushing during those times when the intensity of this program hit like a tidal wave. His endless reserve of good humor, questions, and concern for “how things are going” let me know that his love and support, along with that of my entire family was behind me. This impact of who he is will forever be with me and I’m so grateful that I listened to him and got my education. I am fortunate to be able to continue to share his time and wisdom. For everything, thank you Grandpa.

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taking Lucy and Abby so I could write uninterrupted, or just being there to listen. I know you didn’t always know what to say, but even the silence was enough. I love you, Mom.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

WAVES HAiku
Pushed to silver tips
Reverberating a dream
Foam tickles, tingles

There are a myriad of reasons why creative writers write. Some are driven by an internal need to tell a story or share joyful experiences, while others may use creative writing to wade through difficult times in hopes of making sense out of their lives. Others may write from a more holistic approach with the intent to heal either physically or emotionally.

I love to write. It is an inherent and automatic urge, like the tides of the sea. My first memory of knowing I love to write centers me back into my childhood before I knew how to articulate the words for the images my mind concocted. Play and the pretend worlds of my imagination were filled with multi-layered situations, characters of dimension with their own histories, and adventures that unfolded over numerous afternoons. Each play session was a continuation of the last and the stories moved, evolved. Hours upon hours were spent in silent play, all consuming for me, and when I was finished it felt satisfying, a feeling I liken now to just completing a long and wonderful novel.

To this day I still think in story. For me, like many of the writers highlighted in the mentioned literature in upcoming sections, creative writing is something I am drawn to do. It is an essence of who I am; it is a must-do, at times a frenetic pull that effervesces and words overflow. There’s no understanding of where this pull comes from, it has just
always been there, coming from deep within me and it is as old as my memory. The inability to separate or turn off this type of thinking is why I am drawn to creative writing and storytelling.

Why I write is as complex as it is organic. Often I think of writing as a mood because it becomes a manifestation of my emotion or situation and I come to writing as a means of self-expression. Over time, the short stories of childhood imagination evolved into journaling and experimenting with forms of poetry and different prose genres. Keeping a journal has been pivotal in my writing development and it essentially taught me how to capture my voice, emotion, and description of situations as they presented. Reading some of these journals today the girl-I-was who wrote them may be somewhat foreign, but the vivid descriptions enable me to transport right back into those moments as if no time has passed. My stories and journals have captured time and experience like snapshots, freezing action and emotion.

As a teacher of writing in both composition and creative writing I often tell my students that to write is to take the first steps of a journey and through writing pathways can wind through dense, foggy forests, labyrinths can curl to dead ends, or where a vast sea will sprawl itself incomprehensibly towards a never-ending horizon. But words are more powerful than just the imagery they create. Writing has enabled me to cope and attempt to ease both the emotional and physical pain of loss. Recently I rediscovered a journal that detailed the specific days of loneliness and despair while going through divorce and simultaneously grieving the loss of Greta, my beloved basset hound. During the same period of my life I was presented with a potential serious illness and I used writing to give my anxiety an outlet. I wrote stories, kept a journal, and explored topics...
via academic writing. It became a means to connect to the turmoil that was trapped within my body and revelations of potential connections between writing and the body emerged. To write through these experiences cleared my head, slowed my racing heart, and caused my out-of-control blood pressure to moderate some. I felt at ease, not in conflict with a jittery body that felt beyond my control. Sleep came easier and my roiling belly eased. Although not realized by me in those moments, a retrospective viewing shows clearly now that writing had an enormous therapeutic impact for me.

This personal experience has provided me unique insight not only into the power of writing, but the great potential there is in engagement of the body as part of writing. My role as a teacher of both creative writing and composition studies has focused mainly on the general process of writing. What I found in teaching writing courses was a lot of enthusiasm for the idea of writing but when the time came to actually produce writing my students were stilted, reluctant and worked in spurts. Many of the complaints came in the form of so-called writer’s block, which was manifestation of anxieties, nervousness, uncertainty spurred by not knowing where or how to start, wavering focus or purpose and a lack of understanding. There seemed to be a missing link or disconnection. Could it be lack of awareness of what it is about their writing that causes both positive and negative reactions within the body, which could lead to an overall disconnection with writing? Maybe a stronger connection to the body is the key?

What then does this have to do with adult education? In all of my roles, writer, student, and teacher of adult students, I consider myself to be a lifelong learner. I have a love of writing that has had a powerful impact on my life and I have experience with writing as a form of healing and meaning making. In my experience writing is a holistic
process. I am interested in both why creative writers write and their engagement in the writing process itself. Additionally I am interested in creative writers’ sense and perception of the role of their body in writing and whether it has facilitated any of their own healing. I believe that conducting a research study, examining these issues in more depth, that will eventually enable me as an educator of adults in writing classes to help better facilitate students’ writing. It will also help learn more about creative writers’ perceptions of the role of body awareness in the writing process, and the role of writing as healing in their own lives. It can be assumed that the position of most writers is not one of bodily awareness, and it is likely they are not consciously thinking about aspects of body awareness as they write. Thus an action research study that allows creative writers to increase their conscious awareness of the role of the body in writing would be an appropriate means of examining the connection of the body to writing. This project will undertake this inquiry, at the same time that it will explore why and how writers write, as well as their perceptions of the role of writing in their healing and ongoing life journey.

**Background to the Problem**

*Tides rise and fall, are impacted by the phases of the moon and the cycles of nature that are as old as Earth itself. The urge and need to write manifests like a tide’s ebb and flow, comes at the mercy of mood and body. Waves that can churn and ripple over the sea’s dark depths and light of shallows…*

Writing is very much like the ocean. Ideas that flow and percolate evolve into stories or poems or writing more personal. Movement on the surface hides what swims beneath and eventually turns up on the wet sand. Every writer holds an internal sea of
currents, ideas, thoughts that swim like the sea-life and are motivated by different factors. Piirto (1998) brought forth a similar idea from a study that examined the themes present in the lives of 80 American women writers. She found that the reasons why writers write is varied and complex, ranging from the need to create, to sharing, seeking understanding of life and participating in the human experience. Similarly, Augsberger (1998) noted a motivation to write to express emotional experiences and for therapeutic purposes. While there are different ways of framing a study of writing and the body in adult learning, most relevant to this study are insights from Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) philosophy of the body as it intersects with the work of Eugene Gendlin (1996, 2004), a psychologist and philosopher, who discusses the role of the felt sense in the body in his philosophy. The healing sciences and perspectives on embodied learning in adult education also inform this study. Each of these are touched on briefly here. In each section below, I begin with a metaphorical sense (in italics) of my own urge and passion as a writer indicating what my own writing process is like.

The Influences of Merleau-Ponty and Gendlin

Gale force winds push the sea to frothy overflow in powerful torrents over the sand. Waves rise and fall, this time in stacked assaults of tense pushing and pulling. The sea boils and churns...

Tension and churning circulates ideas within the writer’s body. Writing is felt in a deep, low hum originating in the belly and my body that produces the writing is part of the writing. The work of French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1945) offer some meaning or explanation to how this might happen. Merleau-Ponty notes that it is through our bodies that we come to experience and exist in the world. Our bodies are interconnected
and reflected with objects, other people, experience, and the world; the body holds a “power of natural expression” and a clear connection to story (p. 211). The writer’s words then are a bringing forth of the expression of the body, manifesting a new existence and dimension of our experience. Simply, the way the writer experiences through the body may be similar to how and what the writer is able to write. Further, Merleau-Ponty (1945) says words exist for us and that they form a “certain field of action” around our bodies (p. 210). In other words, we possess the ability to articulate, pronounce, and write with words as another way to use our body. Like an arm that reaches or an internal organ that functions, the text created by a writer is both and extension and part of the body.

*There is an intuitiveness and wisdom to the tide. It doesn’t think to keep a schedule or how high to rise or how low to recede. The function is the nature; it is part of the existence of the sea and all that is part of it is interconnected...*

Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) broadly speaking connects the felt sense of the body to language and words, and the lived experiences of the body to make meaning and human connection. Highlighting the pre-reflective realm of the body, the implicit and sensory knowledge of the body is a central idea to his philosophy. Merleau-Ponty (1945) acknowledges both words and the silence between words as having a larger meaning that is sensed in the body and understood through memory of our experiences. He suggests that thought and expression, simultaneously formed with one not existing independently of the other, are derived from the body as a gesture of meaning. Additionally, words are also gestures of the body and “beneath the conceptual meaning of the words, an existential meaning... inhabits them, and is inseparable from
them,” going on to acknowledge that there is a “sense being held within the word” (Merleau-Ponty, 1965, p. 211-212). Word and speech become the body. The silence typically thought of as emptiness is conceptualized by Merleau-Ponty as being alive and having an “inner life” and an “inner language” (p. 213). As will be discussed further in Chapter Two, these connections of word, sense, thought, and understanding intersect to broaden meaning and interpretation through the body.

There are many who discuss the role of the body in learning in philosophy, education and psychology who refer to Merleau-Ponty (1945). Among them and central to this study is Eugene Gendlin (1996, 2004) who is both a philosopher and psychologist. Gendlin’s (1996) work is about drawing on the link between experience and felt sense. According to The Focusing Institute (2011), which specializes in teaching Gendlin’s Focusing Method, the essence of Gendlin’s work is to make meaning and further facilitate change in a person’s life; it offers solutions to individual problems, or discovery of some meaning by paying attention to the subtle sensations of the body. Felt sense is an integral and key component to focusing and can be applied to writing. Felt sense is of the body and can be loosely defined as a “wholistic, implicit, bodily sense of a complex situation” or meaning that enables direct access to our bodies through experience (Gendlin, 1996, p. 56). Perl (2004), in drawing on Gendlin’s work to consider how it relates to writing, states:

Felt sense is being connected to meaning. It establishes a link between what we think (our minds) and what we feel (our bodies). Or between what we know implicitly (before words come) and what we ultimately write or say (with words) explicitly. (p.5)
Gendlin (1996) states felt sense is to fill the spaces between expression of emotion and bodily sensation, covering the gray areas that are difficult to articulate, yet it is information that one just knows. Gendlin (1992) admits that felt sense is a murky if not opaque concept, one which he articulates with a symbol “…” implying that felt sense is individually derived from the body and holds personal meanings to be determined. Felt sense provides access to the knowledge of the body.

There are also people who draw on the felt sense in the body to write, or to write to heal. As noted above, in writing and composition methodology Sondra Perl (2004) uses Gendlin’s concept of felt sense to link the body to writing through guided meditations where particular attention is drawn to body and emotion before writing. In Perl’s work, felt sense is used to unblock struggling writers and help them gain access to the words that fit and feel right, enabling expression to be more authentic and clear.

While Perl (2004) establishes a clear link between writing and the body, there are others who draw upon this link to facilitate healing by writing. More recently, Jordi (2011) additionally draws on Gendlin’s work to connect reflective practices to experiential learning.

Like Perl, Todres and Galvin (2008), expanding on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body, also draw on Gendlin’s work on the felt sense, to explore how to use poetic or creative forms of writing, in presenting the results of qualitative research. They are trying to explore the role of creativity in articulating the various layers of experience and research effects. They explain that the writer chooses words that feel right to go beyond statements that simply summarize experience. They highlight the following as key tenets of the aesthetic phenomenology that informs their work: first aesthetic phenomenology
uses poetic, evocative, or expressive forms of language and writing to describe experiences; second, it examines the tensions and/or undercurrent between the words and the feeling of the body that’s evoked; third, it uses such tensions to create a way to enter into the experiences of others for the purposes of creating personal and emotional meanings through understanding of another’s experiences. They are trying to call attention to a “lived body” which is a holistic configuring of the body that takes living, feeling, and moving into account.

**Writing and Healing**

*Upon a deep inhalation, salt air fills the lungs and cleanses with its tart, astringent quality. Quiet lapping of the waves bite at or reach in frothy fingers feeling over the shoreline. In its tranquility the seas can heal and provide peace to troubled souls...*

For some writers, the purpose of their work is to find comfort and healing, to express emotional and physical trauma, or to make sense of their lives. Pennebaker (1999a, b; 2002; 2003), a social psychologist, in numerous clinical studies exploring the connections between the use of expressive language, emotional experiences and implications for health (both physical and mental), found that in situations of turmoil and stress, writing expressively was beneficial to calming the inner workings of the body.

Pennebaker and his colleagues have done numerous studies on this, which will be discussed further in Chapter Two, a few of examples are useful here. Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) found specific links between storytelling and the body, noting that storytelling is a natural human process that helps people make sense of their lives; further writing stories about trauma has improvements in physical and emotional health. Berry
and Pennebaker (1999) cite growing evidence that writing about trauma or discussing it in psychotherapy reduces the need for medical care and demonstrated improvements in overall health. Petrie, Fontanilla, Thomas, Booth and Pennebaker (2004) had consistent results in a study of HIV patients who benefited from writing with emotional disclosure. Many studies in which Pennebaker is involved mirrored the same clinical model of writing for 15-20 minutes per day for 3-5 days. These studies by Pennebaker and his colleagues demonstrate a link between writing and healing, with impacts on the physical body with measureable effects. While many people share stories without thought to healing, it is a significant and automatic human response and provides commonality and connection through our experience. Campbell and Pennebaker (2003) highlight that “…dozens of replications have demonstrated that emotional writing can influence frequency of physician visits, immune function, stress hormones, blood pressure, and a host of social, academic, and cognitive variables. These effects hold up across cultures, ages, and diverse samples” (p. 60).

Based on some of these research studies it is becoming clearer that expressive and creative writing have implications for healing. As a result of this healing, the question extends into learning and whether learning occurs from writing the body in this way. The body’s role in the context of learning is emergent and will begin with literature in adult education and its related disciplines.

**The Body in Adult Education**

*The sea of my origin extends to depths that are unfathomable under my watch.*

*The quick whisking eye of the lighthouse searches too, and like a guide it leads me back to this spot next to the steely shoreline. Revelation and potential within the tide...*
As previously discussed, the body provides starting points for writing and to the healing processes. The body is also an integral part to the learning process for many people and in the past 10 years or so there has been an emergence of the body in literature and research in adult education. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007), summarized much of this in the early years of the new millennium; in doing so they draw on Clark’s (2001) discussion of embodied and narrative approaches to learning and Amann’s (2003) consideration of the role of the body in transformative learning. Clark (2001) citing experience as central to embodiment, states the body is returning to legitimacy and can be an alternative source for learning and knowing in adult education. Additionally, Clark (2001) offers ideas for encouraging embodied learning through role playing, reflecting emotionally about certain experiences, and through the narrative approach of storytelling.

Amann (2003) notes there is a strong emotional aspect to learning and the body, which is recognized as a more holistic way of learning and knowing and the act of embodiment is to give a body to the self. By developing a four part somatic learning model that includes kinesthetic, sensory, affective, and spiritual components to an adult’s learning, a more holistic approach to learning is presented (Amann, 2003). Horst (2008, née Amann, 2003) differentiates embodiment from somatic learning and knowing, noting that it is also experiential, “felt by the body,” and viewed as a holistic type of learning through engaging emotions and affect, as a way of bringing the body to learning.

In general, the role of the body in adult learning is seen as a form of experiential learning. Fenwick (2003) drawing on the work of Michelson (1998) in her discussion of several approaches of experiential learning, notes that the body is a central site for
learning and making meaning via experience. Issues of the body are addressed by highlighting four problems of embodied learning due to a history of exclusion and mind-body dualism present in experiential learning.

There has been an increasing discussion of the role of the body in adult learning in the past few years. Merriam and Sek Kim (2008) highlight that experience and emotion are key terms when discussing the body and learning in adult education. They state the knowledge we gain through experience is carried with us as embodied learning, and view knowing as multifaceted learning with cognition, emotion, and spirituality as part of an adult learner’s body. Sodhi and Cohen (2012) recently did a study of social workers’ embodied knowing, discovering how social workers trusted their somatic sensations to guide their practice. Jordi (2011) drew on Gendlin’s (1996) ideas of felt sense to argue for the integration of reflection and embodied experiences to aspects of experiential learning. Specifically he uses Gendlin’s Focusing Methodology to access felt sense to expand and incorporate aspects of reflective practice into learning.

Freiler (2008) in discussing learning through the body in adult education suggests that embodiment is seen as a way to “construct knowledge through direct engagement in bodily experiences…” (p. 41). She discusses the issue of the difference between embodied and somatic learning, and notes that while the terms embodiment, embodied learning and somatic learning are sometimes used interchangeably, nevertheless she highlights the differences. “As a distinction, somatic learning generally refers to learning directly experienced through bodily awareness and sensation during purposive body-centered movements” (p 39). She goes on to provide a comparison: “Embodiment and embodied learning generally refer to a broader, more holistic view of constructing
knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning, usually in connection with other
domains of knowing (for example, spiritual, affective, symbolic, cultural, rational)” (p. 39).

Based on this literature then, and drawing on Freiler’s (2008) insights the
following definition of embodiment is offered, and is central to this study. Embodiment is
defined as knowledge in the body; it is what the body knows. The body is the vantage
point to the world and the way the world manifests to the body, through and in the body.
Knowledge is gained through experience. In this perspective, embodiment implies a
taking in of experience and it becomes part of the person. This includes the affective,
emotional, cultural, and cognitive domains, along with memory and imagination as they
all engage with and manifest through the body. The body becomes a site for learning
through experience and action. To draw distinction between embodiment and somatic
terminology, the term “somatics” focuses primarily on the movement of the body,
whereas “embodiment” is more holistic in its connotation. Overall somatic knowing has
more of a history of scholarly examination. Gendlin (1996) appears to use the terms
“somewhat interchangeably, in that he uses the term somatic at times and embodied at
times with no apparent distinction, but for our purposes here embodied learning will be
the term I will use to note the body’s connection and interaction with other modes of
learning the way Freiler (2008) describes.

It is important to note here that adult educators in their discussions of embodied
learning, also draw on related disciplines, including in feminist studies, as well as some
of the sociology literature. Feminist attention focuses on gender and sexuality (Davis,
1997), appearance and body modification (Negrin, 2008), and body image, self-
consciousness or awareness (Bermudez, Marcel, & Eilan, 1998). Additionally, feminist philosopher, Susan Bordo (1989) discussed the body as a way of knowing and being that is influenced by culture, history, and is discussed through the context of positionality and disorder.

There is also literature highlighting the body’s positionality of absence, invisibility, and marginalization. Leder (1990) explores the body’s position of absence through phenomenological, philosophical, and historical lenses.

There are discussions of the body’s role in teaching and learning specifically in higher education (Latta & Buck, 2007). Le Grange (2004) cites the mind-body split as a cause of the planet’s environmental crisis, specifically through social practice, embodiment, and the construct of race. Barnacle (2009) talks about the physiology of “gut instinct” as a way to challenge rationalism in higher education and the engagement of informal and non-cognitive ways of knowing as part of the learning process. Lewica (2009) states an embodied pedagogy can addresses students holistically and works to undo the Cartesian tradition of knowledge.

While this literature will be discussed further in Chapter Two, and it is important and necessary to acknowledge this literature, it is also of equal note that this literature does not really explore issues of embodiment, as in the body as a site of learning with specific relation to the role of the body in creative writing as a form of learning. The work of Merleau-Ponty (1945) along with Gendlin (1996; 2004) and those who draw on Gendlin, specifically Todres and Galvin (2008) come a step closer. Through their use of aesthetic phenomenology, Todres and Galvin (2008) use creative writing to communicate experiences as they are felt and interpreted through the body to facilitate meaning and
understanding. It is also of note that although these areas have influenced and fed the research questions and purpose of this study, there is a major gap in the literature discussing specifically the role of the body as part of writing and the writing process. This is the problem that is the focus of this study: to attempt to deal with this lack of literature on the role of embodiment and the creative writing process, and how adult educators can begin to help learners attend to this.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

As previously stated, writing has been an enormous part of my life, both personally and professionally. I have spent my career teaching high school and adult students how to write. In light of the lack noted above, along with my own interest in writing and the body, writing as healing, and in teaching creative writing to adults and emerging adults, I am interested in conducting an action research study that facilitates greater attention to the body in the writing process. In particular the purpose of this action research study is threefold: it is to first examine how creative writers describe their writing process with particular attention to their perceptions of the role and awareness of the body in the writing process; secondly, it is to engage these writers in a series of exercises about body awareness; finally, it is to explore their perceptions about the effects of an increased body awareness on their writing process.

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. Why do creative writers write, and what are their perceptions of how it facilitates their healing?
2. How do they describe what happens as they become more conscious of their bodies during the writing process?
3. What is their overall sense of the role of the body in relationship to healing?

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study finds most of its foundations in French philosopher Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) philosophy of the body, as well as Gendlin’s concept of felt sense discussed earlier.

Because this is a study that focuses on creative writers and the body it is important to note that writing can be very personal and reflective of embodied experience. Writers will draw from a mixture of experience, observation, and imagination to write from what they know and Merleau-Ponty (1965) says that what we experience through our bodies is both dependent and reflective of the situation we are in, our living and maneuvering, essentially the starting point for being-in-the-world. The body is recognized as having a power of natural expression and intentionality that becomes a vehicle of meaning- we are our words. Additionally, at the crux of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is the idea of the pre-reflective, which directly ties to this knowledge of the body. Embodied experiences enable writers to effectively and believably tell their story and it is these stories that ultimately weave like threads through the tapestry of human experience, what Merleau-Ponty (1965) called a “co-existence or communion” (p 48).

Writing is of the writer; the text brings to life new dimensions to our experience and imagination that additionally encompass, reflect, and are produced by the body. In this perspective through the body we are both reflective and pre-reflective. Like other forms of art such as dance, painting, or sculpture making, writing engages visceral responses, words, experience, and imagination to bring the body fully and completely into the
writing process. Banks (2003) in writing about framing personal writing in the college composition classroom in an embodied (i.e. gendered and sexed) context suggests that writing stories can be a catalyst for making our way back to our body.

Further, Gendlin’s (1996) concept of felt sense, a component of his focusing experiential method, is a technique used and taught in therapy to encourage personal development. Attention to the body calls for felt sense, which works in tandem with reason to create unity, meaning there is a notable relationship between the implicit and pre-reflective bodily knowledge and the outward reflection. Accessing felt sense enables a carrying forward (Gendlin, 2004) of this implicit knowledge of the body into writing or whatever project one is working on. Felt sense allows for emergent and multiple discoveries, which are gained through lived experience. Influenced by both Gendlin (1996) and Perl (2004) and as discussed in detail later, participants in this study, as an action research project, were invited into various writing and embodied exercises, and the concept of felt sense is a helpful analytical frame. Felt sense is a thread that runs through certain actions of this study.

To summarize, the theoretical framework weaves together Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body, Gendlin’s concept of felt sense, and studies and discussion of writing and healing and the body in adult education. Each source influences and contributes to the guiding research questions and influences the inquiry into embodiment, the individual’s writing process and their body awareness and whether healing and learning can be facilitated through writing.

Significance of the Study
Awareness of the body calls for experience followed by a cycle of pre-reflection and reflection. The body and its role in writing and learning is central to this exploration into the concept of embodiment. The significance of a study focusing on the body and the way writers use and perceive their body is to rethink, reframe, and further reconceptualize the body as it is in its present state. It has been established that the current position of the body in education is one of absence (Leder, 1990) or discussed in bits and pieces. Adult education discusses the body in various ways, but does not yet have a specific theory of embodiment or pedagogy of learning through the body, though it is beginning to develop. There is a difficulty in discussing the body, as has been demonstrated though the literature and the numerous and varied definitions of related terms, embodiment and somatic ways of knowing, which are still in many ways being fleshed out in the various discourses that have shown interest in inclusion of the body. Yet there is tension surrounding the legitimacy of the body and Crossley (2007) speaks to this tension by acknowledging “the ‘body’ and ‘embodiment’ despite their concrete connotation, are very vague, broad, and abstract concepts that do not define a reachable object (p. 86-87). Overall, the significance of an examination of embodiment is about a returning and reconnection to the knowledge and understanding within our self that contributes to learning and making meaning, individually and with others.

For the field of adult education, the significance of a study that examines embodiment seeks to understand the various complexities surrounding embodiment. There is intention to broaden the gap in research about embodiment and enhance the quality of practice. Learning through the body connects us to ourselves, which can be some of the most significant learning experienced by an individual. Embodiment gives a
new context and additional dimension to learning. An in-depth exploration into the body awareness has continuing implications for writing and healing and can intersect these ideas into learning through the body. There has been interest in adult education over the years in finding ways and ideas to incorporate the body into learning (Clark, 2001; Freiler, 2008). There is still a significant gap when it comes to the body. This study seeks to work through some of these gaps and find ways to bring to light the ever-present body as a valid source for knowledge, drawing on previously discussed adult education literature, but hasn’t yet looked at writing.

Attention to and learning through the body accounts for experience and experience is a significant part of the way adults learn (Lindemann, 1926). Of further significance is the recognition of the body as a way of knowing through research and capturing the individual experiences that may help to enhance the understanding of embodiment as an accessible and valid way of knowing. Specific to the field of adult education, the experience of these writers may reveal significant ways to gain access to the body. Knowledge of the body is valid and this study seeks to bring such validity to the forefront. Of significance to my work as both a teacher and writer, there’s great potential in the learning and knowledge of the body. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, writing is an urge, that like the tides, I have no control or will to stop. To draw attention and awareness to my body will enhance my writing and teaching practice. By researching embodiment it provides room for writers, practitioners, and students to access and understand the many layers and depth to what knowledge is given through the body.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Strengths
The purpose of academic research is to possibly address certain concerns, fill in gaps, or present new ideas to the academic community. Any research project is typically fleshed out through assumptions, limitations, and strengths. Creating and designing a research project on embodiment, there are certain assumptions, limitations, and strengths to be considered. Those areas will be discussed in this section.

One of the central assumptions underlying this study is that there are other, non-traditional ways of knowing and learning (Merriam & Sek Kim, 2008). These so-called other ways of knowing are considered non-Western or non-traditional to the typical structure of education and are based on an anti-Cartesian ideology. To build upon this first assumption, a second assumption is that personal experience is key to learning through the body (Beckett & Morris, 2001) and that meaning can be made of experience through our body (Horst, 2008). Third, it is assumed that the body is a significant source for individual learning and knowing (Clark, 2001). A fourth assumption is it incorporates the affective dimension, in that the way something feels or how we experience emotion with relation to experience and articulating of that experience is part of our understanding and learning (Dirkx, 2001; Gendlin, 1996). A fifth assumption is that writers, much like other artists, use their bodies as part of the creation of their art. Finally, the use of creative and expressive forms of writing have an impact of well-being and can facilitate healing (Pennebaker, 1999a, b; 2002; 2003).

Limitations and strengths must also be acknowledged. Beginning with limitations a study of the body starts tiptoeing into some murky terrain. The concepts of embodiment and the body can be and are defined in multiple ways, leaving the meaning to be very contextual and open to interpretation. While the study and theorizing about the
body seem to be growing in many academic fields, studying the body is still wrought
with issues of absence and obscurity (Leder, 1990). There may also be limitations with
how to articulate the nature of the bodily experiences related to writing and learning with
interpretation of the meaning behind the language being very contextual and subjective.
Concentration on the way and how an individual does something, an embodied action so
to speak, may lead to participant self-consciousness and over-analysis, which may be
limiting (Crossley, 2007, p. 84). There may be difficulty in articulating unfamiliar
experience and discussion of the body may be stilted because it is not something we are
asked to think about every day. Because of these reasons, capturing a true essence of
what it means to engage the body might present difficulties. Yet despite these claims of
limitation, there is still hope within the potential of studying the body. Examining the
body and embodiment demonstrates the possibility of awareness in being and educating
in a holistic sense.

Strengths of this study may include enhanced awareness of body and process,
whether that is through writing or healing. Because embodiment is highly subjective, the
emphasis on the individual’s experience is another strength. This study seeks to refresh
the body and bring it forth as a valid part of the writing process of creative writers. The
individual voices of participants will help to reshape the perspective of the body not just
in their lives, possibly with potential implications for academic practices in adult
education. Examining one’s experience with regard to how the body may be impacted or
may factor into participation opens more opportunity to learning that is beyond the norm,
which allows for learners and instructors to have another for learning.

Overview of Methodology
Potential new discoveries motivate research inquiry. This is a qualitative action research project seeking knowledge about where and how the body fits into the writing process.

Research is motivated by the desire to learn more about a topic. A qualitative action research design was appropriate for this study in light of the purpose and research questions. One of the main purposes of qualitative research is to examine how individuals make meaning from events and experiences that occur within their lives, making the assumption that there are multiple perspectives from which to view the world (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Action research allows a research and participants to work together to focus on some action to address or solve a problem (Patton, 2002). This study was designed to first find out from participants their sense of their body awareness in the writing process as a beginning and then to take them through a process intended to facilitate greater awareness of the body, and then to examine their perceptions of its effects on writing. While this will be discussed in great detail in Chapter Three, a brief overview of the research design is provided here.

This was a qualitative action research study. Qualitative research makes use of a purposeful sample (Stake, 2005), where participants are chosen according to specific criteria; in this case that participants identified as creative writers, had an interest in the role of the body in writing, and had to be willing to complete a body awareness project over the course of approximately six weeks. There were four participants in the study.

Data collection began with an initial narrative interview focusing on their history as writers, and their sense of their body in writing. Narrative inquiry enables the stories of
the participants to be told in their words, preserving the individual’s voice and unique perspective (Clandinin, Pushors, & Orr, 2007).

At the end of the interview, each participant negotiated with me as the researcher a body awareness activity in which they would engage for a six-week period as part of the action research component of the study. Action research like narrative, takes into account the individual stories of the participants, but expands to taking some action. Planning, action, evaluation of action, and reflection are the core structural components to action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). A key component of action research is addressing a specific problem in order to facilitate improvement (Merriam, 2009), in this case, a greater awareness of the role of the body in writing.

Participants developed and engaged in a body awareness practice over a six week period, writing about it in a journal, while continuously working on their individual creative writing that’s part of their daily writing practice. Participants engaged in such practices as yoga, meditation, walking, gardening, and martial arts. A narrative interview was conducted at the end of the study to explore the effects of these practices. More details about the study methodology can be found in Chapter Three.

Organization of the Study

This chapter focused on providing background and an overview of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature that informs the study. Chapter Three gives an overview of the methodology used in this inquiry. Chapters Four through Seven cover the individual participant narratives of body awareness and writing process. Chapter Eight summarizes the data and covers implications for theory, practice, and future research.
Definition of Terms

For further clarification and understanding certain terms used in this study are defined.

**Aesthetic phenomenology** is a way to gain knowledge and make meaning from experiences by using poetic, evocative, or expressive forms of writing, which allows for a more symbolic and metaphorical means of expression. Through aesthetic phenomenology, the feeling or sensation that manifest in the body creates understanding (Todres & Galvin, 2008).

**Being-in-the-world** refers to the state of existing in the world through everyday experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1965). Being-in-the-world has a strong holistic component as pointed out by Frelier (2007): "it is the nature and essence of lived experience within one's complete humanness, both mind and body, in perceiving, interacting and engaging with the surrounding world. It points to a sense of connectedness and interdependence" (p. 24).

The body is referenced in two ways: First as the **corporeal or primary body**. Used in this way it refers to the flesh and bones, physical body present in the Cartesian split of mind and body. The **holistic body** refers to the entire body, undivided mind-body-soul as one, containing the affective and emotional domains: “it has another ‘inside’…; an inside compromising lived sensations…” (Crossley, 2007, p. 82).

**Body Awareness** is a deliberate paying attention to the body through movements, emotions, and sensations. In the context of this study, body awareness was attained through the reflective act of journaling about the body.

**Creative writing** is an expressive form of writing that centers on short story,
personal narrative, fiction pieces, poetry (Piirto, 1998). Additionally characterized as personal writing, it is further defined as a “complex human endeavor, requiring practice and analysis, involving beliefs and emotions, resulting in failure and successes” (Bishop, 1994, p. 194).

Community-based writing groups are made up of both professional and hobby writers. These groups are typically small, informal, and function in a realm outside of education or the academic setting. There is a collaborative-supportive component to these groups (Westbrook, 2004).

Embodiment is then defined as the knowledge that is revealed through the body’s unique way of comprehending the world; it is what the body takes in and expresses in an implicit way gained through experience and so registered in non-discursive ways or as it is attached to meaning from experiences already had. In this perspective, embodiment implies a taking in of experience and it becoming part of a person in a holistic sense, so the observed-observed distinction is undercut. Experience is active and present tense and although embodied knowledge can be accessed through reflection, it is often more efficacious to access it through creative activities such as painting, or creative writing. In this way, the body is a site for learning. Embodied knowledge is the combination of knowledge, experiences, perceptions and reflections all resulting from our state of being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1965). Embodied learning in this study will be used as Freiler (2008) describes as a “more holistic view of constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site of learning, usually in connection with other domains of knowing (for example, spiritual, affective, symbolic, cultural, rational)” (p. 39).
Felt sense is considered to be holistic and of the body. The concept of felt sense is somewhat opaque and highly subjective to individual experience and awareness, making it difficult to define in definitive and concrete terms. It can be loosely defined as a “wholistic, implicit, bodily sense of a complex situation” or meaning that enables direct access to our bodies through experience (Gendlin, 1981; 1996, p. 56). Perl (2004) states that felt sense is a way to make meaning that connects the mind to what’s felt in the body.

Flow or flow experiences are defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) as what happens when a person is fully immersed within an experience. The kind of immersion often happens through the body’s pre-reflective perceptual engagement with the world, expressed in non-discursive ways. Flow becomes a “metaphor” to describe the “sense of effortless action” people feel when they are engaged in some activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29). Flow “tends to occur when a person faces a clear set of goals” and “flow activities” can “induce flow” therefore making it more likely for this type of experience to take place (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29-30). Although flow can happen in wider set of experiences, an important subset of these experiences are ones that are embodied. While flow can apply to broader contexts, for the purposes of this study, flow was explored as a way the body can be engaged as part of the writing process and whether attending to a body awareness activity would induce flow experiences when writing.

Healing references the noted improvements in both physical and psychological well-being as a result of some action, in this case writing. It is also defined as a making sense of the experiences of life or physical and emotional trauma (Pennebaker, 2000). Writing as Healing notes the use of expressive writing or personal journaling to facilitate improvements in overall health and well-being, as in the case of Pennebaker’s studies.
Somatic knowing is used in multiple ways in the literature. While some authors use the term somatic knowing almost as a synonym for embodied knowing, in this study, I will use the term somatic knowing or learning primarily only to draw awareness to the body through movement and physical reactions.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of understanding scholarly literature surrounding a topic cannot be overstated. The purpose of this action research study is threefold: it is to first examine how professional creative writers describe their writing process with particular attention to their perceptions of the role and awareness of the body in the writing process; secondly, it is to engage these writers in a series of exercises about body awareness; finally, it is to explore their perceptions about the effects of an increased body awareness on their writing process. The purpose of this chapter is to gain insight into the concept of embodiment by thoroughly reviewing the literature as it informs the purpose of the research which seeks understanding about how creative writers describe their process with particular attention to their perceptions of the role and awareness of the body in writing process. Embodiment will be explored through its theoretical underpinnings, research and conceptual pieces, as well as the various ways embodied experiences occur. Literature will be discussed in three areas: the first will focus on the theoretical framework and include literature that informs the study; the second area will focus on research on embodiment specific to the context of education and learning as well as embodied practice; the third will discuss embodiment and its relation to writing, writing process and practice.

**Theoretical Framework:**

*From Merleau-Ponty to Gendlin’s Focusing and “Felt Sense”*

As previously discussed the body can be viewed as a nebulous concept depending on the context for discussion (Crossley, 2007). The body at times can be placed in
numerous contexts and be analyzed based on any number of criteria such as race, gender, culture, as well as kinesthetic, biological, or emotional or affective aspects. For the purposes of establishing some grounding for this study of embodiment, the body, and embodiment and writing as a way to bring the body into focus for this study, it is important to introduce a framework for study and discussion. Similar to the way plot provides structure for a story, the theoretical framework provides an undergirding for concepts. According to Anafara and Mertz (2006) theory can be thought of as the building blocks that assemble a study, moving “concepts to the level of theory” (p. xiv) and providing a “lens... for framing and shaping” the work ahead. For this study the work that is ahead is informed by intersecting two different philosophical and conceptual roads that merge: Merleau-Ponty’s (1965) philosophy of the body; Gendlin’s (1996, 2004) concept of felt sense in his philosophy of the body. Each area provides influence and this section will discuss each and how it provides structure and underpinning for the study.

**Merleau-Ponty**

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1965), mid 20th century philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty reframed the perspective of the body in understanding knowledge construction from one of exclusion and absence to being the locus of our knowing and meaning making. His work contributed to uprooting the Cartesian foundations of thought and brings to light numerous issues and limitations of an intellect dominant perspective (Hubbard, 2007). Hubbard (2007) notes that specific to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical perspective is the notion that the body is both expression and speech. Learning through the body, and finally implications for the body in this aspect of
Theoretical framing will be discussed. The philosophy of the body or embodiment as per Merleau-Ponty bears heavy influence on the inception and first thoughts and ideas for this work, additionally providing the lens through which the data are viewed. The *Phenomenology of Perception* is the primary text and while dense and rich in philosophy of the body, it is impossible and inappropriate to use all of what Merleau-Ponty wrote to provide context and footing for the study, but there are key ideas that are central to his thinking and to the study, including the notions of body and experience; body and expression; the notion of the importance of the pre-reflective; and the role of perception, expression, imagination and memory. These are discussed below, as well as a brief look at Merleau-Ponty’s connection to other disciplines.

**The body and experience.** Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is vast and accounts for many aspect of life experience. While he wrote about the art, specifically painting more so than writing, this is not the sole focus of his philosophy. He offers the arts as an extension of the artist’s/writer’s body. Baldwin (2004), a modern British philosopher, points out in Merleau-Ponty that through discussion of the arts (painting, film, poetry), Merleau-Ponty wants us to understand that there is meaning to be derived from the experience we have looking at paintings or reading poems. However when applying this idea to literature, problems arise because of language. Language can be a limitation and what is required to appreciate literature and poetry is an understanding of the language used to write implies a certain level of expectation and understanding on the reader’s part to fully make sense of what they are reading (Baldwin, 2004). Because this narrative analysis seeks to keep the story of body awareness central and intact, the use of language,
the word choice, stylistic elements of structure, syntax, diction, or interpretations of potential meanings are not part of this analysis.

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body incorporates a holistic body, one that is fully realized as mind and body unified. Tenets of his philosophy of the body include ways in which we experience the world, make meaning, perceive objects and sense and express ourselves through our body; all of which hold relevance to this study. In this perspective the body is central to everything (experience, knowing, learning, perception, emoting, relating and so on). Writing from the perspective of the nursing field, Priest (2000) highlights Merleau-Ponty’s ideas that the body is the “margin of all my perception” and “my body is with me” (p.173) signaling the body’s centrality and our obvious inability to separate, have out of body experiences, subjugate the body, or privilege the mind over it. In this way, the body is not an extension of the brain, objectified or viewed outside of our experience, rather all we do and encounter becomes part of our make-up, part of the body, and who we are. Thus the body functions as a “general instrument of comprehension” and the “fabric into which all objects are woven” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 273).

Merleau-Ponty argues that the body is central to all our experience and connects us to the larger environment, functioning as a “vehicle for being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 94). Experiences are not passive or had; rather we are our experiences: “to be an experience is to hold inner communication with the world, the body, and other people, to be with them instead of being beside them…” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 110). In this way our body enables us to not only gather experiences but to communicate them
to others, thus alluding to interconnectedness within embodiment. For many people initial understanding of their level of body awareness is through physical injury or illness.

**The body as a vehicle of expression.** The body as a means of communication and expression has particular relevance to this study. Merleau-Ponty presents the body as both expression and speech, which the body has intentionality to possess and give meaning. Words and speech along with presence of thought are manifestations of themselves and in this case the written word, is understood to be a “flow of words set in motion” with phrases possessing both silent spaces between words and an underlying attitude or meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 204-05). The idea of empty spaces, or the meaning behind words is picked up by Gendlin’s idea of felt sense, which in Merleau-Pontian terms is an understanding “over and above what we may have spontaneously thought” (p. 207).

It may be obvious to say that words have meaning, but in this way words communicate and articulate sensibilities, understandings, implications, and conceptual meanings that may only be realized after the flow of words has stopped. Words exist for the writer to take up and express embodied experiences and meaning is carried, communicated and interpreted by the reader. As individuals and writers we possess the ability to use, articulate and pronounce words as another way to use the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 210). Because the body is a “power of natural expression” thoughts are not designated through words and speech, rather words and speech must become the presence of that thought; in other words, it must become so through the body. The creative expression of the writer occurs in simpatico with thought. Through the body a new gesture of communication and meaning is given. Simply, people’s stories, poems,
and memoirs are not just gestures of their creativity or gestures of their experiences; rather such pieces are manifestations of themselves, an extension of their body like a limb, an arm or leg. Merleau-Ponty, casts some light on this when he writes:

when expression is successful it leaves more than a reminder for the reader; it brings into existence the meaning as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings to life an organism of word, establishing a new sense organ, opening a new field or dimension to our experience. (p. 212)

The union of mind and body is asserted in the *Phenomenology of Perception* and through drawing attention to the body as part of the writing process, writing and expression are pulled into this union, connecting body, mind, and writing.

Wilde (1999) refers to Merleau-Ponty’s perspective as “the philosophy of embodiment” (Embodiment Defined and Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Embodiment section, para. 2). Merleau-Ponty’s (1965) philosophy of the body has a major theme present in the sense that the body is not disjointed. In other words, we are not experiencing the world piece by piece or through individual parts of our body (p. 238). In Merleau-Ponty’s view, according to Wilde (1999) thought and expression are simultaneously formed, so there is no mind over body, and the body is dealt with as a whole. Beneath the detachment and objectification of the body, we learn then that “we are our body,” we are in the world through our body, and we perceive the world through our body; to “remake contact with the body and with the world, we are able to rediscover our self” (Merleau-Ponty, 1965, p. 239). Writing stories, in keeping with this perspective, can allow for us to make our way back to our body (Banks, 2003). Because writing is the writer, the text brings new dimensions of experience to life. Writing then, is the
intersection of story, experience, and our body. Writing is a personal and reflective manifestation of embodied experiences.

**The pre-reflective.** An additional component drawn from Merleau-Ponty is the emphasis on the notion of the pre-reflective. The pre-reflective conscious is characterized as a sensing that we have before we do any reflecting on experiences. It is implicit and refers to the subjective feel of experiences. Merleau-Ponty states in regard to perceiving experience, “that originary perception is non-thetic, pre-objective, and pre-conscious” suggesting that there isn’t a consciousness awareness of an idea or thought in this case about the body as one perceives an experience. He then goes on to say that there is a “provisional matter of knowledge that is merely possible” of one’s perceptions (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 252). Perception, as part of experience, is made up of both sensation and interpretation, which allows for access to aspects of experience in provisional terms, meaning temporarily and conditionally. While the body is presented as unified in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, he does recognize the two aspects of body and reflective mind, but in such a way that they are two systems that function together as we have experiences that can approximate knowledge. A conscious thought or reflection always refers back to the language-less experience itself. In particular, he statesL “The reflective ideal of thetic thought will be grounded in the experience of the thing. Thus, reflection only grasps itself if it refers to the pre-reflective fund it presupposes, upon which it draws…” (p. 252). Hence, the pre-reflective is omnipresent in embodied experience.

In essence, Merleau Ponty is suggesting that experience becomes a grounding factor for the “reflective ideal of thetic thought,” which essentially requires us to have an
overall understanding of experience, but not what the experience is like. For instance, we can reflect upon experiences, but reflection does not tell us what the experience was like in terms of the essence or felt sense. For this we must cycle back to the pre-reflective, knowledge of the body.

**Perception, expression, imagination, and memory.** Additionally important from Merleau-Ponty (1945) are the notions of perception, expression, imagination, and memory. Perception as the foundation of experience is the more inclusive setting for other types of non-discursive experiences. It can be described as residing behind, around, and underneath our experiences. Although, its locus is the pre-reflective realms, aspects of reflective experience get incorporated into later flows of pre-reflective perception: ideas shape later perceptual experience, called “sedimentation” by Merleau-Ponty. Since we experience the world through the body, the world becomes an open plane to be perceived in multiple ways such as through emotions, memories, imagination, and proprioception that comes from experience, becoming what we know in the body and what comes without thinking. Since we experience the world through the body, the world becomes an open plane to be perceived in multiple ways such as through emotions, memories, imagination, and proprioception that comes from experience, becoming what we know in the body and what comes without thinking. In perceiving the world, the body then finds itself not just in the world, but inseparable from it and in this way perception is lived experience. All of what we come in contact with (objects, people, landscapes) as we experience the world becomes reflected within us and thus extends from the body back into the world, to others, to nature as an expression of who we are.
(Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Perception does not work in pieces; rather we experience the world with our entire body. Merleau-Ponty writes:

> We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body. In the same way we shall need to reawaken our experience of the world as it appears to us in so far as we perceive the world with our body. But by this remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception. (p. 239)

In this respect, the body is the knower of the world. Thus being-in-the-world is belonging to the world as it is perceived through experience as inseparable from the environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 90; 94). Contextualizing perception in this way enables a peeling back of the multiple layers inherent in our experiences. Experiences are not quick moments captured in black and white snapshots; perception draws the depth of interconnectedness of pre-reflection, reflection, and what the body knows to the multiple horizons of culture, emotion, affect, and cognition.

The body additionally has an intentionality of expression and speech that gives meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 202). The body through perception is an expression of itself, and he views the body additionally as expression and speech; the body has an intentionality and speech that is a specific act of meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 202). Merleau-Ponty (1945) says that words “exist for me,” form a “certain field of action around me,” and are given by the body, thus becoming part of the body (p. 210). We
possess the ability to use, write, and articulate words as another way to use the body. Even words as they exist hold meaning as well as the absence of words, the silence between words; and while silence is typically thought of as emptiness, Merleau-Ponty points out that this is not true and that “silence is alive with words, this inner life is an inner language” (p. 213).

The words then become gestures of ourselves, of meaning that are given in the body and expressed through story or poem. The body then “is a power of natural expression” (p. 211), allowing writers to tell stories that are extensions of themselves, what Merleau-Ponty (1945) says establishes “it in the writer or reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field of new dimension to our experience” (p. 212). Since the body is seen to have transformed the world in apprehending it in these ways, the transformed world is also able to be written out as a gesture within creative language that follows more closely the pre-reflective experiences.

The interceding of imagination then comes into play. While it may be tempting to think of imagination as an opposition to experience and perception, it can be thought of as a “texture of one’s experience” (Mazis, 1988, p. 39). Imagination’s role in a study of the body and creative writers is significant, as Mazis (1988) states

the imaginary… slips into the interplay with perception, and is at the heart of, elongates and intensifies that it inhabits a significant world of personal and impersonal depths lodged within the landscapes to which the person turns to discovering himself or herself. (p. 38)

In this way the use of imagination and imaginative words in writing allows for getting closer to perception because it delves into multiple layers and depth of our
experience (Mazis, 1988). It is additionally through memory coupled with imagination that we are able to further articulate experience and expand its meaning. Finally, as Merleau-Ponty (as cited by Mazis, 1988) states:

> We must take literally what vision teaches us: namely, that through it we come in contact with the sun and the stars, that we are everywhere all at once, and that even our power to imagine ourselves elsewhere – ‘I am in Petersburg in my bed, in Paris, my eyes see the sun’ or to intend [viser] real beings wherever they are, borrows from vision and employs means we owe to it. (p. 41)

This statement has the implication that a creative writer who is able to write from the body in the sense of tapping into their embodied knowledge would have a whole universe of new experiences emerging from this matrix of perception, imagination, emotion, visceral feeling, body memories, and a felt sense of time and place that could be expressed in their writing.

**Merleau-Ponty’s connection to other disciplines.** While Merleau-Ponty does not speak to education and learning specifically, he does talk of knowing and making meaning through the body. Knowledge and meaning making is constructed through experience. Layers of meaning are gained via experience and these incorporate into our body, space, and world. An underpinning of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body is the idea of a whole, holistic presentation and understanding of the body, and as will be discussed further later, many in education and adult education who discuss the role of the body in learning refer to his work.

While most philosophical writing that refers to the body points back to Merleau-Ponty’s work, it is important to acknowledge that feminist philosophers have theorized
the body too. Chapman (1998) recognizes that there is an undercurrent of holistic framing within adult education, reflecting the wholistic underpinnings present in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. Jaggar and Bordo (1989) note that the role of the body is emergent in feminist writing and express the viewpoint that a Cartesian framework of duality (mind from body) is in need of reconstruction and calls for a “revisioning of the body” (p. 4). Bordo (1989) further conceptualizes the body as a way of knowing and being that is influenced and at times defined by culture. This will be discussed further later.

**Gendlin’s Philosophy of the Body and Notion of Felt Sense**

Eugene Gendlin is a philosopher and psychologist who draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty among others to develop his ideas of a philosophy, and the notion of felt sense. Felt sense engages the body in terms similar and related to Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) philosophy of the body, specifically the ideas of pre-reflection and reflection. Gendlin (2004) states that we live in “situational bodies which always sense themselves in sensing anything else” (p. 129) thus placing the body at the center of knowledge, experience, and perception. The body is the place where meaning is made and knowledge is understood in all areas covered in the theoretical frame.

Gendlin’s (1996) concept of felt sense is a piece to his larger Focusing Method, which was developed as a way for people to access implicit knowledge of the body to problem solve, facilitate change, or discover new meanings in experiences. By focusing on the subtle bodily sensations, a patient could articulate the subject aspects of experience. Tying this to the notion of reflective practice in adult education, Gendlin’s Focusing process contains six steps or movements to attend to and work to resolve problems. He
theorizes this process as “Six Focusing Movements” which include 1) “Making Space” by pushing away all problems to focus on one main issue; 2) “Felt Sense,” meaning to explore the sensation and emotion of what the problem feels like; 3) “Finding a Handle” or working to name the felt sense (jealousy, for example); 4) “Resonating” which checks if the name or “handle” matches the felt sense; 5) “Asking” the felt sense what the handle means (for example, what does this jealousy mean?); and 6) “Receiving” or accepting the felt sense and utilizing it to understand the true issue and nature of a problem (Gendlin, 2007, p. 58-63). This cycle of Focusing can be done more than once to work out an issue and is ultimately meant to provide clarity and understanding in order to achieve resolution or solution.

Gendlin (1992) asserts that there is something prior to language and concepts that is found in the perception and the body. Felt sense, according to Gendlin (1996; 1998; 2007) has its own meaning that can be difficult to articulate, because it is not necessarily an emotion or bodily quality (such as jumpy, heavy, sticky). “Felt sense goes deeper and further than the surface” (Gendlin, 1996, p. 62). Defined as a “holistic sense of a situation” felt sense pushes beyond the level of emotional or physical sensations, containing emotion yet encompassing something “wider…something that can come with, under, or all around the emotion” (Gendlin, 1996, p. 64 & 59). Because “the body can feel a situation” felt sense is key to tapping into the body’s knowledge (Gendlin, 2004, p. 130). Gendlin (2004) more recently defines felt sense as the implicit way the body knows something, further stating that it is also called a “felt meaning, the direct referent, the implicit demanding” (p. 133). This notion of felt sense ties to the implicit, or the pre-reflective in Merlea-Ponty. In applying this notion to writing, he would likely posit that a
writer would rely on felt sense to help choose the right word, assemble the correct phrasing, and write plot lines or poems that work. Felt sense can account for the emotions and sensations that emerge the writing process. Meaning perhaps can be drawn from these spaces and gaps that are not usually articulated or paid much attention to.

Gendlin (2004) extended his concept of felt sense by developing and including the notion of “carrying forward” (Gendlin, 2004). “Carrying forward” is an implicit knowledge of the body that both refers back to something and brings it forward. To Gendlin, the body is a “situational body” (2004, p. 148) that is central to experience and environment (being-in-the-world). To carry forward we must “use our implicit bodily sense of the whole situation” (p. 131) which the body can feel. Placing this notion into the context with writers, it is the knowing that is implied when choosing the right word; that we somehow know and can get a feel “or felt meaning, felt sense…the implicit demanding” (p. 133). In this way the notion of “carrying forward” can be expanded, and may be that the writer is listening to and trusting what Vygotsky (1986) refers to as “inner speech” that one garners through social and individual experience of the world before it is verbalized. It sometimes remains implicit and Gendlin suggests implicit knowledge from inner speech or felt sense is given through the body. When the body is engaged in this way when writing, we carry forward to find the words that feel right.

Gendlin (2004) gives an example when writing a poem that is unfinished:

It wants to go on. In an implicit way you feel (sense, have, live, are…) what should be said next, but you do not know what to say. The phrases that come do not precisely say it. You reject one phrase after another. How are you able to do this? You do not know what to say, but you recognize these phrases do not say it.
Something implicit is functioning in the rejection of them…Your body understands the phrases that come. It knows the language and demands- I say implies- something more precise. (p. 131)

This direction the poem takes, the right feel as found through body sensations of the next lines taken as they are given through the body is carrying forward.

From here, the concept of a “zig-zag” emerges and functions as part of the process. It is similar to the back and forth movement one has in the reflective and pre-reflective in Merleau-Ponty. Zig-zagging takes us between this implicit understanding and knowing, dealing with it outwardly, usually by talking. But what zig-zagging allows us to do is check in with the body, engage it, see if the words feel right, then carry forward, over and over through the implicit to fruition.

More recently from adult education, Jordi (2011) has drawn on Gendlin to theorize the body by discussing tying embodied experiences and aspects of cognitive processes by using Gendlin’s Focusing method to provide a way to expand on reflective practice in experiential learning. He cites the manifestation of felt sense usually occurs as an “unclear body felt sensation” often times detected in the “throat, chest, stomach, or abdomen and hovers just on the edge of our thinking” (p. 13). As stated in Chapter One, Gendlin (1996) defines felt sense as being of the body and is “wholistic, implicit, bodily sense of a complex situation” (p. 56). Ideally, usually felt sense brings the murky, intrinsic aspects of experience to clarity because felt sense implies so much of how we experience and exist in the world. “A felt sense contains many elements of feeling, memory tacit knowledge, thought, emotion, opinion- all of which cross, govern, and give relevance to one another” (Jordi, 2011, p. 13). Examining this yet to be articulated
knowledge of the body and experience could have implications for learning and meaning making, revealing deeper insights into a mind-body connection.

For writers, there could be a deepening of the writing process. It is noted by Gendlin (as cited by Jordi, 2011) that we are our experiences and the “embodiment of our experience provides us with tacit knowledge that allows us to know who we are, where we are, and what we are doing without a great amount of thought” (p. 16). It is by using and engaging felt sense of the body that writers may find another pathway into articulating the presence of their body in the writing process. An assumption that guides the thinking behind this inquiry is that whether aware or not, the body is present in all we do and this embodied knowledge and experience is unable to be separated from action and perception. Recognizing and tapping into felt sense may provide access to body awareness.

Sondra Perl (2004) has connected this specifically with a writing methodology. As will be discussed further later (in the section on writing), Perl developed a writing and composing program placing Gendlin’s concept of felt sense as central to the writing. Perl’s (2004) program called “Guidelines for Composing,” which uses a series of guided meditations to tap into a writer’s felt sense in hopes of improving writing practice, creativity, and production of pieces. The program is designed to be used in writing groups, composition and creative writing classrooms, or by individual writers seeking to approach their practice in a new and unique way.

Finally, Todres and Galvin (2008) draw on Gendlin’s ideas in developing a more aesthetic approach to phenomenological research. Their version of aesthetic phenomenology focuses on the meaning that is created by using creative, evocative, or
expressive forms of writing to create meaning from their study participants’ narratives. Implicit meanings are drawn out through the expressive writing they create, drawing from and reflecting on experiences to create new awareness and knowledge. This is another way Gendlin’s work on felt sense and carrying forward is used to connect the body to writing.

**Summary**

In summary this section of the literature review was meant to provide an overview of the theoretical framing for this investigation as they intersect to inform a study of embodiment. Each subsection, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the body, aesthetic phenomenology and Gendlin’s felt sense, carrying forward and zig zagging, highlight the role and position of the body and possibilities inherent for further examination. The next section of this chapter seeks to provide insight into the literature on embodiment to provide footing for continued examination and further study of the body’s role in writing and learning.

**Embodiment**

There are many perspectives, approaches, and assumptions regarding the body. The purpose of this section is to discover what is known about the concepts of the body and embodiment in the context of adult education and other, related fields. This review of literature also sought to gauge understanding of the literature dealing with the body and learning.

There is much ambiguity present when researching the body and embodiment and there is a complexity and challenge in the literature in the vagueness of agreed upon terminology of the body, embodiment, and somatics. It was discovered that many times
these terms were and are used interchangeably by some authors, thus making it somewhat difficult to gain a complete and clear understanding of definitions within the varied academic discourses. According to Crossley (2007) the “‘body’ and ‘embodiment,’ despite their concrete connotation, are very vague, broad, and abstract concepts that do not define a reachable object” which can be interpreted to mean that what is presented through embodiment and somatic knowing cannot necessarily be quantified, standardized, or generalized, as both concepts rely heavily on personal and experiential knowledge.

Eilan, Marcel, and Bermudez (1998) point out that discussing the body is complex, acknowledging that as a particular source of difficulty is the “…fact that we have many ways of using, being conscious of, and representing our own bodies” and that “Their nature and their interrelations are very much open to debate” (p. 1). This signals another particular challenge, which is the amount of available resources, specifically studied, and it was necessary to explore any and all literature that came up through searches.

**Embodiment and Somatics and Education**

It is important to acknowledge that in the past 10 years or more, there has been some emergence of the body and embodiment in the literature and research in adult education and related fields. Much of the work about embodiment in adult education is summarized by Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) and provides insight and starting points for research. Gaining understanding of the body and embodiment as it is considered and referred to in varied contexts will provide both theoretical and conceptual perspectives on the concepts. While considered to be a newer form of learning, the body and embodiment provide challenges to our “hegemony of Western way of knowing” and provide more holistic ways of approaching meaning making and learning (Merriam,
This section seeks to address embodiment in the contexts of pedagogy, learning, practices and research.

**Contextual and Historical Overview.** Beginning with the current position of the body in learning is meant to provide a quick historical overview and context for discussion surrounding embodiment to grow. Currently, the body is often viewed either as marginalized or as absent in learning, in that often there is no mention of the body (Leder, 1990; Fenwick, 2005). From a historical perspective there is a significant divide and split when it comes to inclusion of the body, in both educational and cultural contexts. Many sources site Descartes (Becket & Morris, 2001; Clark, 2001) as declaring the separation between the logical brain and the body, ideas further reinforced by the Enlightenment philosophers. Intelligence then is thought to be separate from the body and thinking is identified as a process or hierarchy (mind over body containing a soul) rather than what Somerville (2004) refers to as the “lived body” (p. 52). Further problematizing and distancing the body, is our cultural perspective, which as Clark (2001) points out is troubled and unsettled in our perception and acceptance of the body, rendering it most often as absent and invisible (Leder, 1990; Fenwick, 2003; Crossley, 2007). Along these lines, that while numerous sources acknowledge that the “body can be an important source of personal knowledge” it historically has been “disowned as a result of dualistic Cartesian perspectives of human experience” (Johnson, 2003, p. 7).

There seems to have been a significant split which privileges the mind over the body leading to invisibility, lack of presence, and validation for the body in learning has become an early lesson in our education system as highlighted by Joseph Tobin (as cited in Bressler, 2004, p. 111): “disappearance of the body in early childhood education,
which highlights just how early in our education practice we begin to relegate the body.” While his article spoke with regards to issues of morality, the removal of the body in any circumstance has a psychological impact that extends outward from the classroom setting and embeds within the culture. Fenwick (2003) further reinforces these ideals highlighting that the body has been “banished from learning” (Introduction section, para. 3).

Some sources, while acknowledging the dilemma surrounding the body cite a growing academic interest in the body, a sort of renaissance of study, bringing the body back into the classroom or outright acknowledging a rise in the body’s presence (Chapman, 1998; Shilling, 2007). With the growing popularity to explore somatic knowing and embodied learning in various fields, Clark (2001) cites a “new legitimization of the body” which points to an understanding and awareness of how important the body is as a “source of knowledge” (p. 85). Recognition of this problem of the body is what sparked the interest in a study of embodiment and to the review of the literature that follows.

**Embodiment and somatics in adult education.** The body is a way of knowing that is integral to the learning process and to meaning making. There has been some discussion in adult education literature regarding the body, mainly through embodied and somatic classifications of learning and knowing. Clark (2001) discussed embodied and narrative approaches to learning. As stated, Clark (2001) acknowledges the body as a renewed and legitimate source for knowing and learning and offers some insights as to how the body can be used in learning. Highlighted is the connection between learning and the body, specifically learning through bodily experience. She references learning
through the body as a form of somatic or embodied learning, terms she uses interchangeably, and cites kinesthetic and physical development as more common with much information already in existence.

By focusing on two specific areas, somatic learning and narrative, and drawing on the works of Michelson (1998) and Crowdes (2000) to demonstrate these types of learning in action, Clark (2001) brings into focus the need for further exploration in the adult education context. Clark (2001) additionally cites knowing in much the same way Gendlin discusses felt sense: as a means of knowing that is “deeply and intimately connected,” to the experiences of the body, which are usually “unconscious and largely unspoken,” but yet have a way of manifesting “in our bodies before our heads fully understand” (p. 84-85). Though somatic or embodied learning it is demonstrated that the body is a significant component to learning.

Amann Horst (2003, 2008), in a conference proceeding (2003) and in her dissertation (2008) in considering the role of the body in transformative learning, additionally notes the connection between learning and the body. (Note: Amann and Horst are the same person, her last name was changed in light of her marital status). Focusing on a strong emotional component to learning, she recognizes that embodied learning is a more holistic type of learning. Focusing specifically on somatic learning as a means of “bringing the body into the learning experience” (Introduction section, para. 1). Amann (2003) offers interpretations of aspects of somatic learning and then offers a model that breaks somatic learning into four main parts (kinesthetic, sensory, affective, and spiritual), which seek to provide a framework for learning though the body (Defining Somatic Learning section, para. 5). Citing this model as a means to engage the “whole
person” in learning, Amann (2003) states that incorporating these four areas into learning could have implications for transformative learning experiences. From this piece it is of note that somatic learning is part of the everyday experiences of day to day living and that recognizing bodily learning as important and significant can clear the way for new and richer learning experiences (Amann, 2003).

Horst (2008, nee Amann) offers further clarification of this four part somatic learning model by offering a revised version which accounts for embodied elements of “dialogue, reflection, and cognition” (How to Foster Somatic Knowing section, para. 1). These elements were added to recognize the body’s communicative elements, which contribute to a pedagogy that incorporates elements of somatic learning. By recognizing the importance of these three additional elements after completing a study of 15 women managers who engaged in yoga practice and they way they articulated the importance of communicating and sharing stories, thoughts and emotions, demonstrated that these elements work together to facilitate learning. Ways to facilitate somatic learning call for increased intentionality for inclusion of the body as part of learning, utilizing creative methods such as music or artwork, and storytelling. The connection that is made via Horst’s (2008, nee Amann, 2003) updated version of the somatic learning model is the increased awareness to attending to all parts of bodily experience as valid to learning. What’s provided is additional context and understanding of the varied ways the body enables learner’s to make meaning.

Fenwick (2003) drawing specifically on the work of Michelson (1998,) cites the centrality of the body to experiential learning and views it as a way to make meaning through experience. Several approaches to experiential learning are explored as a means
to re-conceptualize the body in learning: co-emergence, desire, and struggle as they are informed through complexity science, psychoanalytic theory and collective social action (Fenwick, 2003). Co-emergence discusses the inseparability between person and context, further highlighting the learning process as “continuous invention and exploration” demonstrating that embodied learning is a result of many factors and actions working together (Fenwick, 2003, Co-emergence… section, paras, 1,7,8). Further, these theoretical dimensions used by Fenwick (2003) to articulate meaning to the approaches, “encourage a view beyond the individual learning subject separate from the objects of her environment…to understand knowledge as constantly enacted as she moves through the world.” This idea “focus[es]” on the relations…for learning is produced within the evolving relationships among particularities that are dynamic and unpredictable” (Struggle… section, para. 8). It is through these areas and approaches that Fenwick (2003) views a more embodied approach to experiential learning.

Additionally suggestions are made for adult educators to configure a more embodied approach to learning through experience by highlighting four problems of embodied learning present in experiential learning. Highlighted are the purposes and responses of adult educators, which Fenwick (2003) pushes to a more de-centralized role, reconfiguring the educator in other roles potentially as someone who can upset and disturb the norm in ways that barriers are removed and new insights are drawn upon. A embodied approach in experiential learning is one that calls for expanding possibilities (Fenwick, 2003).

Freiler’s (2008) chapter on learning through the body in Merriam’s (2008) A Third Update on Adult Learning Theory, draws clear and distinct differences between
embodied and somatic learning. She begins her chapter with a story about the Moken sea
gypsies’ embodied learning that allowed them to seek higher ground thus surviving the
devastating tsunami in Asia in 2005, to frame the discussion of embodiment. Then
drawing on the literature, she notes that embodiment is a “more holistic view of
constructing knowledge that engages the body as a site for learning” (p. 39), in
comparison to the term somatic. She notes that it is essential to understanding
differences between ambiguous terminology, that is at times referenced interchangeably
throughout the literature (Freiler, 2008, p. 39). With embodiment is the distinction of the
importance of the role of experience and the way it is fed by and connected to other
aspects of knowing, such as those cited by Horst (2008, nee Amann, 2003) as part of the
four part somatic learning model and Freiler (2008) who additionally ties in the symbolic,
cultural, and rational domains. Additionally, Freiler (2008) offers a number of
conceptualizations of embodiment which include the experience or phenomenon of being
a body (as per Csordes (1994); phenomenological and neural embodiment informed by
Lakoff and Johnson (1999); and embodiment to “incorporate body and mind” (Freiler,
“embodiment is defined as a way to construct knowledge through direct engagement in
bodily experiences and inhabiting one’s body through a felt sense of being in the world”
(p. 40).

Special attention is given to valuing the knowledge of the body, citing it as an
alternative means of closing the gap between binary of mind and body (Freiler, 2008).
Insight is also provided on incorporating and implementing learning through the body
into an adult education setting, as well as theoretical implications. Freiler (2008) notes
that though engaging learners through multidimensional and integrative approaches, adult learners may be opened up to a more individual, contextual, and important means of learning and knowing. Freiler’s (2008) article is recognized as one of the most important and concise explorations of the concept of embodiment. Clearly offering insights and definitions, it is a useful article for coming to understandings regarding embodiment and potential the body has in learning.

Merriam and Sek Kim (2008) focus on a discussion of indigenous learning to understand holistic types of learning, embodiment being one form. Indigenous learning is brought to the reader via a context of Western versus non-Western epistemologies, citing the non-Western perspective as dominant and “even today they are held by the majority of the world’s peoples” (Merriam & Sek Kim, 2008, p. 71). Merriam and Sek Kim (2008) state embodiment, spiritual learning, and narrative are viewed as growing trends in education and learning, which lays the groundwork for discussion of “learning and knowing from non-Western worldviews” (p. 73) and cites communal, lifelong and informal, along with holistic learning as themes to this perspective.

As noted in Chapter One, there’s an increase of discussion of the role of the body in learning. More recently, Sodhi and Cohen (2012), who through a qualitative study of social workers examined how these social workers relied on their internal reactions to specific situations to act as a guide for their practice. Additionally, Swartz (2011) looked at the role of the body from the perspective of neuroscience and adult education, arguing that by using the connection between embodied learning and neuroscience adult education could further examine the implications of the “neurobiological body” and the connection to wisdom (p. 15-16). Jordi (2011) theorizes reflective practices by drawing
on Gendlin’s Focusing Method to make ties to experiential learning, noting how through reflective practices a dialogue emerges between “embodied experience and conceptual aspects of our consciousness” (p. 181).

From higher education, Brockman (2001) defines somatic knowledge as being received from within an individual and foregrounds the knowledge of the body, or somatic knowing, as a powerful influence in making moral decisions further highlight cultural connections as a dimension to embodied learning. Knowledge of the body transcends culture; Brockman (2001) states “the body is a criterion of knowing inclusive within every cultural context, though not independent of context” (p. 332). Brockman (2001) brings perspective to a key issues, as he sees it, in education; the fact that cultural knowing is privileged over somatic knowing and therefore views somatic knowing as a way to overcome what are considered “cultural evils” (p. 333) and dealing with issues of morality.

In summary, this section was meant to provide an overview of the major pieces in adult education that inform a study on embodiment and the role of the body in the writing process. Through this literature, embodiment can be defined as an active, present-tense, as well as imaginative and experiential-based knowledge of the body that accounts for all aspects, a holistic sense, of a human being. This includes the affective, emotional, cultural, and cognitive domains. Because the terminology used in literature within and outside the field of adult education can at times be used interchangeably, it is important to offer distinctions between embodiment and somatics. Somatic knowing draws on the idea of felt sense (Gendlin, 1996) and is more of an understanding or intuition that comes from the body, yet it is heavily tied to embodied experience, and Gendlin himself appears
to use the terms somatic and embodied interchangeably. Somatic knowing has more of a history of scholarly attention and focuses on the body through movement, emotions, sensations, and physical reactions.

**Embodiment and pedagogy.** As stated, the last 10 years or so have hosted a seeming re-emergence of scholarly interest in the body, embodiment, and somatic knowing and learning, as highlighted by the literature reviewed. While there has been much theorizing and varied conceptualization of the body, questions remain about specifically what to do with the body inside an educational setting. Making a case for the body blurs boundaries and as Clark (2001) points out, “holistic education reflects an attitude, a philosophy, a world view, that challenges the fragmented, reductionist, mechanistic, nationalistic assumptions of main stream culture and education” (p. 48). While this intends a much loftier view and acknowledgement of a bigger picture beyond the classroom, educating and learning in an embodied way present a more holistic view of learning that accounts for all facets of human experience.

While there are numerous methods for practice, there are no steadfast rules on how to educate in an embodied manner. Horn and Wilburn (2005) cite reflection as a key component to embodied learning. Highlighting self-awareness and reflexivity, Horn and Wilburn (2005) point to a process of observation, reflection, and articulating experience through language as a way draw distinctions in the way learning takes place. Learning is viewed as a process of living, and a merging of both the mind and the body (Horn & Wilburn, 2005).

Additionally focusing on reflection as part of embodied learning, Latta and Buck (2007) discussion the body’s role in teaching and learning specifically in higher
education. Latta and Buck (2007) discuss the idea of “falling into trust with the body” as a means to establish embodied pedagogy (p. 324). Through reflexive practice, educators can attend to bodily experience to create meaning. In doing so, attention is called to “moving minds,” which is the work of embodied teaching and learning (p. 324). Ways to facilitate embodied pedagogy are attention to the multisensory body; attention to and synthesis of all parts of the teaching and learning process to understand it as a cohesive whole; being alert to diversity in teaching opportunities; connecting theory and beliefs to practice (Latta & Buck, 2007). An embodied pedagogy attended to in this way enables a teacher/educator to have an increased sense of “consciousness of self” which indicates more self-awareness and connection to others (Latta & Buck, 2007, p. 325).

O’Loughlin (1998) cited emotion and the way emotions are felt in the body as a way to bring human embodiment into the process of education. She suggests moving beyond the expected aspects of curricula that tend to only engage movement, such as sport, to encourage a curricula that brings “emotion in thinking” (p. 292). To expand, O’Loughlin (1998) cites the need to incorporate exploration of emotional responses by an individual as part of their learning process. Examples of ways to unite emotion and thinking include multisensory experiences such as environmental and architectural exploration. O’Loughlin (1998) theorizes that by examining architecture or other spaces and environments, students are able to respond in both physical and mental ways, eliciting “whole body responses” (p. 293). Drama, which brings together movement, various communication and language skills, as well as reflection provide understanding on how to portray a character (O’Loughlin, 1998).
Other classroom activities are cited by Crowdes (2000), whose ideas focus on issues of power and conflict and exploring embodiment as part of the exercises. Done in the context of a sociology class, the idea is to establish a link between the mind and body to “accentuate the multidimensional processes by which humans construct their ongoing social realities (p. 27). The first activity she calls “Over-the-Line” and it is meant to help students establish relations and conflict resolution by reflecting on their own actions with relation to the assigned task, which is to move their partner over a line without speaking. Journaling and picture making were part of the debriefing for this activity, where students were able to reflect and think about their actions and what this could mean to their way of relating to others outside of the classroom (Crowdes, 2000). Crowdes (2000) also incorporated an exercise in bowing to a partner to explore power constructs between people. By providing instructions that essentially encouraged resistance and domination, students were given another opportunity to explore their relations through writing, drawing, and discussing the experience (Crowdes, 2000). Role playing was used as a final activity to strengthen and draw awareness to their role in relating to others. Each of these methods sought to engage the body by placing students in a situation where they tapped into and reflected upon emotions generated by participation. Emotion can provide insight into the knowledge of the body.

Barnacle (2009) talks about the physiology of “gut instinct” as a way to challenge rationalism in higher education and the engagement of informal and non-cognitive ways of knowing as part of the learning process. The idea of gut instinct seems similar and reflective of Gendlin’s (1996) explanation of felt sense. Barnacle (2009) highlights gut instinct as a way to gain a sense and sensibility for the learning that is taking place, which
suggests greater levels of understanding and acquisition of knowledge. Through gut instinct then, Barnacle (2009) cites an ability for learners to develop critical thinking. Barnacle’s (2009) concept of gut instinct additionally calls for a more holistic and body-inclusive way of educating, thus implicating a re-orienting of thought about the body in higher education.

Latta and Buck (2007) also discuss embodiment with regard to experience, specifically looking to flesh out the body’s role in teaching of concrete experiences as highlighted in teacher education programs. Their work seeks to make the connection between teaching and learning that is embodied, what they call “falling into trust with the body” as discussed through the example of one “practitioner-inquirer” (p. 319). This trusting of the body enables an educator to make connections between the self, others and the subject matter, making for a more relational approach (p. 317). A key assumption, as indicated in the piece, is that embodiment is elemental and essential to human existence, and that the body is a medium for sense making, even pushing into a more holistic stance to teaching. According to Latta and Buck, embodiment is present-tense and experiential, mirroring in philosophical stance in the foundational works of Dewey and his insights on experience and education. The idea of “falling into trust with the body” (Latta & Buck, 2007, p. 315) is reflective of the miner’s pit sense described by Somerville (2004). The miners essentially had to trust their experience and instincts when down in the mine as being tuned out and not present could cause injury or death.

Lelwica (2009) offers a different setting and purpose to this discussion, in that the search for an embodied pedagogy was centralized to religious education. Stating that a pedagogy of embodiment motivates and brings students and their experiences into their
learning, once again the context is specific and situation, essential to the learning process. By using Aikido, Lelwica (2009) cites her students were “more mentally focused and prepared to engage in analytical-critical discussions” and were more excited about their learning (p. 131). Additional suggestions for incorporating the body into learning and developing an embodied pedagogy into religious practice was through practices such as Tai Chi, rituals, service learning, travel and other auditory and visual means, such as art, film, or music (Lewica, 2009). She also highlights mindfulness and meditation practice as a way to bring the body into the learning process, further making the point that it has the ability to open new “vantage points on subjects” that are being taught (Lelwica, 2009, p. 125). Lelwica (2009) points to these ways as a means to challenge traditional learning and provide more opportunity for students to learn in ways that best suit their needs.

Numerous other sources make some suggestion for linking embodiment and pedagogy. Clark (2001,) who specifically focuses on somatic knowing and narrative learning, shows that one pathway to the somatic way of knowing is through talk, thought and reflection, and role playing. Talking about experiences, specifically experiences of the body, is a means to create a consciousness about the body (p. 85). Intellectual processing, mainly through reflection of bodily experience, is a way to access the body and give it legitimacy as a place of learning (Clark, 2001, p. 86; Horst, 2008). Matthews (1998, as cited in Clark, 2001, p. 86) cites another way to bring the body into learning is by “being and doing” as an example of a teacher who incorporated role playing into the curricular activities. Horst (2008) calls for an overt inclusion and drawing of attention to the body, stating “without the body’s continuous engagement, dialogue loses it significance and certainly lacks meaning for learning” (p.4). One means of reflection is
through writing, specifically through journaling, which is cited by much of the literature as being significant and important. Merriam, Cafferella, and Baumgartner (2007) point out that “journaling writing is an important tool for adult learning, mainly through reflection” (p.212). Journaling, writing, and telling stories in conjunction with reflection, is key to engaging the body. Amstutz (1999) discusses the use of storytelling as an alternative instructional strategy that allows for individual experiences and voices to come through, using women telling stories to combat oppression as an example (p. 28).

These ideas call for an inclusionary and active approach to bringing the body into teaching, learning, and writing practice. Many ideas presented in the literature take place in many classrooms, not ones seeking methodology to make learning more embodied or to engage the body as a way of knowing. Acknowledging the potential and possibility of their use may just call for reframing with a sense of mindfulness towards the body and how it can be incorporated in learning. The next section will focus on the way the body has been researched in adult education to provide information on insights and discoveries on embodiment.

**Embodiment and Related Fields to Adult Education**

In discussing embodied learning and the body, adult educators will pull from other and related fields, including feminist studies, disability literature, and some sociology literature. It important to mention the influence of feminist literature where the body is extensively written on and many theories and concepts are drawn from this literature. The following section is meant to provide a brief overview of some of the literature from these related fields that informs adult education.
**Feminist attention to the body.** Feminist attention focuses on various issues and representations of the body. Davis (1997) examines issues related to gender and sexuality with particular focus is on the varied roles of the female body and how the body has been conceptualized and reconceptualized in scholarly literature. This book seeks to examine how the body has come to a resurgence to develop a “new” theory of the body or embodiment. What’s offered through this text is a look at the body as both an agent of metaphor and material manifestation and the various ways the body is theorized in light of sexuality, difference, domination and power, and subversiveness. Davis (1997) states “bodies are not generic but bear the markers of culturally-constructed difference” and takes this as the “starting points for understanding the conditions and experiences of embodiment in contemporary culture” (p. 14).

Negrin (2008) further discusses another conceptualization of the body through the ways the body appears, people construct identity, and various forms of body modification and art. While the primary focus of this book is fashion with particular attention to clothing, cosmetics and cosmetic procedures, body art and modification, it offers another conceptualization of the body as we experience it through modern culture. Theorized through a feminist lens, the difference configurations of the body and a “concept of the self as masquerade” are presented (p. 6). While the book does not directly relate to embodiment or somatics as explored through this study, the insights it provides into the various ways the body is conceptualized through culture and an individual as part of a larger cultural component informs the various roles assigned to the body.

Bermudez, Marcel, and Eilan (1995) discuss body image, self-consciousness, and awareness and focus on the tensions that exist between the various ways we use and
represent our bodies. Bermudez et al (1995) cite the different perspectives such as “psychology, philosophy of the mind, epistemology, and ontology” (p. 27) that impact the nature of self-consciousness and body awareness. Bermudez et al (1995) highlight the relationship and tensions the exist between self-consciousness and body awareness to shed further light on the body as it interacts with our perception of self, our movements, environments, and with others (Bermudez et al, 1995).

Feminist philosophers, Allison Jaggar and Susan Bordo (1989) discussed the body as a way of knowing and being that is influenced by culture, history, and is discussed through the context of positionality and disorder. Citing distinctions of dualistic assumptions regarding the body, there is discussion regarding a contemporary perspective in feminist studies that seek to “revision the body” (p. 4) and look for other approaches to gaining knowledge. What is suggested is an examination of the body that accounts for all cultural implications and impacts on the body. The book presents the body as a challenge to historical and intellectual movements that exclude other ways of gaining knowledge. Additionally, Bordo (1989) discussed the body as a way of knowing and being that is influenced by culture, history, and is discussed through the context of positionality and disorders.

**Cultural studies/sociology.** There is literature highlighting the body’s positionality of absence, invisibility, and marginalization, in cultural studies and sociology. Leder (1990) explores the body’s position of absence through phenomenological, philosophical, and historical lenses. While it was established previously that there seems to have been a significant split in culture and education regarding the placement of the body, potentially caused by placing the logical over the
affective, privileging the mind over the body leading to invisibility, lack of presence, and validation for the body in learning. Leder (1990) states

Via machines we are disinvested of work that once belonged to the muscles.

Technologies of rapid communication and transportation allow us to transcend what used to be the natural limits imposed by the body. Operations are mediated by the written word or the computer calculation, where once a living presence was required. (p. 3)

Our culture exists under the haze of technology and machines, which creates a chasm where the body used to be. This is an early lesson in our education system as highlighted by Joseph Tobin (as cited in Bressler, 2004, p. 111): “disappearance of the body in early childhood education, which highlights just how early in our education practice we begin to relegate the body.” While his article spoke with regards to issues of morality, the removal of the body in any circumstance has a psychological impact that extends outward from the classroom setting and embeds within the culture. With this absence of the body we have become unhinged, not only from each other, nature and the planet, but ourselves as well.

The role of the body and embodiment also appear in sociology literature. Crossley (2007) discusses how the body is absent in this academic field and uses an approach called body techniques developed by Marcel Mauss (the process of these techniques are not fully explained) as a way to bring the body present for an “empirical analysis of embodiment” (p. 80). Farnell and Varela (2008) show body movement as a way to unite body and language to create an “embodied dynamic” (p. 215). The crux of Farnell and Varela’s (2008) argument is that the body, through its senses, emotions, and
body movements, communicate and are part of the meaning-making process. Much like Crossley, Shilling (2007) discusses the current positionality of the body in sociology and proposes a new approach that accounts for anthropological, social and cultural standings of the body in sociology.

**Body Practices and Meditation**

For this study, body centered practices, which may include meditation, will be used as an access or entry point for engagement of the body by creative writers. The material presented in this section is based on the conceptual literature whereas the research studies related to this will be discussed later. There is much in the literature that relates body centered practices with experiences in meditation and mindfulness as they connect with writing and body awareness.

**Meditation.** In examining the literature on meditation, certain topics emerge. Meditation, specifically Zen meditation, is discussed as being a factor in promoting creativity (Stephens & Burke, 1974; Domino, 1977; Wegner, 1976). It seems that these writings in the 1970s on meditation were both productive and limited by their time period. Seeking ways to open up and explore the mind to foster creativity seemed a part of 1970s culture.

Before getting into these areas it is important to acknowledge the physiological implications of meditation on the body. Engagement of the body and opening up to embodied knowledge is typically thought of through the movements of a dancer’s body, the rapt-hands of a painter or sculptor, the athlete, and it is rarely thought of with creative writers. Even earlier than the 1970s, specifically the 1900s, Stanislavski, as part of training and working with actors utilized aspects of yoga. Margarshack (as cited in
Wegner, 1976) states that “at the time Stanislavski was interested in Hindu philosophy and especially in the yoga system of abstract meditation and mental concentration…” (p. 86). Purposed from Stanislavski’s meditations and practice was a technique or method actors could utilize to become fully engaged in character. In his personal writings and autobiography, Stanislavski referenced meditation that lead to his discovery of the “creative mood” through meditation practice (Wegner, 1976, p. 85).

While there has been more recent attention to extra-rational ways of knowing that include embodiment and spirituality, meditation is generally marginalized in the academy (Campbell, 1994). It is often thought of as non-Western or a practice derived from Eastern religions such as Buddhism (Moffett, 1982). Moffett (1982) further clarifies meditation as being of “all cultures and of all times” and not a practice that is outsourced from another culture (p.235). Another facet to this exploration of literature on meditation reveals other pathways for exploration. Moffett (1982) clearly explains and calls for further incorporation of meditation as a way to engage writers, and see meditation and writing as interconnected where one can lead to the other. Writing and meditation are “naturally allied activities” (Moffett, 1982, p. 231). Moffett then goes on to discuss the various types of meditation and their potential importance in the writing classroom.

Visualization is a meditation-type practice that is gaining some attention and become somewhat vogue at writing conferences. Moffett (1980) actually discussed this some 30 years ago, noting that the process of visualization is rather simple: “the meditator closes his eyes and transfers the image inward… alternately gazing outward and visualizing inward teaches one to develop inner attention and imagination without
forcing verbalization…” (p. 236). Most importantly this technique according to Moffett (1980):

lets him or her feel the strength of the self, the deeper self…Writing presupposes just such inner strength. A writer of whatever age has to feel full of herself and have a degree of confidence, belief that she has something to say, faith in her will, and control of her attention. Gazing and visualizing, finally, develop vision-seeing and perceiving both outer and inner ways prerequisite for writing. (p. 236)

Moffett (1980, p. 231) sees meditation as a way to gain access to “inner speech,” what others may refer to as stream of consciousness and what is referenced in this study as embodied knowledge or knowledge of the body that we all possess. Through meditation practice or other body awareness activities, access points for entering into this knowledge of the body may be obtained.

Moffett (1980) also offers direct example and correlation between meditation and the works of other writers. He specifically discusses the “metaphysical poets of the 17th century” who derived their practice from St. Ignatius of Loyola, citing how the Holy Trinity is reflected in the traits of the poetry of Donne, Herbert, and Vaughn (Moffett, 1980, p. 238). In this “discursive meditation” or vivid visualization of a scene or incident, in this case from the life of Christ, visualization is used to fill in the scene with sensory details pertinent to development of story (p. 237).

Moffett (1980) also discusses other forms of meditation. “Nondiscursive meditation,” which calls for the repetition of a mantra, phrase, or sound is another way to engage “inner speech”: “During mantra repetition inner speech continues, in a sense, but changes profoundly from serial thoughts, a train of thoughts, to a point of thoughts” (p.
Moffett’s work and ideas about meditation are viewed as the “closest to bring legitimacy to meditation as a technique to help students” (Campbell, 1994, p. 248). There are also more recent writers such as Perl (2004) who connect writing, and focusing as a form of meditation, but this will be discussed in a later section.

**Mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a term used in many contexts with meanings that can be just as varied. But because it is mentioned, at times interchangeably with or connected to meditation, some attention must be given to understand its presence with this study and to education. In has been established that education that taps into the embodied knowledge of the body and seeks to employ a holistic approach tends to fall into the realm of non-traditional practices in education. Because this study seeks information on the embodiment experiences of creative writers, meditation will be utilized as a vehicle to hopefully tap into this knowledge. While the prior section on meditation highlights the impact meditation practice alone or in conjunction with some type of expressive writing has on the body, this section works to establish defining criteria for the term mindfulness.

Attempting at clear, concrete definition of mindfulness is to reveal a tension that bubbles beneath the surface of a great expanse of lake. Because of the varied contexts, the term becomes more pliable. Literature from a psychological perspective gives mindfulness the tenet of “trained attention,” meaning it is a skill to be cultivated through practice and training (Shapiro et al, 2008). Cognitive psychologist Robert Sternberg
(2000) suggests that mindfulness may also be a cognitive ability or style, even a personality trait, with more specific characteristics of openness, sensitivity, awareness, alertness and an “orientation to the present” being key parts to being mindful (Sternberg, 2000, p. 12). He constructs mindfulness in a very cognitive manner, using Gardner’s theories for support. In this manner, the body is unaccounted for and remains absent. Brody and Park (2004) define mindfulness as a “self-directed attention” that may come about through a heightened state of awareness (p. 147). Heightened awareness is achieved from “transformation of unconsciousness ad implicit memories and experiences into conscious and explicit ones” (Brody & Park, 2004, p. 147). Thought of in this way, mindfulness is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s description of sedimentation - the way experiences, information, and knowledge settle within each of us and become a natural part of our being.

Adding another dimension to mindfulness there is emphasis on the present moment, and making acknowledgment that there may be sacred moments within daily living; further to this point, it is thought of as a form of attention (Goldstein, 2007). Kroll (2008, p. 72-73) states “mindfulness has everything to do with waking up and living in harmony with oneself and with the world…being in touch” making mindfulness seemingly go hand-in-hand with the concept of embodiment. Related to experience, mindfulness is “being one with our experience, not dissociating…” but rather mindfulness “describes being right where we are” (Chodron, 1997, p. 38).

To connect mindfulness to writing, Kroll (2008) focuses specifically on the personal essay, but the practice of mindfulness or meditation could apply to any creative writing situation. In his teaching experience having students write these personal essays
encouraged opportunity for the students “to be present and pay attention to their own lives” (p. 73) and goes on to say that even if the writing is not personal and specifically about the student, there is still “an actual flesh-and-blood human being still compos[ing] the sentences” thus highlighting and connecting writing and awareness to the body (Sanders, 2000, as cited by Kroll, 2008, p. 74).

**Research on the Body in Adult Learning and Related Areas**

This section will provide an overview of research studies on embodiment and related terms the body and somatic learning and knowing. These studies were selected based on their relevance as well as for the insights they provide for this study on embodiment. Additionally, selected studies are meant to inform the assertion that knowledge of the body and learning through the body are powerful ways to learn and construct meaning.

The following discussion will take place in light of some of the themes relating to the research literature, namely: studies relating to the contexts of place and space of the body; studies on the effects of meditation and the body; studies of the focusing methodology and the “felt sense”, and finally, studies of various body practices.

**Contexts of place and space.** There are a few studies that deal with the relevance of the body in the context of place or space. Somerville (2004), for example brings the body into focus by using narrative ethnography and phenomenology. Her exploration into writing the body, more specifically, of her body within her academic work, she made space for reflection of her body in the context of place, stating her strategy is “to centre the body, my body, at the scene of writing,” a scene which caused her physical and emotional discomfort in the face of academic projects (Somerville, 2004,
p. 52). The context of place extended to the workplace and Somerville (2004) explored the work of miners. She explored how miners relied on embodied knowledge or “pit sense” to give them a sense of their surroundings with regard to their safety in a very dangerous setting (p. 60). This “pit sense” gives the miners a sense of their surroundings as felt through their bodies. In this instance, pit sense is deeply rooted within the miners’ way of being-in-their-world, and it is inherently embodied as knowledge within them.

She also discussed her own sense of body in the writing process and in the academic environment as a sense of place and talks about her experiences as being “embodied experiences of habitation,” the idea and experience of being in a place, reminiscent of being-in-the-world.

Cheville (2005), in her study of basketball players in sync on the court seems to touch on these ideas as well. She does so even more through the lens of situated cognition, which provides a “frame conducive to expanding the parameters of ‘situativity’ so that activity might include the influence of the body on the mind” (p. 92). Her study not only drew from her personal experiences as an athlete, but on the narrative experiences of student athletes (12 female participants) whose bodies are placed both within constructs of culture and cognition. What the study revealed was that the placement of their bodies and working together within the same space (i.e. the basketball court) contributed to learning that was embodied and a sense of their surroundings.

Cheville highlights an example of this with Jenny, one of the players, who explained a “string metaphor” used by one of the coaches to illustrate how the players sync up in their movement and thoughts on the court: “Only by ‘being there’ together in body did players enter into reflexive consciousness. For Jenny and her teammates, the orchestration of
bodily activity was the means to a collective mindset” (p. 98). This embodied learning was relational and required a context with other athletes. Yet it demonstrates the varied ways in which one can learn through the body, through placement within a specific context or within the context of an experience.

Beckett and Morris (2001) conducted case studies in the workplace to center the body as a source of adult learning. They also discuss the body in context of place and experience, but in this instance the place is the body, specifically the bodies of workers at an aged-care facility and of adult ESL literacy learners. They point out: “instead of starting with the commonsensical view that humans’ embodied actions are the raw material for powerful learning, we have trawled that very materiality for its epistemological significance”… (p. 46). The conclusions that were drawn through their study indicated that workers come to the job with embodied experiences that could be central to learning and identity and where much could be gained and learned by making these central.

**Studies of the focusing methodology and the “felt sense”**. There are numerous studies that have been conducted using Gendlin’s focusing methodology. Given that Gendlin is both an American philosopher and a psychotherapist, many of these studies as summarized by Hendricks (2001) are based on psychotherapeutic settings. Hendricks’ (2001) review examined a total of 89 studies with the intent on discovering impacts Focusing had on therapeutic situations (Research Studies section, para 1). Additional attention was given to Experiencing outcomes, which is defined as what can be “sense[d] in the body” (Experiencing … section, para. 1). What was indicated in these studies was an overwhelming sense of positive outcomes in therapy that incorporated the use of
focusing as well as increased levels of experiencing. It is important to note that a variety of types of therapies were used and with people of different therapeutic needs. Specifically, important findings indicate that those patients who are able to learn focusing, measure themselves as being more successful in therapy (Discussion of the Findings section, para 1). Therapist interaction with focusing also determined success for patients. Therapists who understand how to engage the patient in focusing and facilitate the process have better outcomes for their patients (Discussion of the Findings section, para 1). While this review was vast and covered research over a number of decades, the findings are indicative of how important a role attention to the body can have in therapeutic or healing processes. By engaging the body through focusing in this way, demonstrates how the body awareness can be further implicated as a way of knowing.

An additional study by Klagsbrun, Lennox, and Summers (2010) highlighted how “Clearing a Space” (CAS) which is step one in the Focusing Method, can be used to reduce stress or understand other factors that are impacting the body, in a study with breast cancer patients. This part of the method calls for these issues to be imagined or envisioned as distant or removed from the body, in essence, clearing a space to feeling better overall (Klagsbrun, et al, 2010, p. 40). Participants in the Klagsburn et al (2010) study were given instruction by a Focusing coach over the course of six weeks. The findings of the study showed that the women who participated in the CAS process saw benefits from using it, citing changes in “greater sense of calmness, enhanced emotional regulation, improved coping, increased mental clarity, greater overall well-being, and a sense of empowerment” (Klagsburn, et al, 2010, p. 50-51). Further, participants found additional benefit from the personal interactions they received as part of the CAS process,
citing the weekly discussions and step-by-step process that facilitated attention to the body (Klagsburn, et al, 2010). Overall what these studies reveal is an increased attention to the body proves to be beneficial for therapy, healing, and for developing a sense of peace and overall well-being, as indicated in Klagsburn et al (2010).

Studies on meditation. There is an emergent body of recent literature regarding research on the body, meditation, and the role of neuroscience. While this literature is related, the primary focus of this study is not about neuroscience, so this literature will not be included as part of this literature review. The following section will focus on studies on meditation and other body work practices, such as yoga, massage, deep breathing and other practices.

Additionally, physiological responses are not necessarily the focus of this study, but it would be unfair to ignore their impact and to do so would further perpetuate an absencing of the body, if not in whole, but in parts. Given that technology such as advanced X-ray, CT or MRI scans were not available to look at physiology of the brain as a way to explore meditation until more recently and as a contrast to the studies of the 1970s, Grant et al (2010) conducted a study to examine pain sensitivity and thickness of certain areas of the brain in Zen meditators. Findings indicated that those who practiced meditation are less likely to have high sensitivity to pain, in fact it is indicated that those who meditate have a higher pain threshold (p. 48). It was also found that there is less reactivity in emotional or affective responses and it was evidenced that meditation posture (cross-legged sitting) may result in thickening of cortical areas of the brain (brain stem) and other areas of sensitivity of the brain (p. 52). This study “provides evidence in
support of the notion that meditation strengthens brain processes involved in emotion as well as pain regulation” (p. 52).

Domino (1977) also studied the link between meditation and creativity, evaluating a claim that Transcendental Meditation (TM) can lead to increasing creativity. The findings seem to run contrary to the popularized notions and information concluded from other studies and writings. In this case, there was not an increase in levels of creativity. It is important to note that the study was over a 6-month period and the shorter time may be a limitation that may cause the results to be stilted. Searches for additional studies have yielded very limited results.

In addition to Domino (1977) study on TM, Yuille and Sereda (1980) used two types of meditation seeking implications on various cognitive measures. TM and savasana (corpse pose; yogic tradition), and a third made-up meditation the researcher called Sat Chit Ananda, along with a control group sought if meditative practices had an impact on intelligence, memory, and attention. The findings revealed there were no marked improvements as a result of meditation; that even poor practitioners of meditation were as likely as good, consistent practitioners to show improvements (Yuille & Sereda, 1980).

As discussed before, the assumption or “implicit promise” of many forms of meditation is that some positive feelings may result from meditation (Yuille & Sereda, 1980). This study found that positive effects are not the norm or usual consequence of meditation (Yuille & Sereda, 1980). Again there are limitations to this study that may have impacted the results. Most marked are the limitations of time and requirements for participation. The study lasted over a 6-month period, a duration that may not be long
enough to see major results. Additionally, the participants were new to meditation practices and many dropped out of the study indicating that meditation requires discipline and potentially years of practice to see its effects either emotionally or physiologically as indicated in Grant et al (2010). The Grant et al (2010) study on pain tolerance and cortical thickness used participants who were experienced meditators.

With this it is important to note that in both Domino (1977) and Yuille and Sereda (1980) participants who engaged in TM needed specialized training only available through a TM center or instructor, which is not only time consuming but expensive. Participants in Domino’s study were trained at their own expense; those in the TM group in Yuille and Sereda’s study had their training funded through a grant. Considering the time, duration, and cost of TM, participants in this study will not be offered TM as a specific option for meditation practice. This is not to say that those with TM experience will not be considered for participation; rather it is a revelation achieved via this literature that resources for TM will not be an option. Further information and criteria for selection of participants is outlined in Chapter Three.

Research on meditation or meditation-related practices often imply a positive outcome or influence facilitating awareness, personal growth, salubriousness, openness to exploring new ideas, or impact on intelligence (Grant et al, 2010; Campbell, 1994; Moffett, 1982; Yuille & Sereda, 1980). The outcomes or implications for exploring and practicing meditation are varied and numerous. Grant et al (2010) point out that a “…Buddhist concept, more generally referred to as mindfulness, has been shown to influence a great number of indices including those measuring depression, anxiety, immune function, and pain” and has been proven to have a “positive impact on chronic
pain patients” (p. 43). This draws together the actions of this research, which is to study and explore the links between the body and writing that creative writers do. Concepts such as healing and writing also make these connections to the body.

**Studies on body practices.** Other studies of related body work practices, such as Yoga or Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), were found that also draw attention to the body. In a review of studies and literature on yoga, Mehta and Sharma (2010) explored yoga as a therapeutic technique to help alleviate symptoms and progression of clinical depression. Mehta and Sharma (2010), in their meta-analysis of studies, cite the significance of yoga as a way to draw the connection between the mind and body through meditation, postures, and breathing techniques, and yoga’s possibility to promote and restore mind-body health (p. 157). They found that yoga as a complimentary or alternative method of treatment was found to be of benefit. Many different types of yoga were used in the variety of studies reviewed. The group that showed the greatest noted improvements in depressive symptoms were those experiencing depression due to cancer diagnosis, victims of trauma, and elderly people experiencing age related depression.

Adams, Lui, and McLaughlin (2009) explored literature and studies on the use of CAM therapies with elderly patients as a coping mechanism for illnesses. Specifically cited as most common among CAM and conditions which caused older people to use them ranged from body work such as massage and chiropractic; herbal and dietary supplements, special exercises or movement, special diets, or spiritual practices (Adams, et al, 2009). Conditions cited were arthritis, chronic pain, colds and flu, diabetes, hypertension, depression and anxiety, and sleep disturbances were most commonly cited
as those that prompted patients to see CAM therapies (Adams, et al, 2009, p. 231).

Meditation, mindfulness, yoga, other body work and CAM therapies are all ways to engage the body and draw awareness to the body for a variety of reasons. The next section will discuss research regarding the body as it applies to adult education and related areas.

Price (2005) examined the use of Body-Oriented Therapy as an approach to treat 24 women who were victims of childhood sexual abuse. Body-oriented therapy is defined as a type of therapy combining psychotherapy with a touch component of massage, along with other body awareness exercises such as deep breathing, mental intention an inner awareness, and “delving” exercises (Price, 2005). “Delving” is “similar to mindfulness meditation” and attention to felt sense, from Gendlin’s the Focusing Methodology (Price, 2005, p. 49-50). Participants in the study experienced increased level of “body awareness that facilitated change in perception from disembodied to embodied self” (Price, 2005, p. 55).

There have been some studies using body techniques. Beaudoin (1999), for example explored the use of body-centered approaches for alleviating discomforts, such as physical ailments or emotional distress, as well as to encourage overall wellness. The study asked six adult participants to use body-centered approaches such as some type of exercise or movement practice like Eutonia Method, the Alexander or Feldenkrais techniques. The techniques were completed by participants in a self-directed manner, and they were able to choose what technique they would use. Results indicated “six somatic learning elements” as being beneficial to participants: movement; posture modification; being attentive to situations; awareness of body sensations; going along
with situations, happenings, their feelings; and being present in the moment (Beaudoin 1999, Results section, para 3).

Williams-Piehota, Sirois, Bann, Isenberg, and Walsh (2011) conducted a survey that examined the use of Complementary Alternative Medicine (CAM) by 216 individuals. The purpose of the study was to determine how CAM may or may not factor into behavior change when it comes to managing overall health or specific health conditions (Williams-Piehota, et al, 2011). Body awareness techniques via CAM in their study consisted of yoga, Feldenkrais Method, and Alexander Technique, massage or other touch therapies like cranio-sacral therapy.). They found that the use of the CAM techniques facilitated health behavioral change such as better diet, more exercise, and reduction of non-salubrious activities like drinking alcohol or smoking. Finally, they note how CAM therapies help participants become more aware of their bodies and thus more cognizant to make appropriate behavioral changes.

Pruthi, Degnim, Bauer, DePompolo, and Nayar (2009) found that by offering massage therapy to 63 patients in treatment for breast disease, massage therapy was found to be beneficial in all of the areas of relaxation, stress relief, reduction of tension, thought clarity, and reducing fatigue and additionally, that patients expressed interest in other related CAM therapies (Reiki, hypnosis, a guided imagery) as part of treatment for breast disease. With regard to the overall health and wellness of the patients, massage therapy indicates an important outcome for healing and treatment.

Ekerholt and Bergland (2008) examined patient’s breathing during a Norwegian psychomotor physical therapy session (NPMP). NPMP uses massage, exercise, and movement to tap into a patient’s “interaction among emotions, breathing, muscular
conditions, posture, movements, and autonomic functioning” (Ekerholt & Bergland, 2008, p. 833). The idea is that a patient’s reaction clarifies body awareness and self-image and that it is all expressed through the way we breathe (Ekerholt & Bergland, 2008). By connecting to the breath through this technique, there was noted increase in body awareness, a feeling of being united “body and soul,” greater understanding and attention to bodily reactions and increased feelings of empowerment and confidence (Ekerholt & Bergland, 2008). Body awareness was cultivated through a number of approaches with great results.

In sum, the purpose of this section was to create context for how the body may be engaged to draw awareness to its role in the writing process. Embodied practices, such as the varied body work strategies, can be employed and explored by participants in this study to gain access and entry into exploration of their body awareness. The final section will explore the various manifestations of writing as it pertains to this study.

**Writing (and Embodiment)**

This last section on writing and its connection to embodiment will be divided into four subsections. It will begin by discussing creative writing and embodiment and then will explore creative writing as a process and the varied contexts in which someone might write, such as in a classroom setting, individually, or in a communal setting (community based writing groups). In the third subsection, connections will be made between writing and embodied practices, which will pave the way for the last subsection, which is a consideration of the research studies on writing and healing.

**Creative Writing and Embodiment**
Writing is not neutral, and can never be separated from the author who created it; in that sense to some extent it reflects the embodied reality of the writer including the body markers of that person including gender and race as body markers that have shaped their embodied experiences. Banks (2003), in a discussion of personal narrative in the composition classroom, discusses a “knowledge of ‘self,’ whether that ‘self’ is unified or fragmented” (p. 22) and takes consideration of the self as part of these personal narratives. Banks (2003) asserts, “personal’ writing is embodied writing,” additionally going on to state the importance of finding and exploring ways to get back to including the “bodies, those experiences” as part of writing (p. 22). Banks (2003) encourages a reconsidering of including such embodied writing, such as personal narratives, as part of learning.

As stated in Chapter One, many authors write from what they know, their experiences, knowledge, and worldview. Barry, Bevins, Crawford, Demers, Hara, Hughes, and Sherby (2004) highlight how the body plays into the practice of writing in their study of women writers. They found that the creation of identity of a writer relies heavily on the physical body. The women in their study worked together to establish identities as writers based on their gender, given that historically women writers have not been taken as seriously as their male counterparts. While their point is not so much to get into the history of the gendered relations of composition studies, but rather to suggest that as a culture Western writers have been taught consciously or unconsciously to ignore or dismiss the body. They suggest that to be historically forced to deny one’s body creates an “alienation from one’s self as well as from the wider intellectual community created feelings of loneliness and isolation” (Barry et al, 2004, p. 209). Fleckenstein (1999)
argued specifically that the body should be incorporated more into the practice of writing and acknowledges the importance of an “embodied discourse” (n.p.).

Visceral and emotional responses of writers during the act of writing or by reader-responders are forms of learning. Spigelman (2004) examined the language used in writing groups and asserts that it is an act of argument or persuasion, connected to embodied realities in the attention that is paid to visceral, felt responses. A person’s comments or reactions to writing indicate their “emotional and cognitive reactions,” which can manifest through physical reactions demonstrate another way of embodiment in writing (Spigelman, 2004, p. 138). Spigelman (2004) cites an example of a respondent’s reaction to a piece of writing, “I feel like I am watching from the outside. I need to feel closer… to know why I am sweating…” (Spigelman, 2004, p. 138)

Day and Eodice (2004) looked at writing groups in academia by examining co-authorship of university faculty. They make the argument that writing and group collaboration is born of “habitual gathering places” where “ethics of respect, trust, and care are enacted” (p. 125). They cannot separate “an impulse to care” from writing and because “these things exist as part of who we are, these habits of voices, ontologies, and experiences” are a way of embodiment through emotion and recognition of the self in writing (Day & Eodice, 2004, p. 126).

Westbrook (2004) examined individuals working within a community based writing group and the issues of power, support, and participants’ inability to separate personal experience from their writing. She specifically highlights writers who are unable to separate their writing from their bodies and experiences based on race and gender, citing one participant in her study, an African American female, whose
experiences of racial intimidation and discrimination were embodied within her writing, “grounding her writing choices in personal experience and cultural difference” and making her textual decisions “difficult for a white woman to contend with” (Westbrook, 2004, p. 237). When suggestions for revision were given, members of the group were met with resistance from the author, whose “worldview ultimately ‘won’” out over the ideas and consensus of the group (p. 237).

All of this suggests that the notion of embodiment perhaps is a central but implicit part of the creative process. Making the connections between the work of creative writers and the body is the overall aim of this study. To enhance understanding of the context of the body and embodiment and writing in different contexts, it is necessary to consider the writing process itself and how it might connect to pedagogy and learning, particularly since it will be part of this action research study to also facilitate a process. This will be discussed next.

**Creative Writing Process and Pedagogy**

There are many purposes and reasons why people write. Smith (1994) cites three primary reasons for writing: communication, recording events, and for art’s sake (p. 8). Motivation for reason and intention manifest into writing process, which all writers possess. This section seeks to explore the writing process as it appears through different perspectives of certain theorists, but it is also explored for its role in writing pedagogy.

**Process.** There are differences between written language and spoken language such as in grammatical variances or in the employment of different conventions and each form utilizes a certain pacing; for instance, the process of writing takes longer, requiring a different level of attention and thought (Smith, 1994). There are numerous approaches
to the writing process that date in composition studies back to the early 1970s. Seminal pieces such as those written by Janet Emig (1971), Sondra Perl (1979), Donald Murray (1972), and Linda Flower and John Hayes (1981) outline writing as a process in the context of the writing classroom. In fact teaching the writing process has become so entrenched in language arts pedagogy it seems as though it is just present, with no identifiable origin or starting point. But it was these early pieces that laid the groundwork for much of what is done with regard to teaching writing practice.

As early as the primary grades in the public school setting, the writing process is presented as a segregated, episodic process, many times representing about six stages from prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, conferencing, and publication. By nature the writing process does not engage the body. Flower and Hayes (1981) theorized the writing or composing process (as it is at times referred) as a cognitive, goal directed, and hierarchical process that basically accounted for the steps between the generation of ideas to the production of sentences and organization of the piece. Their model utilized a three-stage process of planning, generating and revision. Rose (2009) also discusses the writing process as a cognitive exercise and examines the implications and dimensions of writer’s block. He cites the Hayes-Roth (1979) model for composing, which takes an opposing stance to the linear models for the writing process. Hayes-Roth (is viewed as opportunistic, meaning that all “goals, plans, discourse frames, and information” do not necessarily present hierarchically and can be emergent as writers work (as cited by Rose, 2009, p. 9).

Along the lines of less linearity, Smith (1994) states that writing is a “flow of words” of which “the writers has little or no control” making it difficult to distinguish the
moments or episodes of the writing process (p. 104). For some, the writing process needs to manifest this way, as it becomes more of a discursive movement, circling, back and forth, or in and out of the various stages. Runco (2009) focuses on writing as process, rather than product, further sharing the insight that process writing can lead to self-discovery and disclosure. In this way, process is more evolving, and makes room for the writer to concentrate on the process itself.

Lubart (2009) points to varied components that underpin the writing process, which include cognitive aspects and the more emergent, opportunistic methods. He combined a scientific or cognitive approach based on Flower and Hayes (1981) model, with a creative process based on Wallas’s (1926) four stage model of creativity applied to the writing process, and describes it as “the movement between the fiction world and the writing world” (Lubart, 2009, p. 159). The fiction world is considered to be more passive, the place where the story unfolds as the writer’s voice takes over and describes this part of the process as being an “automatic writing” (p. 159). Additionally the writer’s world is described as being more active, focused on goals and outcomes, and critical, guiding the continued progress of the story or the development of characters (Lubart, 2009).

Over the years there has emerged a body of literature on writing and how to bring the body into the writing process for the purpose of developing authentic voice (Herring, 2010; Lee, 1994), to make sense of our lives (Baldwin, 2005); or for the purposes of healing (Ganim, 1999) as in Pennebaker’s various studies (discussed later). Herring (2007) references a “deep writing process” which she centers in awareness of the body. Expanding beyond the writing process as a cognitive or thinking process, she states stories come from “within our bodies” and can only be told through an “authentic voice
that is ours” (p. 7). The writing process as Herring (2007) describes it is broken into two
main stages: brainstorming and revisioning. Brainstorming includes invention and
generation phases and strategies, but she additionally includes draft one, then transitions
the process into revisioning, which includes multiple drafts, editing and making changes
(Herring, 2007).

Process is cited as more important to writing because the process can lead to
discovery. To this point, Waitman and Plucker (2009) draw attention to the writing
process as something that is “inextricably intertwined” with a writer’s practice (p. 292).
In this view, the writing process is not something that can necessarily be shut off or used
selectively; it is ongoing and evolving with the writer as they continue to develop his or
her writing (Waitman & Plucker, 2009). This potential for development can be further
cultivated not just by the individual writer, but by what takes place in the classroom in
relation to writing pedagogy.

**Pedagogy.** Discussion of pedagogy is important to provide additional context and
importance for writing. Writing in the classroom is of particular interest to me as a
writing teacher. McVey (2008) states that all writing, from all contexts, academic or not,
involves the use of “raw materials of language, experience, knowledge, textual sources
and the author’s own ideas and imaginings to bring something into existence (p. 289).
Accepting this assertion about writing in general places an importance and emphasis on
the way writing is dealt with in the classroom. Within the classroom it has been
highlighted that writing is divided into two contexts: composition versus creative writing
(Bishop, 1994). Bishop (1994) notes a hierarchical mindset that pushes each course into
a set category when the lines between composition and creative writing pedagogy should
be blurred, with one borrowing from the other. She calls for more inclusion of critical theory and research within the writing classroom.

Smith (1994) cites a recurrent and general theme in writing pedagogy: that writing is learned through practice and continuing to write. But there’s more to just writing when it comes to the classroom setting. While Smith (1994) highlights a key point, that there is not one set, solid methodology for teaching writing, writing will develop as an individual works to develop their writing skills. From the standpoint of the instructor, it is obvious to say that providing an environment conducive to writing is important; Smith (1994) suggests beyond that to demonstration of writing skills by the instructor is also crucial, as well as to offer assistance with themes and topics. Additionally, Smith (1994) focuses on a need by an instructor to encourage multiple skill sets, including different types of critical thinking.

Rose (2009), who comes from the perspective that writing is a cognitive process, cautions against writing instructors looking for “narrow prescriptions” to writing. He suggests that using different forms of writing, working in technique and voice, changing tense or style of prose, may be ways to facilitate learning the skills needed to be a proficient writer. The push is to go beyond the basic writing exercises, and examine issues as they come up in different writing contexts or event patterns of writing. He highlights the importance of individualized writing instruction is highlighted; encouraging individual conferences with instructors to address and rectify issues is a way to monitor progress.

Baer and McKool (2009) emphasize the importance of encouraging writing students to find motivation to write and searching for ways to facilitate creativity and
improve writer’s skills, but offer some radical and unique ideas. They suggest that writing should be done for the sake of writing, which harkens to earlier ideas presented by Smith (1994) that to write and write often is to improve. In this case, Baer and McKool (2009) suggest writing assignments be given two ways: assignments that will receive feedback and credit and assignments that will just be given credit for completion. The idea is that students will continue to practice and work on developing their creative skills. They suggest the use of Writers’ Workshops, where teachers will demonstrate a skill through mini-lessons and practice with students until they internalize the skill being taught.

As an additional note, the issue of self-efficacy through writing practice is an additional thread that runs through some of the literature on pedagogy of writing. Encouraging confidence and a writer’s self perception is important. Waitman and Plucker (2009) highlight the need for student writers to view themselves as writers, to cultivate a personality of writing or develop an individual writing identity. According to them, in doing so the continuous development and shaping of writing experiences occurs, feeding the writer’s perception and identification as a writer. This is thought to be a continuation of the writing process. Writing in this sense goes beyond what is created on the page; it seeks to engage the experiences of the individual and reframe them in a way conducive to writing practice. This provides a broader scope and more well-rounded approach to beginning to see a writer as part of the writing process, which is a step towards engaging the body as part of the writing process.

The work of Sondra Perl (2004) is pivotal in beginning to turn the direction to the way the person is viewed as part of the process of writing. Through introspection and
examination, Perl (2004) developed a way to engage the “felt sense” of writing, and in essence, she uses it as a writing pedagogy. As was indicated in earlier section, “felt sense” is part of Gendlin’s Focusing Methodology and is used by Perl to engage the knowledge of the body as a way to encourage and develop a person’s writing. According to Perl (2004) working with the felt sense of writing is important for teachers of writing especially because it is another tool that can be used to encourage creativity, showing a way for students to be more connected to their writing and open to exploring new ideas. Perl’s (2004) methodology, called Guidelines for Composing, is what she refers to as a “guided process, a composing activity” (p. xv). Perl’s (2004) “Guidelines for Composing” merges the cognitive aspects of writing, such as those outlined by Rose (2009) and Lubart (2009), and connects them to the body through a basis in experience that additionally draws on an intuitive sense about how the body is engaged in knowing (p. xvi). Her work provides an important step in understanding one of the dimensions in which the body can be brought into the writing process. By exploring felt sense in this manner, forced attention is given to the body and further demonstrates the connections between the mind and the body.

The context of the above discussion demonstrates the varied ways writing and the writing process is used in and out of the classroom. By recognizing the varied approaches and deep historical roots to the writing process, it can be better understood not only how writers work and write, but also provide a better understanding of writing as a pedagogy that is an important and effective tool for learning. The next section provides additional context for writing by focusing on community based writing groups, highlighting where the participants for this study will be drawn.
Community writing groups. Storytelling and creative writing are both an individual and communal act. For some, working within the context of a group can provide the objective eye many creative writers seek. To this point, Highberg, Moss, and Nicolas (2004) comment:

Writing groups enable writers to make decisions about their personal texts with the supportive influence of readers/writers who are like minded in their views of what it means to belong to and participate in a community of writers but who represent a diversity of perspectives, experience, and opinions…. (p. 3)

In higher education creative writing groups are fostered within composition courses, other writing courses or through a facilitator at a university’s learning / academic support center. To draw distinction, there are also growing numbers of writer’s guilds, small groups, and artists’ communities flourishing all across the country in more informal settings (Highberg, Moss, & Nicolas, 2004, p. 7). One of the threads running through the literature both in informal and formal, academic contexts, in addition to the discussion of embodiment and body in writing process as highlighted above, is the need for collaboration and support for writing.

In addition to discussion of embodiment, Day and Eodice (2004) also cite collaboration on a smaller group scale focusing on co-authoring and publishing requirements of faculty in higher education. They cite a great potential for “coauthoring” as having “a mentoring quality that cuts across hierarchies” and going further discussing “the cognitive gains the coauthors identified come from sharing knowledge and experiences, as well as from learning and practicing strategies for improving the writing
itself” (p. 120). Writing groups in higher education settings are commonplace in writing classrooms.

Anderson and Murphy (2004) in their study of writing workshops in the college classroom note the importance of collaboration for inexperienced writers. They found that through collaboration, writing improved and there was an increased desire for collegiality during the writing process. Reinforcing the effectiveness of collaboration, Spigelman (2004) makes this point as well in her experiences with writing groups and notes that “dynamic co-inventing, co-composing activities encouraged writers to reconceptualize their work and to revise accordingly (p. 136). Bryan (1996) also speaks to this point though her work with collaborative groups, “cooperative writing groups are very effective because students establish a supportive, comfortable learning environment; are more actively engaged in the content of the course; and experience greater gains in mastering course content” (Bryan, 1996, p. 192).

Outside of higher education, community-based writing groups speak in even louder volumes about the collaborative aspects of writing. In community-based groups the desire and drive to improve writing is voluntary and the curricular requirements are removed. Westbrook (2004) completed an ethnographic study of a community-based writing group in South Carolina and cited one member who stated the purpose of their group: “…to keep an environment where people can get feedback about their work, that we can all get exposed to discussion about different things that relate to what works, what doesn’t work…To get an eclectic experience” (p. 234). This further highlights the need for collaboration and support in the group setting. Vinz and Kirby (1988) also discuss how important the shared experiences of reader and writer are to the writing process.
stating, “text represents only a small part of the total experience that the reader creates through collaboration with the writer in a shared experience” (p. 91). They further note the community process of writing as one that allows for openness, of expression and richness of experience, which they cite as being integral and central to the writing group process.

**Writing and Embodied Practices**

Connecting writing to embodied practices begins to touch upon the action of this study, which is for creative writers to become aware of their bodies as part of their writing process. It will be through embodied practices, body work such as massage, possibly meditation, yoga, or through creation of art, that participants in this study will draw on awareness of their body in the writing process. As a starting point, the concept of “flow experiences” as presented by Csikzenmihalyi (1997, p. 29) will be explored, then additional pieces highlighting other ways the body can be engaged.

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997) a flow experience is what happens when a person is fully emersed within an experience. Flow becomes a “metaphor” to describe the “sense of effortless action” people feel when they are engaged in some activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29). As examples, Csikszentmihalyi discusses athletes referencing flow as “being in the zone,” calling the flow experience of religious mystics “ecstacy” and that of artists and musicians as “aesthetic rapture” (p. 29). It can additionally be noted that flow “tends to occur when a person faces a clear set of goals” and “flow activities” can “induce flow” therefore making it more likely for this type of experience to take place (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29-30).
As indicated by these examples, flow can be applied to broad contexts, crossing numerous disciplines, and has even become part of the lexicon of popular culture, though many in popular culture use the term “flow” in a much looser way than the way Csikszentmihalyi (1997) uses the term. For the purposes of this study, flow was explored as a way the body can be engaged as part of the writing process and whether attending to a body awareness activity would induce flow experiences when writing.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) himself often focused on the body as key to flow experiences. The concept of flow is based on the following: first, that important truths from the past as uncovered by “prophets, poets, and philosophers” need to be rediscovered; second, science is a present tense link to the worldview of humankind; third, to understand and truly live, messages of the past must be integrated with modern science (p. 3-4). With these assumptions as a basis, Csikszentmihalyi (1997) incorporates stream of consciousness and human experience to get at a larger sense of the human condition.

Living, means experiencing “through doing, feeling, thinking” (p. 8). Flow works much like an airplane set to autopilot; it is a full body engagement, utilizing the whole person in the process of writing or completing another task.

Flow is all-consuming, and is an embodied, not out of body experience that can manifest while one is engaged in an activity. However to clarify, Csikszentmihalyi does not specifically relate flow to creative writers, as indicated through the examples above. Though related to creative writing, flow is something that can take place in the process of telling a story, which can be guided by sedimented experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). This additionally ties to Merleau-Ponty’s idea of reversibility.
In addition to flow, Campbell (1994) sees meditation and writing as linked, but acknowledges that the two remain on the outside of academic practice when linked together. She advocates for meditation in the writing classroom because students are not only thinkers but bring with them into the classroom a physical body, emotional presence, and spiritual component to their being. Meditation takes into account a whole human being; she suggests that the writing process in an attempt to open up and begin to “reveal the wounds” and that one can use meditation to heal them (Campbell, 1994, p. 247). Campbell draws on the insights of Swami Muktananda, who states that we cannot be separated from ourselves as “the sun cannot be separated from its light” (p. 249). Further, the Self (capital S intended) is being already attained within us; this “Self” seems to indicate a singular essence at the core of each individual, similar to that valorized by many advocates of expressive writing” (p. 249).

In a similar vein, Goldberg (2005) cites writing as a practice, much like the practice of Zen meditation, and states “meditation and writing practice are coincident” (p. xiii). Based on her experiences teaching writing classes over the course of many years, Goldberg (2005) provides anecdotes, advice, and wisdom for writing, which aren’t necessarily instruction; rather her suggestions are more like urgings to do with writing what our bodies and minds tell us is right. She walks the reader through a process, although not linear, which accounts for much of what has been covered in the prior sections on research—similarly that writing can be emergent like the Hayes-Roth (1979) model, or that it can tap into the cognitive aspects of writing (Rose, 2009; Flower & Hayes, 1981), or that one can tap into the felt sense (Perl, 2004) while writing.
Goldberg’s (2005) work is important to connecting writing to the body and draws on the knowledge of the body to guide the progress and process of writing.

**Writing and Healing**

There is also a body of literature, much of it research-based, on writing as healing that informs this study. Specific focus and attention here is given to the works of J.W. Pennebaker, (1999a, b; 2002; 2003), a social psychologist, who in numerous clinical studies explored connections between the use of expressive language, emotional experiences and implications for health (both physical and mental). Major findings of these studies indicate that that in situations of turmoil and stress, writing expressively had implications for health.

Pennebaker and his colleagues have done extensive studies on writing as healing; only a few examples are discussed here to demonstrate the impact of writing as a means to facilitate healing and cultivate self-discoveries. Pennebaker (2000) highlights the importance of narrative as a natural human process that helps people make sense of their lives. The methodology employed by Pennebaker in these numerous studies is primarily through providing the same or similar structure with variations related to time spent writing and duration of consecutive days in different settings. There is an experiment group writing about traumatic experiences and a control group writing about non-emotional or mundane topics (Pennebaker, 2000). Using this methodology, in a study conducted with beginning college students, Pennebaker and Beall (1986) found that the students who were asked to write about trauma wrote with immediacy and produced more words in the first fifteen minute writing session. The authors noted that “many [students] cried,” indicated this writing was “valuable and meaningful” (p. 4). The
subject matter of the writing revealed traumas such as “rape, family violence, suicide attempts, and drug problems” (p. 4). It was additionally found that these participants wrote with a surprising eloquence about these experiences, something Pennebaker and Beall (1986) state shows the participants “intuitively know how to put their life experiences into remarkably coherent narratives…” (p. 5). Pennebaker and Beall (1986) found that beyond the narratives there were impacts to overall health noted as they “followed students illness visits to university health center in the months before and after the experiment” to which they found that those who wrote about their trauma went to health center less than those in the control group writing about mundane topics.

Using similar methodology and Pennebaker and Beall (1986), Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) had college students write about either traumatic experiences from their lives or about a non-emotional topic. Student participants were asked to freewrite (paying little attention to grammatical conventions of writing) for 15 minutes per day over a period of four consecutive days (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). According to Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) the methodology of writing for a select time periods about traumatic experiences has consistently yielded the same results—improvements in physical and mental health. They summarize and say “this finding has been replicated across age, gender, culture, social class, and personality type” (p. 1243). Pennebaker and Seagal (1999), in examining the results of other similar studies, offer confirmation of their basic research findings. By using the LIWC program (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) to analyze the writing, it was revealed that those who get the most benefit from writing use a “high number of positive-emotion words, a moderate amount of negative emotion words, and increase their use of cognitive words over the days of writing.”
This study suggests that there is a connection between the way writers created their narratives and their experiences to having an implication for overall good health, mentally and physically (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Additionally Berry and Pennebaker (1993) sought to explore the various connections between the ways emotion is expressed verbally and nonverbally and what the implications might be on “psychological activity” (p. 12). Several studies were summarized and the data suggests that individuals with high emotional expressiveness may show “improve[ment] in physical health, it enhances to immune function, and is associated with fewer medical visits” (Berry & Pennebaker, 1993, p. 11).

Petrie, Fontanilla, Thomas, Booth and Pennebaker (2004) in a study of 37 HIV-infected patients were assigned to write about either an emotional or non-emotional topic over four days for 30 minutes per day. Specifically from each patient a “CD4+ lymphocyte count and HIV viral load were measured at baseline and at 2 weeks, 3 months, and 6 months after writing” (Petrie et al, 2004, p. 272). Participants in the emotional writing group indicated that their writing was both emotional and valuable and there were noted drops in the “HIV viral load, CD4+ lymphocyte counts increased” (p. 272). What was concluded was that emotional writing could be beneficial for HIV patients (Petrie et al, 2004, 272).

Campbell and Pennebaker (2003) highlight that “…dozens of replications have demonstrated that emotional writing can influence frequency of physician visits, immune function, stress hormones, blood pressure, and a host of social, academic, and cognitive variables. These effects hold up across cultures, ages, and diverse samples” (p. 60). Campbell and Pennebaker (2003) re-examined writing samples from three previous studies, provided by students, both first year and upper level, and writing from prisoners,
using Latent Semantic Analysis. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a “relationship between writing content and style to frequency of doctor visits” (p. 60).

Positive outcomes in physical health thorough LSA, that using personal pronouns was important when “discussing the self” when writing (p. 60) were indicated. Social, academic and cognitive variable (though these were not defined nor stated clearly) were said to be variable as well.

Liehr et al (2002) explored the connection between talking about health experiences and the impact on blood pressure. Elderly Japanese stroke and cardiac patients were asked to tell about their health for a period of 4 minutes while having their blood pressure recorded (Liehr et al, 2002). Their word use was additionally recorded. Liehr et al (2002) noted was that the stroke patients had higher blood pressure after talking about their health than the cardiac patients. Specifically when the stroke patients talked about their past experiences their blood pressure remained high but decreased when the stopped talking, which could be due to their cultural context where self-discussion is limited (Liehr et al, 2002). This research gives insights into the ways people give meaning to their health experiences (Liehr et al, 2002).

Ramirez-Esparza and Pennebaker (2006) asked the question as to whether telling good stories can be conducive to better health. The criteria for good stories was not clearly outlined and the authors specifically state that no set or agreed upon criteria is being utilized, stating that judgments of “good” lie within the “eye of the writer” (p.213). To this point, because there is no standard the participant is the judge and knows within their body if he writing and or telling of a story is beneficial. According to Pennebaker
there does seem to be a clear link to the power of expression and bodily well-being. As Liehr et al. (2002) state:

A reality of human nature is that people know the world through their bodies as they face everyday realities and create their personal stories. Personal stories created moment by moment bring both remembered past and anticipated future to the bodily experience of the present moment. (p. 28)

While Ramirez-Esparza and Pennebaker (2006) point out that there is limited evidence to support saying that a good piece of writing can have implications for health; what they did note were “linguistic features” that do facilitate changes in health (p. 211). Using the LIWC computer program, writing samples were analyzed by calculating the amount of specific kinds of words were used, such as positive and negative emotion words, “cognitive words” that tell how a story is constructed and pronoun usage (such as first person pronouns signaled depression in people) (Ramirez-Esparza & Pennebaker, 2006, p. 211). Certain markers of language have indicators for improved physical health.

Based on some of these research studies it is becoming clearer that expressive and creative writing have implications for healing. As a result of this healing, the question extends into learning and whether learning occurs from writing the body in this way. This is what some of this study will explore. The work of J.W. Pennebaker provides inspiration and structure for more study on the connections between writing and the body. The findings and the methodology that carried through the majority of the studies serve as important grounding points for my own study on the embodiment experiences of creative writers.

Conclusion
The multiple ways in which the body and embodiment is dealt with in the literature demonstrates its emergence as a topic of scholarly interest. This review was meant to provide an overview of information regarding embodiment revealing a deep, complex and unique understanding of the various ways in which the body manifests in writing, in pedagogy, and within certain body work practices.

While this is certainly not exhaustive in coverage, what it does reveal is a need for further examination and reconceptualization of the body as a way of knowing. Mark Twain, a prominent American writer, once said, “Don’t let your books get in the way of your education,” a poignant and relevant thought, especially when it comes to researching the body (as cited by Fletcher, 1992, p. 161). Exploration of the body must now turn to the experiential and the active. In this sense, the qualitative action research methodology will guide the action of the study, and data will be gathered through interviewing and collecting narratives, stories of experiences had and felt by the participants as they engage the body. Further discussion and details of the methodology will be discussed in Chapter Three.

While studying the body is one wrought with potential issues, as highlighted through the research and literature, it is also one that has to be recognized as having great potential. Knowledge of the body, once understood and paid attention to, can offer significant new ways of learning and meaning making in various contexts. Conceptually embodiment is somewhat disconcerting and perplexing. This study seeks additionally seeks ways to unravel these complexities for greater understanding.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology for this study about the creative writers’ perceptions on the effects of attention to bodily awareness on the writing process.

This was a qualitative action research study where the purpose was threefold: 1) first to examine how creative writers describe their writing process with particular attention to their perceptions of the role and awareness of the body in the writing process; 2) secondly, to engage these writers in a series of exercises about body awareness; 3) and then finally to explore their perceptions about the effects of an increased body awareness on their writing process.

This study was initially born of my own curiosity. Developing this qualitative action research study was a response to the lack of attention given to the body in writing practice and pedagogy. Although in recent years literature that is inclusive of the body is gaining momentum, it is still a concept being constructed within numerous academic contexts. This being said, the link between writing and the body is becoming more apparent and it is ultimately the overall motivator to the research questions.

Qualitative Action Research & Narrative Inquiry

This qualitative action research study made use of two approaches to qualitative research: narrative inquiry and action research. Strong use of the narrative approach to research initially guided the study, from the standpoint that the study began by conducting narrative interviews with writers focusing on their background with respect to writing, about their writing process overall, and how they see the role of the body in
writing. This was used at the beginning of the study to get a sense of who the participants are and their experiences of writing and the body, so that I could plan (along with the participants) the action component of the study. Working towards that end, qualitative research in general will be described, including its various types, then narrative research, and finally the action research process.

**Qualitative Research in General**

There are various types of qualitative research: ethnographic research focuses on aspects and elements of culture; phenomenology seeks to know about some phenomena as it manifests in participants’ experience; qualitative forms of action research which facilitates a process; narrative inquiry pulls individual experiences and story to create meaning. Overall qualitative research methodologies search for meaning and focus on how participants make sense of their worlds. According to Merriam and Simpson (2000)

The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret what they experience. (p. 98).

Anfara and Mertz (2006) additionally note that by nature, qualitative research allows for flexibility that allows the researcher to gather data and interpret the data through their individual worldview and lens. Qualitative researchers are then interested in how people interpret, make sense, and experience being in the world (Merriam, 2009). Based on this literature the following overall assumptions and characteristics of qualitative research are: a) reality and the world are not fixed; b) individuals create meaning based on experiences and interactions in the world; c) researchers search for
meaning and understanding; d) the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument of data collection.

A study on the role of embodiment in the writing process seeks to place under the metaphorical microscope the personal and individual experiences participants have in a context where the reactions and awareness of the body become the focus, the nature of the inquiry method must be flexible, with malleable boundaries for the researcher to work. Because this is a study on the embodiment experiences of creative writers, the qualitative methodologies are a nice fit.

Because of the open-endedness of qualitative research methodology (Patton 2002), it suits the ambiguity present when dealing with other ways of knowing, specifically the experiences of embodiment and the body as a general site of learning. To capture the individual experiences of participants two forms of data collection will be utilized: interviews and documents. Data gathered for analysis in this qualitative action research study consisted of interviews both initial and final; journals from the participants; personal reflections, feelings, and opinions of the researcher. More specific information on data collection and analysis will be discussed in later sections of this chapter.

**Narrative Inquiry**

While this is a qualitative action research study, it was conducted with the particular awareness and focus on narrative. Narratives or other biographical or autobiographical texts can provide valuable insights into personal experience, narrative structures, our understanding of events, and our selves (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). The study began with narrative interviews with each of the participants, and included four participants. More information on participants and selection of participants will be
discussed later. Here it is important to offer explanation of narrative inquiry as a specific form of qualitative research.

Connelley and Clandinin (1990) discuss narrative inquiry as a research methodology and state that they are operating under the assumption that “life is education,” and that narrative inquiry focused primarily on lived experiences of participants. At the heart of narrative methodology is the emphasis on story; simply the “first-person accounts of experiences that are in story format, having a beginning, middle, and end” (Merriam, 2002, p. 286). Story is constructed both individually and through the social interactions people experience in daily living (Clandinin, Pushors, & Orr, 2007). Patton (2002) describes narrative analysis as a way to interpret stories to reveal social and cultural patterns through individual experience(s).

Since a key component of narrative inquiry is examining experience as phenomena, the use of story to describe the experiences of embodiment seemed to fit well with the participants, who are storytellers either by nature or by profession (or both) (Clandinin, Pushors, & Orr, 2007). Narrative analysis, though these stories, seeks an understanding of what can be revealed through a person, experience or world from which it came (Patton, 2002, p. 133). Analysis of narrative is done so through reflection and retrospective contemplation; further it is defined through “socially constrained forms of action, socially situated performances, ways of acting in and making sense of the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 641). The retrospective component present within narrative inquiry makes the use of the reflective journal appropriate to construct the participant’s story.
In addition, it has been established that in qualitative studies the researcher is central to the collection and analysis of data contributing to a highly descriptive end product (Merriam, 2009, p. 39) it is important to acknowledge this role the researcher may play as a participant in the study, specifically with regard to narrative inquiry. To be able to fully capture embodiment it is imperative that the researcher describing the phenomenon has first-hand experience and knowledge of embodiment. Further, to begin to completely get a sense of what is being studied, the story is constructed together between the researcher and the participant, though the write up of the narrative portion of the study is primarily in the participant’s words (Merriam, 2009; Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). The meaning of the experience is conveyed through the story being told. These stories are multi-layered and textual, evolving, not concrete and are influenced by what Connelly and Clandinin (2006) call the commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. Each of these concepts must be paid attention to when conducting qualitative narrative research as each can impact the story told and meaning derived by both participant(s) and researcher.

**Action Research**

The general stories from the narrative interview were analyzed and it was determined in light of participant input how to proceed in the action phase of this study. Proceeding to the action research part of the study, the purposes of action research are discussed, followed by an explanation of how these notions were applied to this study. Historically action research was developed by Lewin in the 1940s to work out problems occurring in communities during post-war America (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). McNiff and Whitehead (2003) further clarify action research as a “movement
within social science enquiry that had implications for social justice (p. 2). Zuber-Skerrit (2009) highlights how action research works for problem solving and addressing needs for seeking knowledge, and that more traditional approaches to inquiry may no longer be appropriate, stating that action research is a “methodology for change, problem solving, and positive developments involving people” (p.2). According to Lewin, action research functions as a “spiral of steps” or “moments” with planning, action, evaluation of action, and reflection being the core structural components (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982).

Patton (2002) defines action research as a “problem-solving and learning-oriented process [that] often uses qualitative inquiry to help a group of people reflect on ways of improving what they are doing” (p. 195). Reason and Bradbury-Huang (2006) refer to action research as inquiry-in-action, further defining it as a way to respond to pressing issues in people’s lives or addressing community or organizational problems. According to McNiff and Whitehead (2003), action research is a collaborative process of people working to achieve personal and social goals that have been commonly agreed upon; that it is a form of dialogue to problem solve. Action research is typically driven in purpose by a gap in what needs to be explored and further defined in a practice (McNiff & Whitehead, 2003). The goal of action research then is to address specific problem(s) and issue(s) within a specific setting (Merriam, 2009).

At the heart of action research is a commitment to improvement. The idea that people, within a given setting, discover ways to solve problems and develop solutions by studying themselves is a key assumption of action research (Patton, 2002). The experimental nature of testing ideas in a practical setting to improve and increase knowledge is an essential element of action research. The primary outcome of action
research is empowering change to encourage benefits and improvement (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982) and develop practical knowledge and useful solutions to everyday problems that people may experience in different contexts (Reason & Bradbury-Huang, 2006). Reason and Bradbury-Huang (2006) cite five characteristics present in action research: a) a focus on practical issues; b) human flourishing though problem solving, dialogue, and collaboration; c) knowledge in action; d) participation and democracy; and e) there is an emergent and developing form to action research (p. 2).

There are differences between action research and other research paradigms such as a basic qualitative research design. The largest distinction is in the relationship between the researcher and the participants, being the lines between the two groups overlap and are less defined (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). Further the purpose of action research is specifically to make something happen while the research process is going on, and it is the researcher/facilitator’s role to do this in dialogue with participants. By contrast, in basic qualitative research designs, the purpose is simply to study participants’ perspectives, or to understand a particular phenomenon rather than to make something happen. In action research, the lines between researcher and participant are blurred, which makes this very interpersonal and cross-influential—meaning a researcher must realize and take into account the influence the participants will have on them, as well as their influence on the participants (Gubrium & Holstien, 2001). The researcher is both participant and facilitator in action research (Merriam, 2002).

In discussing action research in general, Elsbach (2000) highlights a potential halo effect by the researcher and signals a potential caveat that researchers must consider when doing action research: that because a researcher is part of the research process,
difficulties in decision-making may occur or issues regarding bias and assumptions towards research. In action research a key component to study design is that the researcher will make decisions in consultation with participants, which can create the space for action research to take on a liberatory form and purpose by opening space to address potential issues of imbalance and struggles with power (Reason & Bradbury-Huang, 2006). In qualitative research addressing biases and assumptions regarding research can be counteracted through incorporating member checking with the participants. This air of collaboration within the approach, the style of inquiry where the researcher becomes facilitator and teacher as participants embark on their inquiry is able to provide a “supplementary agenda,” which according to Patton (2002) increases the participants’ sense of being in control and reflective about their lives and experiences.

Limitations specifically related to time are also inherent within action research. According to Patton (2002) considerations of duration and time must be made to generate useful information that can be acted upon. Lengthy and collaborative relationships can develop between researcher and participants (Reason & Bradbury-Huang, 2006). Through action research the qualitative data that is acquired can be used to give a voice to individuals and articulate the experienced phenomenon under study. Data should therefore be presented in ways that are both understandable and meaningful to the purposes of the inquiry and the participants involved.

As stated, the purpose of action research is to make something happen, in this case the goal of an action research study in body awareness is in essence to gain a more complete understanding of how the body impacts the writing process and the lives of the participants. Embodiment is a particular phenomenon. Given that the intent of action
research is to make something happen, part of the purpose in this study specifically related embodiment was to provide writers with a means of coming up with new insights about how the body relates to their writing practice. Action research can be viewed as a way to undo certain traditional ideologies about scientific research privileging “thought over action” (Reason & Bradbury-Huang, 2006, p. xxv); this study foregrounds the body’s role in that process. Further, McNiff and Whitehead (2003) point out that action research “recognizes that knowledge isn’t just cognitive, but embodied; that is, mind and body are not perceived as separate entities but as integrated. Knowledge is arrived at, as it exists in, feelings and multiple sensory modes” (p. 17). My goal for this study was to not only hear the stories of the participants, I wanted to see if recognizing the body as part of the writing process had meaning for them and in what ways and whether or not they could become more embodied writers.

The action portion of this study was designed in collaboration with the participants. Initial interviews, individual writings, along with their individual practices for drawing attention to the body were the actions in this study. Application of information gained through this study can potentially be applied to improve the overall quality and bridge the gap between theory and practice within the field of Adult Education.

**Participant Selection and My Stance as a Researcher**

Because the researcher is both facilitator and participant in a study, I am including here both information on the participant selection process, and the stance that I will take as a participant and researcher.

**Participant Selection**
Part of the action research design of this study was the incorporation of individual experience as told through narrative inquiry. Because this was a study about the embodiment experiences of creative writers, criteria and determinations were made regarding the selection of participants. The specific process for selection of individual participants is outlined here.

The approach for this study involved a purposeful sampling of participants. Purposeful sampling is aimed at drawing out insight regarding a particular phenomenon, in this case embodiment (Patton, 2003). A purposeful sample is based on the opportunity for learning potentially inherent within a specified group to study a certain phenomenon. Merriam (2009) states that there is an assumption present; one that indicates a researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight. Because of this a sample must be selected from which an opportunity for learning is present (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Patton; 2002). For this study a purposeful sampling of participants was chosen from community-based writing groups located in Lancaster and Lebanon counties. As noted above, as the researcher in an action research study, I was also a participant.

While it was established in a prior section that the narrative inquiry is an important qualitative research strategy, the selection process for the participants must be focused, and purposeful. Best suited for this study, intensity sampling as defined by Patton (2002) highlights the ability to pull “information rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely…” (p. 243). Since it is assumed that embodiment is a naturally occurring phenomenon seemingly present within all individuals regardless of their personal level of perception of this phenomenon, intensity sampling allows for the rich experiences of the participants to be represented. Individual
participants provided a vast wealth of experience-laden information that lent itself to the exploration of the phenomenon of embodiment. Included in this purposeful sample of participants is the researcher.

My past experience working in and attending workshops through informal, community-based writing groups in the area allowed me to see the vast level of experience, willingness, participation, and voluntary expenditure of time that members devoted to their art. Working within this community of writers developed a curiosity about individual writing process and implementation of prior experience within their stories, and I assumed I would find participants from these writing groups, although this was only true to some extent.

The qualitative researcher seeks insight about a specific phenomenon and the level of analysis in these case studies may be the individual or group and the research context may range from distanced observer to full participant (Elsbach, 2000, p. 55). This study sought the insights, initially of five to seven participant volunteers, but in the end only included four that met the specific criteria. The participants for this study were chosen based on the following criteria: they were a) adult writers aged 25 years or older; b) active and practicing writers with 6 months or more of experience; c) writers who are either published or are hobby writers who have produced numerous pieces; d) writers who are currently working on or willing to work on a piece of writing in the process of this research study; and e) writers who currently have a practice that gives attention to the body or are willing to begin a body awareness activity such as meditation, yoga, exercise, art, or other activity chosen by the individual.
Participants in the study were volunteers who were willing to explore their own writing process and move beyond traditional ways of thinking. Because the concept of embodiment is defined through the personal experiences of the participants, my role as the researcher and participant was important to gain a better understanding of the experiences of the other participants.

**My Background and Stance as Researcher**

As noted above, as in any qualitative research study (Merriam, 2009) all of the information and data gathered through this study will be funneled and interpreted by me as the researcher; thus as Lichman (2010) notes it is important that the experience, the knowledge, skills, and background of the researcher be acknowledged as one of the multiple perspectives on embodiment. It is also important to note that as the researcher, I am a middle class, White woman who believes that it is helpful to consider the embodied writing process, and the overall role of the body in learning. Acknowledging this information about me as the researcher was to make more transparent the lens through which data analysis occurred and as Patton (2002) highlights, the “researchers personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon” (p. 40).

Additionally, my natural tendency is to pull apart the pieces of a larger narrative to determine the smaller parts that make up the whole and reconstructing to form a new, other whole. A significant context for this study was my desire to resist a grand narrative of absence and reconstruct through multiple voices and narratives. The dual positions of both researcher and participant on my part was intended to shift and de-center any power the participants may perceive me to hold, thus undoing any teacher versus students
tension. It was also to allow my experience to lend understanding to the participants’
experiences and to further make sense of any data that was gathered and collected.

Because I am someone who writes creatively and teaches creative writing as a
process, it was important to seek participants who have this in common. One of the ways
to establish a new positionality of the body is through narrative that focuses awareness
there and through individual voice to bring these experiences into the light.

It is important to also note that research, like other words implying action, is a
process. From selecting a topic based on interest or curiosity, to developing questions,
designing a study, carrying out the work of said study, and finally drawing some
conclusions through data and reflection, the research one does is like walking a carefully
selected path over rocky terrain. In most instances research can be a fruitful adventure,
leading to insights and discoveries that could impact a particular field. The research
presented here is no different; it seeks to make the connections between the body and the
work (or process) of a creative writer and to bring legitimacy to the body as a site for
learning.

**Data Collection**

Qualitative data focuses on words and other artifacts such as art or music that
might be endemic to a research context, rather than numbers or statics analyzed in
quantitative research. Data must be acknowledged and recognized by the researcher and
fine-tuned to meet the goals and purposes of the research (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative
research the typical data collection methods are interviews, observations, and the analysis
of documents or other artifacts, all of which encompass the thoughts, feelings, opinions,
experiences, and knowledge of the participants (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Data
collection and field work strategies for this action research project employed the following instruments common to qualitative research: interviews and documents. Specifically sources of data were initial and final interviews; participants’ journals; my reflections, observations and personal feelings. The data that were collected through interviews and documents were used to tell stories about the participants and their experiences. Narrative methodology that incorporates multiple text method will guide the data that can be spoken written, or visual (Keats, 2009).

Because story is derived from written or spoken word, meaning is sought in the stories by giving them structure or searching for revealing pieces of information (Lichtman, 2010). This study utilized the narrative analysis multiple text method analyzing both interview data and written journals. The individual participant’s experience of his or her body awareness will be the focus. Through the use of interviews and reflective journaling about participants’ experiences, participants (including me as participant researcher) were able to tell the story of their embodiment experiences and what it meant to their work as writers. From this, subplots emerged as well as the much sought after implications for classroom practice.

In addition to spoken text in the form of narrative, participants were asked to produce written responses after body-focusing activities that were negotiated in conjunction with the participants. This written record was in the form of a journal where participants reflected on their experiences, which was then collected and studied as part of data analysis. During the study participants wrote about their writing process, ways their body was engaged in writing and whether or not this attention to the body was meaningful for them and in what ways. They were also asked to include a final written
creative piece, reflection, or metaphor that was a response or synthesis of the notion of embodiment.

**Narrative Interviews**

For this study guided, semi-structured or semi-focused (Yin, 1989; Lichtman, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) narrative interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the study. Narrative interviewing is a “qualitative research method that is used to stimulate interviewees or study participants to express their experiences and views of the topic being studied through telling stories or narratives” (Bates, 2004, p. 15). Interviews allow the researcher to gain first-hand knowledge of the participant’s experiences through a reflective dialogue; qualitative interviews provide an understanding of experiences and allow the researcher to reconstruct events in which he/she did not participate (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Narrative interviews have a more conversational form and participants are able to relay their experiences in their own words (Bates, 2004). Interviews are used to gather information on a specific topic of study (Litchman, 2010). Because of the importance of participant experience, interviews were a central way to gather information on the embodiment experiences. Rubin and Rubin (1995) further clarify this

…researchers try to elicit interviewees’ views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed. To reconstruct and understand the interviewees’ experiences and interpretations…think and rich descriptions of the cultural and topical arenas they are studying and try to develop an empathetic understanding of the world of others. (p. 35)

There are several interview techniques, but the one used for this study was a semi-structured or guided (Lichtman, 2010) interview. This type of interview structure
calls on the researcher to develop questions that are generalized to the phenomenon being studied, it also allows for varying of the questions as the situation permits and as needed (Lichtman, 2010). This informal structure is versatile and allows the interview to be more conversational and individual (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Patton, 2002).

The semi-structured interview allows for opportunistic or emergent sampling allowing for the following of new leads during fieldwork and opens the door to that flexibility needed to take advantage of the unexpected (Patton, 2002, p. 244). Because the concept of embodiment and the experience of embodiment have no concrete experiential basis that is the same for all people, interviews allowed an opportunity for further clarification and questioning to gain understanding of the experiences.

Two interviews took place during the course of this study. Interview questions were developed to guide the interviews and provided some structure (see Appendix A), but the guided or semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility on the part of the interviewer. Thus, I varied questions as the situation or circumstance demanded (Litchman, 2010). The questions used for the initial interviews were a combination of general and specific questions. The purpose of the first interview was to determine the background of the participant related to their writing practice and to get a general sense of their writing process, how they saw the role of the body in writing and healing, and their experiences with embodied, body awareness types of practices such as meditation, yoga, massage, or other forms of body work, etc. In addition, I asked them what kinds of body awareness practices they might like to try to incorporate in the context of the study. [See Appendix A for the list of general questions.] Further, because action research as described above draws on the planning, acting, evaluating of action, and reflection
ongoing cycle, the initial interview acted as a way for helping to plan the action component of the study in light of participants’ interests.

Interview #2, the final interview, which took place after the action research process described below was complete, focused primarily on what participants learned in the process of the study, and their perceptions of how the focus on embodiment affected them in their lives and in their writing process. [See Appendix C for the general list of questions for the final interview]. As noted below, I asked participants to produce some creative writing piece or a reflection about their experiences in the project following the final interview. Only two of the participants did so.

**Action and Reflection Components of the Study**

The action research process cycle includes the planning, acting, evaluation/observation of action, and reflection phases. As initially planned, part of this action research process was to include group sessions for participants to actually experience some writing and body awareness exercises, as well as to collaborate and discuss writing, bodily awareness, and whether connecting the two contributes to meaning making. While these sessions were planned at the outset of the study, participants were unwilling or unable to meet. In place of the group sessions, at the end of the first interview, each participant negotiated a body awareness activity to be done in the context of the action phase of the study, where they would engage the practice and write about it in a journal. In addition, a common intervention namely Sondra Perl’s (2004) individual portion of the Guidelines for Composing program was distributed to each participant to simulate an activity that would have taken place with the group. Participants were asked to try this on their own and write about the experience. It was
assumed that participants would try this on their own, although none did, but rather did other activities that they negotiated with me; they did write in their journal on a regular basis about these activities, and some of them e-mailed me segments of their journal entries throughout the process and/or to check in. Two of the participants opted to meet to check in on two occasions throughout the action research process and provided handwritten journal entries

One of the ways to draw awareness to the body is via an embodied practice, such as a meditative act or some other body aware activity such as those listed above. As such participants used their personal forms of meditation or another body awareness activity, which can be established as a “tethered awareness to an object,” thought, or something else (Gross, 2010). For the purposes of this study and to accommodate for any variances in experience with embodied practices, participants defined body awareness activities in a way that best fits their own interests, lifestyle, or practice. The idea was to bring awareness to the body and how it may impact (or not) the participant’s individual writing process.

**Individual Practice.** Participants were asked to complete a body awareness activity on their own for six weeks. Participants were given a journaling prompt, [see Appendix B] to use as a starting point for their individual activity. Participants chose a body awareness activity of their preference and were provided with examples ranging from sitting or walking meditation, yoga practice, deep breathing, exercising (running, walking, swimming), getting massages or some other body work (etc.) or creating a piece of artwork, for example. This practice was up to the individual participant and done to their desire, ability, and willingness. Participants were asked to complete the body
awareness practice for at least 5-10 minutes, at least twice per week, for the duration of this project, which was 6 weeks. Longer duration or more in frequency was up to the participant. Most participants noted engaging in their body awareness practice daily for the duration of the study. After completing the body awareness activity, participants were asked write and reflect on the experience with particular awareness of the body.

The purpose behind asking participants to practice on their own between sessions was to facilitate more opportunity for engaging the body and to draw attention to it. It is assumed that awareness of the body is limited for most people and awareness takes time to cultivate in order to get a clearer picture of where the body fits into writing practice.

Documents

As is perhaps obvious from discussion above, there were a number of documents generated throughout the study. In addition to interviews data was gathered through documents or artifacts produced by the participants and the researcher. This happened individually by participants in their journals. Because this was an action research project, the documents collected from the participants were concerned with solving a problem or addressing a concern within the context of the study (Tomal, 2010), in this case the role of the body in the writing process. Documents can provide a rich source of data for analysis due to the great deal of information that can be accessed through exploring them (Patton, 2002; Stringer, 2007). Considered a traditional source of data in qualitative research, along with interviewing and observation (Merriam, 2009), documents can be “written, oral, visual, or cultural artifacts” (p. 13). Documents can be valuable and information-rich because they can provide more opportunity for inquiry via interviews once they are analyzed (Patton, 2002). McIntyre (2008) points out that using documents
can be a means of exploring more creative methods and using multiple modalities for gathering important information; they are a means to “unearth, uncover, and sometimes undo ‘what we know’ so as to ‘know anew’” (p. 21). Documents as part of data analysis are able to provide numerous and different perspectives in order to make and clarify meaning (Stake, 2005). Seeking insights into the embodiment experiences of writers, the study requested participants to complete journal entries and reflections in response to their body awareness and writing practices. Modeling the work of Perl (2004) and Pennebaker participants were asked to respond to a prompt in a reflexive journal format, recounting their experiences in their own words with the practice of meditation, bodily awareness, writing, and writing process. Some of the documents generated in this study were reflections and journal entries, and interview transcripts.

The use of journaling is an effective tool utilized commonly in creative writing classes and should be very familiar to most writers. Operating on this assumption of familiarity, the journal provided an opportunity for reflection on the participants’ experiences of body awareness and the role of the body in the writing process. The journal provided the freedom and personal space for participants to explore their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with body awareness and writing.

The data collection process for this study relied on various methods including guided, semi-structured interviews, reflective journaling, and writing. The first interview was completed before participants begin their body awareness practice within the context of what this study was asking. Reflective journaling took place during the established period of six weeks where the participants were asked to complete a body awareness practice and then write about their experiences. This journal provided insights into body
awareness and provided opportunity for additional self-discovery (Van Manen, 1990). The final interview took place after the participants had completed their journals and their body awareness practices.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis can occur simultaneously as information is being collected or after all data is gathered (Merriam, 2009; Lichtman, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Since the nature of qualitative research is emergent (Merriam, 2009), it allows for an openness of design that permits discovery through execution of the study. Data should be analyzed to meet the needs of the study; therefore data should be used to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009).

This study sought to find insight regarding the embodiment experiences of creative writers, therefore qualitative data, which usually takes the form of words rather than numbers (Lichtman, 2010), was an appropriate way to access these experiences. Lichtman (2010) and Merriam (2009) state that when it is time to complete data analysis a systematic approach is best. Employing a coding strategy is the most typical means to accessing themes across the participant the data. In this case participant narratives were analyzed for common themes, and for underlying connections to personal histories, establishing writing practice, and incorporation and awareness of the body. Rubin and Rubin (1995) also reinforce coding as a process of analysis and organization of data that is accessed through the language and responses of interviewees. Regardless of the specific method for analysis, the “purpose [of data analysis] is to examine the whole, in a natural setting, to get the ideas and feelings of those being interviewed or observed” (p. 187).
Traditionally, qualitative approaches to narrative texts resulted in fracturing and breaking down the text into smaller bits and pieces, sometimes taking a segment and editing it out of context (Riessman, 1993). What this study sought to do was utilize approaches from both narrative and action research to gain a richer understanding of embodiment and body awareness in writing process. Narrative analysis places the emphasis on the “stories people tell and how these stories are communicated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 202). Stories can emerge from the data and meaning is contained within the data (Lichtman, 2010). Introducing the initial narratives by the participants as stories worked to keep the story intact at the outset of the study; important, as Riessman (1993) notes, “narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself” (p.1).

Data analysis in action research typically employs coding and looking for themes within the data; in this case, the data were analyzed to seek answers to the potentially different ways that writers experience embodiment. The participants’ narratives were constructed by keeping the initial interview intact, pulling long quotes in their own words so the reader could get a sense of their individual narrative flow. Their final interviews were handled the same way. In this case, the goal was to keep the narratives intact and present the stories coherently. More of a thematic analysis of the action research part of the study was done to get at the unfolding story of body awareness. Certain phrases and wordings were placed in bold to highlight each participant’s body awareness without disrupting the flow of the narrative.

To analyze this type of data four interpretive models for analysis could be used: holistic-content; holistic-form; categorical-content; categorical-form (Lieblich et al, 1998, as cited by Keats, 2009). Using the holistic-content method, the individual participant’s
stories were considered “holistically, exploring both explicit and implicit meaning” (Keats, 2009, p. 188). Holistic-content readings require a first general read through to create an overall impression in order to gain an understanding of potential routes of analysis (Keats, 2009). For my study I used a holistic-content analysis to keep the narratives and stories intact. Initially I did a few general reads of the data and searched for ways or methods the participants used to focus their attention on their bodies. Specific words were highlighted and placed in bold to signal changes in body awareness. Each participant’s story tracked their evolution of body awareness from specific starting points so any threads and similarities were noted. Additionally, through general readings overall themes, images, patterns, or reflections emerged that gave insight to the research questions guiding this study. As I read through the transcripts these threads and similarities became apparent and were noted as themes for further exploration. Their body awareness stories were then constructed around these themes. It is important to see them how each journal entry, written response, or interview question was be broken down into the various parts that create the whole story of the participant’s experience, in essence presented the participants individual evolution to new body awareness and how this impacted their writing. Further according to Keats (2009):

> Each text tells its own story, yet all texts share a relationship in documenting the experiences of a single person…By analyzing all text that a participant presents, the researcher may deepen the understanding of what a participant experienced during the research process. (p. 188)

Since a purpose of this study was to understand the connections between the body and writing, as well as to see how participants made meaning from their experiences the
goal was to draw conclusions that pulled from both the participant/individual case as well as my own insights of the researcher. In doing so, the voices of the individuals involved remained largely intact from the beginning of the study. The themes that presented in the data revealed clearer insights into the phenomenon of embodiment, and the role of the body in the individual participant’s writing process.

The context of the study certainly drove the analysis of data and in this case the stories of the participant’s experiences as told through interviews and journal writing opened the analysis to multiple interpretations.

**Dependability and Trustworthiness**

A concern of conducting research is whether the data collected and analysis is reliable and trustworthy. These issues are especially pertinent since the study focused on the use of human subjects and their individual experiences that originated from their bodies. Guiding the ethics and trustworthiness of this research are the qualifications of the Penn State University’s IRB process as well as some guidelines and questions outlined in Merriam (2009).

One such check is triangulation. Triangulation, as defined by Merriam (2009, p.216) uses “multiple sources of data” as a “means of comparing and cross-checking data” collected at different times or places, enabling researcher to cross-check the information gathered from participants. For example, in this study triangulation was used by collecting multiple forms of data from each participant, in the form of multiple interviews conducted with each participant, as well as use of their journals and written comments throughout the action research phase of the study.
An additional strategy to increase validity is to conduct member checks with participants (Merriam, 2009). Hence, once each participant’s narrative was constructed, it was sent via email for the participant to verify, offer clarifications and check the accuracy of their narrative. Close collaboration with my dissertation chair and committee members also ensured that checks for trustworthiness and validity were in place.

Finally, Merriam (2009) states a belief “that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1). While this research was not intended nor was it necessarily positioned to be life altering, what it did seek to do was disrupt the present thinking on the body that is so inherent within our culture. There was a desire on the part of the researcher to deconstruct the present positionality of the body, and reconstitute it as a means of accessing knowledge and meaning, therefore working to reconstitute its presence as valid, relevant, and most important, present to both practice and learning. Perl (2004) reinforces this by stating “we are embodied beings; the body is central to knowing and speaking,” further citing Gendlin (1996), who believed the body should be “return[ed] to its rightful position in the realm of the knowing” (p. 53-54). The specific interest behind this dissertation study focused on the various roles the body has in the writing practice and meaning making. Does learning take place? This research looked to highlight how the body is central to learning and a person is a whole being. This dissertation study also sought to contribute to the present discourse surrounding the body as a site for learning. It opens the door for further study and presents implications on the why, how, and what of embodiment.

Summary
The goal of this chapter was to identify the direction of inquiry and establish the methodology for examination of embodiment as an experience of creative writers. The research questions, along with rationale for conducting the study, as well as justification for qualitative methods of inquiry were outlined. Finally, addressing those issues of credibility and trustworthiness in research were discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR

JOE

A writer of fiction and poetry, Joe, age 30, has an extensive and interesting history with writing. At the time of his participation in this study he was preparing to begin graduate school in a creative writing MFA program in Brooklyn. Joe grew up in rural Pennsylvania and is an adopted child into what he calls a standard household and typical American childhood. As a child he was active, playing sports, and enlisting into the military at age 17. Part of Joe’s body awareness is through physical injury and subsequent degeneration of his hip. He also has dealt with emotional pain through writing as well. His interest in writing began with the discovery of letters written by his biological mother and reading a lot as a kid. Writing became a significant part of his life in college when a professor encouraged him to begin submitting works for publication. He plans to finish his first novel by December 2011.

This chapter provides Joe’s story of body awareness and writing, and to focus and draw attention certain wordings have been placed in boldface as a way to highlight attention to the body and emotions without disrupting the flow of the narrative. The intention is to highlight evolution of thought, acknowledgement of physical and emotional changes that resulted because of his writing and body awareness activities.

Initial Interview: Body and Writing Connection

Joe’s story connecting body awareness and writing is both an evolution of perception and a journey into healing. Knowing him only as a creative writer, it is easy to make the assumption that writing has always been a part of his life, when in fact it was later that writing became a passion, a focal point, and his chosen career.
Significance of Writing in his Life.

I asked Joe to speak in further detail about the significance of writing in his life and he made an immediate connection to healing. In particular he talked about journaling through a rough patch in life to make discoveries about himself. These discoveries and observations were important for his writing practice, perhaps because many creative writers are observers, looking to the world, others, or their own experiences for inspiration. To gain better understanding of Joe as a writer I asked him to describe where he draws inspiration:

*It could be, uh, like I saw Jacob Reese’s photo of, of Mulberry Street.*

**And it kind of made me sad** seeing little kids like that, and I thought about the rest of the world and how it’s still going on in other countries. So I wrote a poem off that, or when I wrote “Humanity,” which I’m still trying to get published, but it was, uh, basically **off a little girl from the tsunamis that I saw on Yahoo**. So, it comes from that, from news. I’m working on—slowly, but surely— a poem around—something that’s going on in the world in our times right now. It’s a longer poem. *Probably the longest one I’ve ever written.* Other ones are from past, like harsh memories, things I gotta deal with and try to figure out.

Joe drawing inspiration from the photograph and creating his own experience as a result of seeing it, is reflective of Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the phenomenology of perception, who’s philosophical foundations are important to this study. In seeing these photos of the people, the ghetto kids in the Reese photo and the little girl from the tsunami, reminded Joe of his personal past. Merleau-Ponty (1945) talks of art, novels, poetry, and music each as in “inter human event” that function as “individuals, that is
beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed…” (p. 175). Here two assertions are made: the first, is that experiences become part of our being and are therefore embodied; second, writing then is an extension of the body and is an outward manifestation of embodied knowledge and embodied experiences. Based on this thinking, Joe’s stories and poems are embodied writing. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945) what we experience becomes part of our being, therefore it is embodied. To see the photograph is to experience it, which Joe later pulled from this experience to inspire and create his poem *Humanity*. Joe’s poem is an extension of his body. Because of his extensive experience with writing in a variety of genres and emerging connections to healing in his writing, I asked him he feels when he writers. In speaking about poetry he says it’s:

...very free. It’s kind of just- I’m copying the emotion, the imagery of things is more of a puzzle tome to express it and try to express it in ways that are deeper than what, you know, is my first reaction. Fiction is another thing. I get very tense. It used to be more fun. Usually now I’ll get very tense before I write and kind of like, very self-critical and harsh. I don’t know, it’s scary to write (laughs). When I’m writing fiction, because you know, there’s that whole thing, like, ok, now I’ve chosen a career path in writing, which doesn’t necessarily pay. Am I doing the right thing? Am I good enough? What makes me think I’m good enough? That kind of thing, you know. It’s probably, like, I’ve done well at other stuff, but you know. Throughout high school I got very low grades, now in college I’m getting very high grades. So there’s still that guy who thinks, you know, you’re not that guy-intellectual. Things of that nature, but we’ll see...
Joe referencing poetry as being a source of freedom emotionally contrasts with what comes to light with his fiction writing. His acknowledgment of fiction causing him to feel “tense,” bringing out his inner critic who’s voice is “harsh,” making him feel anxious, scared, and question his choices are physical and emotional responses that are present in relation to his writing. As noted in an earlier chapter, Pennebaker’s (1999a, b; 2002; 2003), work in numerous clinical studies explored the connections between the use of expressive writing, and traumatic emotional experiences as having implications for health (both physical and mental). He, along with colleagues, found that in situations of turmoil and stress, writing was beneficial to calming the inner workings of the body. Joe has a strong emotional connection to his writing, and since his use of writing as a means to healing is emergent in his story, further questions were asked specifically about the role of his writing in his healing. As an explanation, he told a story about his friend’s suicide, his resulting actions in the aftermath of this loss, and the role of writing as healing in the story. I paraphrase his story here.

The story of trying to stop his friend from suicide was the first story Joe ever wrote after being prompted by a college professor to explore through writing a significant or life altering experience. Joe’s story recounts the helpless horror of having “no physical way” of preventing his friend from committing suicide. As a result of his friend’s death, Joe decided to hike the Appalachian Trail into North Carolina when he headed east to hike the Mountain to Sea Trail. Ironically, his time on this trail crossed his path with a stranger who was drunk, angry, and suicidal. Where he tried and was unable to help his friend, he was able to help this man find assistance, which saved the man’s life. Reflecting on what it was like to write this story, Joe makes a connection between how
writing about traumatic and significant experiences provides healing. About this particular writing experience he states:

*I wrote that story basically, uh ‘cause our professor wanted us to write about a life changing situation, and I don’t know, it was just something I had to write, and I kinda wrote it in one shot and there was this intense time, and when I was done, I just felt relief.*

This sense of relief Joe mentions was interesting and he added that he was only two years removed from the experience when writing about it, yet when describing the act of writing this particular piece he talks about in terms reminiscent of Csikszentmihalyi’s (1998) concept of flow. Csikszentmihalyi mentions the experiences of some people as being in flow as being in a zone, in a state of complete engagement. For Joe, writing this was something he had to do as a way to cope emotionally with these experiences. The sense of relief, while emotionally cathartic, had a physical impact as well, which once again ties writing to his body. He recounts his experience when writing this piece as being in

*...some kind of zone. I could feel it, touch it, taste it, see it. Yeah, I haven’t achieved that kind of, quite that kind of presence in writing since.*

Through Joe’s writing there is evidence that his encounter with the suicidal man is an embodied experience evidenced through his inadvertently tapping into a palpable and time-transcendent emotional state that he felt while in those moments talking to this stranger. With his writing he was in that moment of his past intensely re-feeling and re-living it.

**Discussing the Body in Writing.**
Joe recognized the presence of his body in his writing starting with the physicality of living in a body that has experienced significant injuries. Coming to awareness of the body often occurs via injury, illness, or disability. Joe was asked if his body is present in his writing and he begins to contextualize his body through pain, both physically and mentally. Joe mentions injury, a sports injury to his hip, which has left him with degenerative hip disease and how that injury impacts his ability to write.

...I got two, well one major injury that led to another. So, depending upon my position, I get a lot of pain. If I’m like this (he pauses here and assumes a canted position, where sitting oddly on his hip is referenced), I can feel a little bit in my head. Depending on how the seat is adjusted.

Additionally, he was questioned if certain types of writing were affected when he experiences pain and other physical disruptions. He states,

It’s harder for me, especially with poetry, to think. Like, if I want to use a certain word. I’m trying to recall, and I’ll be, like, nodding off on doing it. It’s not good... There’s always an anxiety when I’m writing to, like when I’m writing prose, more so, not poetry. Poetry, I’m very relaxed. Prose, I’m very, like, anxious. And so, as I’m writing, especially when I get to think and I’m like “oh man, I’m in the groove. I’m in the groove.” And when it shuts down at a point, like end of a chapter, I’m in the groove, so I should be able to jump right in the next chapter, like, naturally. Just roll with it. It’s like too much to get up, take a break, chill, go for a walk, then I come back to it.

Visceral reactions during writing are recognized in addition to cited discomfort. I asked him if he ever noted bodily changes in response to his own writing, like if his heart rate
would increase during suspenseful or tense scenes. He speaks about a specific time when the visceral responses during writing were significant.

*Oh yeah! When I wrote about a guy who, um, there’s a horror that I wrote about a guy who caught his wife cheating, but then takes it out on himself instead of her. But in the end, taking it out on her. As I went through the actions, like when, this is the climax, there were several points, my **blood rate** was, like, my **blood pressure was probably through the roof**. Like, I noticed I was very excited, and I was trembling as well...*now I remember, I’ll never forget the one, “*A Bloody Affair,*” was very intense, the whole way through. I’ll never forget that, because I was like “Woah!” (laughs). It was very, **it was very heightened.**

From here I asked him if he ever writes *about* his body and *bodily experience*. He states that he’s early in this process and just getting into the feel of what it’s about, noting differences when he writes. What he observes to this point are difficulties he has with being tired from exercise, noting shaking hands that made writing difficult. On these days he will work poetry, either writing or revising. For prose writing he cites a need to be awake, alert, and fresh.

With regard to writing prose, an additional component to Joe’s body-writing connection is one that is psychological in nature and some writing, specifically prose writing, is highly pressurized for and by him. He talks about the psychological implications to writing his prose:

*That’s [referencing prose] my chosen genre. My chosen field so... I’ve got to be perfect, which is awful, and it can’t, and I really want to turn, I really*
tune that down, but I don’t know how. It’s just kinda one of those things, once something’s in your head, how do you get it out?

The psychological implications have potential for limitations, specifically referencing the stumbling blocks or stagnation popularly known as writer’s block. With the question about whether he experienced writer’s block he was clear in his opinion that “there’s no such thing. That’s just being scared to write.” In his experience, just writing and continuing to put words on the page is a way to work around fear and anxiety about writing. Further, there is a connection between writing, the body and personal experience. For Joe this presents as another dimension of his body awareness. He talks about how significant his personal experience is with regards to writing prose and creating characters:

Um, with prose oftentimes, I mean what I’m drawing from are things I’ve seen, things I’ve experienced or done. Um, things I’ve read even. But it’s always, um, I mean, I don’t think I could write about something I’ve never learned anything about. I mean, if it was something I didn’t know about I’d be drawing from experiences to make conclusions. But when I write about, like, characters, like right now the book that I’m writing, it’s really a fiction, but it’s based on my father.

From here he goes on to say that characters he creates are based on aspects of himself such as personality, moods and emotions, struggles, experiences, and some of his idealism about an individual’s role, for example an ideal father. For other characters he draws from people in his life, family in particular. Like a well he can draw from,
personal experiences and observations provides a rich source of embodied knowledge that he uses to create his stories.

**Thoughts on Body Awareness**

Finally, I wanted to establish further understanding of what Joe’s impression of body awareness means to him. This was also meant to provide an initial context or starting point for how he views and where he positions his body in the writing process. Initially, he struggles to come to a definition, but what he provides gives a starting point for what he is thinking:

*I don’t think I could give a straight definition. There’re different things I’m kinda’ working on, like, since I’ve started this, I’m kinda’ working on, like, more the mind and body type deal.*

While Joe has body awareness and has made significant connections between his writing and his body in numerous ways, in the early stages of his participation he notes the same dichotomy of mind and body as separate entities. This works to establish his initial presence of the body, a starting point for awareness from his point of view and he speaks further on both the mind and the body stating...

*So, I think both affect each other, but you need to start somewhere. You start on one side or the other. I think it’s easier to start on the physical side. To get working out, I mean, when you get the endorphins, and I noticed that my mood was better when I worked out in the morning, throughout the day.*

He continues expressing a desire to make more connections between mind, body, and writing by incorporating meditative or contemplative practice into his body awareness exploration.
The initial interview provided context and key elements regarding Joe’s writing practice and body awareness. Each participant was asked to keep a journal for the duration of this study. The next section presents Joe’s journal as evidence of his continuing process.

Joe’s Study Diary: Writing the Body

Joe kept a journal for the duration of his participation in this study. His study diary had 11 entries and was very detailed with written accounts of the impact of his various body awareness activities (exercise and meditation/prayer) had on his writing. What follows are some of the journal entries that chronicled Joe coming further into his body awareness. Again, certain wordings related to body awareness have been bolded.

Drawing Initial Connections (First Entries).

Joe’s first entry presents a list of physical and emotional turmoil he feels as a result of writing; he frames out how he will deal with anxiety, fear, avoidance, and fatigue by turning toward exercise to push endorphins. Highlighted are specifics about how Joe continues to come to awareness of his body through emotions and related physical sensations, as well as shifting perspective related to mind and body.

Usual issues I find with writing are a tight chest, avoidance, fear of wasted effort, dread, tiredness and a desire to move once I sit down. Still, I find a compulsion to write that pushes me past these issues, but I believe there is a way to minimize these issues and quite possibly eradicate them altogether. Since mind and body are tied together and exercise releases endorphins, I believe exercise will possibly be an effective treatment for the worrisome conditions which preclude sitting down to write fiction and poetry, my favorite forms of
Joe begins his journal with slight emphasis on the anxiety that certain types of writing induce within him. There is a change in how he speaks of the mind and body dichotomy; where he drew a disconnection in the initial interview, he now relays them as connected, “tied together.” Acknowledging writing as a means for release and for healing is significant and ties back to the work of Pennebaker (1999a, b; 2002; 2003) referenced earlier in this chapter. In this entry, Joe begins to connect his exercise practice to his body, his body to his writing process, as evidenced by his heightened focus and confidence, yet disruptions to writing begin to occur as a result of these intense workouts. Specifically he talks about shaking hands due to boxing and weight training. He notes changes in his ability to sit and concentrate on writing as a result of this workout stating that his “focus and confidence is heightened.”

Contrasting this alertness and ability to focus, Joe notes changes in his body as a result of not exercising, which he implicates as having a direct effect on his writing. His journal entry captures this experience:

…I stayed up late last night so I did not get up to go to the gym today. The results have had an effect on my writing. Until this afternoon, when I decided to drink two cups of coffee, I have been nodding off at my desk. At one point, while revising a poem, I fell asleep while trying to come up with a better word. My response was to go for a little walk, which helped with the drowsiness. In the end, I did get to finish revising my poem and I sent it out to various places for publishing. A note on my mood—drowsiness gives that “Que sera sera” feeling. I could easily see that my writing would be sloppy in this state, but I am benefiting
from the lack of energy to have the “you are not worthy,” debate. -position is laid back, relaxed...

Lack of sleep and not working out have an impact on his writing. His drowsiness being averted by a short walk that enables him to continue writing shows how exercise, even light exercise, is able to provide a boost to his writing. A surprise is this “que sera sera feeling” he notes, that being tired limits the emotional turmoil that has before impacted or inhibited his work allowing him to be more “laid back, relaxed.”

Increasing Awareness with Meditation and Prayer.

In the first interview Joe expressed a desire to explore meditation practice as a way to connect body and writing. In this section of his journal he begins discussing that exploration with meditation, prayer, and walking meditation. In this entry chronicling his foray into meditation, further connections to body emerge. He writes:

...I started my morning with meditation and prayer and found that my day went as well as when I exercised. I did not get to the gym because I gave in to fatigue from sleep issues. I found that a nap, followed by more meditation, made it easier to write. I spent a lot of time in thought and preparation before starting the 20th chapter of my book and found myself leaning back in my chair as I contemplated new parts of my writing. The words I used in my writing seemed to be more precise and I was able to pull depth from all angles of my characters, from the way they moved to the way they spoke. I found that my writing was slower, more labored, and I was less anxious about my abilities to write the story. It is important to note that this part of the fiction was hard to write because it dealt with my mother’s funeral and the whole book deals with the effects of her...
suicide among other things. I do wonder if the fact that I am writing about something that is so close to home is what is stalling my writing of this book and turning me to poetry as a break. In any case, the tightness of my body, the dread—it was removed from my writing processes last night and I managed to lay down 780 words.

His novel is based on real events experienced in his life and he did lose his mother to suicide. He does not clarify whether this was his biological or adoptive mother. The emotional intensity of what Joe is writing about has a clear impact on him physically yet he continues to mention the feeling of a need to write. Additionally the use of meditation before writing had an impact of slower writing pace, preciseness of language, depth of characterization and perhaps most noted, his lack of anxiety. While the subject matter is obviously difficult, the impact of meditation enables him to further bring together body and writing as an embodied practice.

Disruptions, Derailments, and Deterrents.

Physical pain is a powerful disruptor and can not only disturb the best intended writing session, it can affect all aspects of living. There is an emotional turmoil of being put out of activities or rendered incapable that is exhausting as well. Joe’s pain as a result of overused joints or prior hip injury creates an obstacle to be maneuvered to progress in his writing. Earlier references to his hands shaking and in pain from boxing speak to this impact. He begins this journal entry by highlighting the painful disruptions that hinder his writing process.

...I went for a half hour walk before writing and when I began to write, there were several outside factors causing interference. One was the simple fact
that I overdid it with my joints and they were causing me a lot of pain which affects the way I sit when I am finding myself highly engrossed in my writing. While I do have an ability to push this pain to the back of my mind, I find it easier to become frustrated when I am stuck in a writing scenario due to the dual dilemma of controlling pain and trying to process thoughts. I also felt a bit sad which drove me to take a nighttime stroll. Side note, the part I was writing was about the protagonist abandoning half of his family. This could be a reason for the sadness as I am often so immersed in my writing that I can see the people and almost hear them speak or feel their adrenaline and sadness responses.

This is no different than the movies. Good writing should do that.

For Joe, this diary served a meta-cognitive purpose and enabled him to hold a mirror to his practice, providing him with insight into the connections both emotional and physical that he has with his writing. His contribution via reflection has reinforced some themes which are emergent in participant data that connecting to past experiences holds keys to his writing today; that body awareness and writing equal a state of flow or “zone” as Joe calls it; there are visceral, emotional, and real bodily reactions to his writing; and the very act of writing itself is healing. Most important is the coming to awareness of his body that he has reconstructed in a more holistic and embodied manner, noting all the ways his body has connected to and impacted his writing, in some cases vice versa. The next section begins to draw Joe’s body awareness story and participation to a conclusion. The final interview is presented.

Final Interview: Body and Writing Connected

The second interview with Joe took place right before he moved to NYC to
pursue graduate school in creative writing, bringing his participation to a close one week earlier than the 6 week duration. His reflections and insights in this interview provided continuation rather than finality to his story of body awareness. I asked him what his participation in this project has been like and he states that

*It’s been good, because I’ve been paying attention to what, well, what I do before writing that helps me write better. I tend to think, ‘cause of all the time in the military, I tend to shut down outside influences without even noticing. You know, if I’m hurting, or feeling good, or even like, mental stuff that’s going on outside in the world. And I think I realize it still has an effect, whether I put that block up or not. There’s still an effect there.*

After participating in this research study, some questions regarding his writing process and whether his body awareness practice changed or influenced his process were asked. Joe stated he made no definite decisions to change anything specifically, but wants to continue to exercise. He also mentioned in his journal and the first interview visceral sensations, and I wondered if he had continued to experience this or had a sense of his writing in a certain part of his body.

*Definitely. Um, I actually felt really down in the dumps after writing the last part of, it’s like the second, a chapter and a half left of my book. This chapter just keeps growing. It’s probably going to end up becoming two chapters. But, um, I did, I was writing about a part where the character has to pretty much split with his family. You know, some of his family. And I think that was like, it almost felt as if I was going through it myself. And there was like, I didn’t really think about*
it but there was a, I was just down in the dumps like, "I gotta get out of this apartment." I went out and hung out with some friends just to get away from it.

Joe clearly has a deep connection to his characters and to the emotions of his characters, which he has indicated is based on his life and personal experiences. These experiences allow him a deeper connection not only to characters and situations he creates through writing, but also demonstrates a stronger, more developed link between his body awareness and his writing. This feeling of going through what his characters were experiencing is embodied writing. Specifically I asked him to describe the connection manifesting between his body and his stories:

Well everything's kind of connected, so if I'm feeling down in the dumps, there's a different way that I move, less energy kind of things of that nature, you know. If I'm excited, I'm writing, um, what have a written that's really, I haven't written anything really that happy (laughing). But there have been times when you're writing scenes that are really, like, high-climax and my energy is up during that time. Usually by the time I stop it's because I'm just beat. Um, and there have been other one's too that, like, the one story I wrote was, um, kinda a relief by writing it. Kinda gave me a sense of...feeling like really just good about things. Just a sense of relief from some of those things, so it was kinda cool.

To enhance and facilitate the connection between writing and the body he shared with me that his body awareness activity consisted of numerous activities that he felt had meditative qualities to them, such as walking and swimming; he also sat for meditation and prayer, which he describes:
It's not like, a Buddhist-type meditation, it's more like, I'm sitting there thinking about what I'm doing, what I'm writing, you know. It could be anywhere from five minutes to half hour. I, like, usually, like, I'll take a notepad and start scribbling notes in it. And, uh, that is one way I can meditate. I'll sit back and I'll think about this character what they're going through, what they're thoughts are, what reflections they have, what kind of, uh, reactions they might have. And so that's what the meditation would do for me. As far as that goes, I'm very relaxed when I'm going through that.

Joe’s experience in the study seems to hint at further exploration or a continuation of his body awareness practice, rather than presenting as a tidy ending to a well-written novel. When asked at the end of the interview about his level of body awareness and whether it had changed at all, he noted that there was an effect on his writing and that he would like to continue to go on walks before writing. He further acknowledges the importance of walking and meditation as a significant take-away from participation in the study, enabling him to plan story and characters. He indicates at the end of the interview that he will continue his body awareness practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

MIMI

At 64 years of age she has been writing and making art since her childhood. She grew up in what she calls a pretty normal family in northern New Jersey with an English mother and American father. Ever since she was little she wrote in a notebook and kept a journal, but at the time mainly kept her writing private. Being recognized and encouraged by an adult figure, specifically a teacher when she was nine years old was a significant early experience that impacted her to continue to write and explore her creativity. Mimi identifies herself as an “artist who writes,” but specifically calls herself a poet, rather than a writer and says that words come into her head when she makes her art. As an artist she has won award and recognition for her collage art that often incorporates poetry as part of the composition. She continues to work as an artist and poet.

Initial Interview: The Body and Writing Connection

Mimi’s story presents an evolution of coming to awareness of how body awareness can impact her creative processes of writing poetry and art making, which are closely tied together. Through her stories emerged connections to the universe, nature, spirituality and intuition, as well as whether she uses her body awareness practice for healing purposes. Her body awareness story progressed through initial confusion and hyper-awareness where all movement of her body was noted; to drawing her attention to her body through movement and exercise; making connections and assertions about her body awareness activities to her creative practices of poetry and art making; to a strong sense body awareness. For clarification, Mimi calls her poetry and art making “creativity”
and while the term may connote a process and be defined in certain ways within academic discourses, the term is used here because Mimi uses it. Her “creative processes” are writing poetry and making art, which are components of the same piece that’s produced. Creativity to Mimi is the writing and art making process and she uses the word interchangeably.

This chapter provides Mimi’s story of body awareness and writing, and to focus and draw attention certain wordings have been placed in boldface as a way to highlight attention to the body and emotions without disrupting the flow of the narrative. The intention is to highlight evolution of thought, acknowledgement of physical and emotional changes that resulted because of her writing and body awareness activities.

**Interconnected Processes: Writing, Art, & the Body**

In the first interview I asked her to tell me about her process of writing, to which she says she does longhand writing in a journal book; a preference she claims allows her to think about words in a way that typing doesn’t. According to her writing is not a

*It's not a foreign process, so it's all incorporated in my artwork, in my breathing, and my whatever... It's, it's just me, it's what I do. I think all writing is healing, because it just gets anything out. If you've ever read Julia Cameron's "The Artist's Way," and "The Mourning Pages." I mean, I just write like I breathe.*

This simpatico of writing and breathing shows how natural her writing is to her almost functioning as an extension of her body. In this way she begins to make connection between writing and the body. Because Mimi identifies herself as an artist who writes she wanted me to see how the two go together. To further explain her work
she shows me one of her books that incorporates her long poem and collage art. She tells me about the process of putting it together:

"This is a book that I just did, and I did an edition of them for Al Mutanabbi Street, which is in Baghdad, and it was bombed. So, I made the art. So, I made the art, and then I wrote this really long poem. There are my illustrations, and my collages, underneath is Goyal’s drawing from war, disasters of war, and I cut them all apart, and scribbled. And then I made these flowers. And then I made bombing scenes, cause I like to make stuff. I wrote the poem after the whole thing was done. I made an addition of three, and sent them off to this man. So this is the man’s note back to me. [She instructed me to read the note, which said:

"Dear Mimi, Sorry to have not gotten back to you sooner. Your books are beautiful and thoughtful. A fine addition to the project. Your poem doesn’t just complement the images, but really moves to take the idea of the book and” "Ahmuhabi Street further into our psyche. It’s really good writing, Mimi, and also has some of the feeling of an accomplished Middle Eastern storyteller.”

"Isn’t that weird?" She interrupts, and she sees it is a kind of serendipity, it is something that holds larger significance for Mimi and her view of what she puts out into the world in the form of poetry and art and where the source of inspiration comes from, not just what she occasionally gets back in the form of feedback. She speaks (and writes in later journals) about “channeling the universe” and that ideas just come to her from an unnamed source. I continued reading the letter: "Thanks for putting so much of yourself into this and thanks for passing this on to other artists. One day our paths will cross and
we will break bread together and talk of many things." Wow. Mimi is beaming when I finish reading this letter. She says,

Isn't that cool? When I write, I have no idea if anybody at the other end will have any kind of clue what the hell I'm talking about (laughs). Because it could sound crazy, you know.

For Mimi, the artwork and the writing are so clearly connected and when one is being physically created, the other is being formulated within her head. It’s an interesting process, and so interconnected. She sees it as an interconnected process that “comes together in a sieve. Kind of filters in from the universe. I can't tell you how that happens, because I don't know if that's inspiration, or, you know, I've had fifty lives and I can just go, "Oh, wait! I'll be a Middle Eastern storyteller."

While facetious, her comment does raise the question of where her inspiration comes from and while she doesn’t pick one specific place, she is highlighting the possibility of inspiration drawing on the experience of living life. While experiences are always viewed through interpretation and can be ambiguous, its influence on expression and the body becomes less murky when viewed through the lens of Merleau-Ponty. Embodiment works as an understanding and expression of experience that is reached along with experience (Balazac, 2003, p. 110). According to Merleau-Ponty poetry and artwork are embodied expressions in the sense that what is “expressed does not exist apart” from it’s creator (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 166). It is a way of knowing and creating that is influenced by experiences of living and moving in the world, what Merleau-Ponty (1945) calls a “simultaneous patterning of body and world” (p. 189) and
from these connections can be made between process and the role of the body within that process.

**Discussing the Body in Writing**

Mimi talks about her writing process and states that it is “motion,” meaning that her body position changes when she’s writing or making her art. It wasn’t until she injured her ankle that she noticed standing on one foot to create art or sitting off her feet entirely to write. Mimi’s ankle injury brought a deeper sense of her body and made her more aware; especially of the way she positions her body to do her work. As an example, she says that she will “usually sit and write. I don't know, I guess it, maybe, in my body; it's more about breathing.” Her extensive practice with yoga and yoga’s focus on meditative breathing may have implications for her view of writing as calmer, more intrinsic, and natural, like breathing. This falls in line with thinking and positioning the body as absent until we are forced either through illness or injury to recognize, think about, and deal with the body. It’s another form of absenting, but in Mimi’s case it enables her to rethink and reconfigure her body through this awareness.

Acknowledging that her writing is a natural and internalized process, she was asked if there were places in her body that she could identify sensations or awareness when she writes her poetry. She responded that it was less about physical sensations in the body and more of what she calls a “Whoa!” which she describes in the following way:

...*But it seems like something comes in from out, I don't know. That's the part I can't really figure out. You know, I don't know where it comes from.*

*(Laughs). You know, it's like, "Whoa, that's a good idea." I mean, like, I woke up*
one day and I said, "You need to write a play." And then I started noticing dialogue. I started noticing how people talk. But I don't know, I mean, maybe in a hundred years when I'm dead and they read it, I can't guarantee it will be produced this year. But I sort of think, you know, there must be a reason for all kinds of craziness. (Laughs).

This description by Mimi of “something comes in from out” reflects Merleau-Ponty again in that “expression is everywhere creative, and what is expressed is always inseparable from it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 391). Perhaps Mimi’s view of her poetry and inspiration is existential, or there is the possibility that poetry is a “more immediate manner of knowing, to a less exact yet more comprehensive way of being in the world… a fully embodied sense, the poetic sense of the world” (Balazac, 2003, p. 113). This way of knowing that Mimi expresses concisely in her poetry and artwork draws further connection between her body and writing, which she does connect by writing about and in response to her art. She explains and elaborates on this process:

I write, yeah. And mostly, it's phrases and ideas that seem to jog me for some reason. I mean I don't write about yoga, or, I can't honestly say. You know, that there is any, I mean, I guess if I was writing about my broken ankle I could...I did do a whole book called "Wrestling the Volcano" while I couldn't walk. Because I had to stay off my foot for seven weeks. But poetry comes from a different stream. I think my brain is divided in two sections, because if I'm making a lot of art, I don't really write. I have to make myself write. Because my brain doesn't seem to work that way. I don't know what it is. And then, I'll be all finished, and then I'll write. I think it's a process. So, I think that it's something
that's important that I should be doing whether I should or not. It's not that there's any, and, and it's the same way with words. I mean, it's like, once you start moving your hand something will happen, even if you write bullshit.

**Thoughts on Body Awareness**

To understand the context of Mimi’s body awareness in connection to her writing she states that she doesn’t necessarily visualize herself as part of her writing, but she does write from her experience. She believes at this point that her writing is connected to something bigger than herself and she states again that she feels as though she is “channeling the universe for some reason.” At this point in her participation she makes connections between her body and writing through breath and the act of breathing in more of a spiritual context. Her ability to connect her writing to body awareness evolves as is recorded in her journal. In the initial interview she describes her body awareness as it pertains to her injured ankle and more specifically to her yoga and exercise practice, which she describes in the following excerpt. She is only talking about her body awareness practice; she is not connecting to writing at this point. She explains her body awareness practice and activities linking them to staying in shape and for overall health.

*I do yoga...mostly I walk, and, I mean, I've walked forever, ‘cause walking is really good thinking. In the summer, I swim. I don't ski, or I mean, outdoors, I still walk in the winter even when it's freezing in winter. Yoga, I've been doing about four or five years cause I don't want to, I mean, I don't care if I die, (laughs) but I don't want to get decrepit. You know, so I figure I better start something, because the difference between forty and sixty is amazing, and I'm in pretty good shape for an old person. I mean, I'm not old but you know you notice*
that your body changes and it's like, "What's the point of this?" Clearly, God is not a woman... But I mainly do yoga to just stay in shape. I mean I'm not the kind of person that would go to the gym. And I mean, all the repetition, it's boring. At least yoga moves through a series of things and then it's over (laughs). So I’m going to do this for an hour. But now I'm doing Zumba. And this is funny, because after physical therapy I still have exercises I keep moving my foot, you know. And I said, "Can I go to Zumba?" And they said, "Oh, yeah. If you want, you can do that." And it's easier I mean, first of all in Zumba you don't sit down. You stay on your feet, and it's the getting up off the floor in yoga that now I'm not fast enough. So, I mean cause I have to put my foot a certain way. So, in doing Zumba, I can do all the moves that, you know, I can do. And so it's really helpful for my, my ankle, body, and whatever.

The ankle has been a catalyst for her discovering aspects of her body awareness and paying attention. Her ankle, while only mentioned in the first interview becomes a focal point during her journaling and it become clearer through Mimi’s participation writings that this injury has had a significant impact on her life because she does mention it so much. As a final point to the interview and to further contextualize a starting point for her body awareness she was asked to offer a definition of body awareness, that she defines as

**paying attention to your body**, and if it hurts or feels funny, you need to figure out what this is about. Oh, well, I'll tell you one more thing. I just thought of this. When (laughs) my mother, who lived with us for five years before she died, um I could see the decline, she was ninety-six when she died, so it wasn't as
though it was "Oh, dear. I can’t believe Mother is going to die." But how if you don’t take care of yourself, um (laughs) it’s going to be way worse when if you live to ninety-six. It’s another thing of paying attention.

Mimi’s Study Journal: Writing the Body

Mimi kept detailed and extensive journals chronicling her participation. Within this journal she wrote extensively, at least 2-3 pages daily for the full six-week duration. At about the three-week point, halfway through the scheduled duration of the study, I checked in with her to see if she had any writing or thoughts she wanted to share. Because writing and art are so closely linked in Mimi’s writing process, she invited me to see her studio to give me a better sense of where, how, and why she works. This day I also picked up her first journal.

Located on the third floor of one of Lancaster’s earliest homes, climbing the steep staircase is an ascent into a very personal and intimate world- the workspace of a writer and artist. Upon receiving the journal and seeing her private studio, it struck me that all Mimi produces or aims to produce is so distinctly Mimi; even the black and white speckled composition book had been transformed into a collage of vibrant color, both deep and rich, that spoke with an impressive individuality and authenticity. Again the message seems to be that whatever Mimi touches becomes an extension of who she is; her creativity is the expressions of her poetry and art. If Mimi’s poetry and artwork are both extension of Mimi and of her embodiment; her space is an explosion of this manifestation. We spend the better part of a morning in her studio and I felt as though I walked into and became a part of this living breathing and changing collage. She showed
me her artwork and explained her process and poetry, which she writes about in her journal in an entry dated for the day before I arrived in her studio:

_Funny how it is all a random process and comes together as its supposed to or _the universe brings it to me _and I am just a creative conduit / its partially walking back and forth flipping through my source material and laying out the series. Maybe its anticipation but its interesting and exciting at the same time._

_My body is relaxed into some sort of knowing- this works- this doesn’t…_

The journal provided a clear glimpse at an evolution through observation, questioning, and contemplation of body awareness. Her journal is written in a very stream of conscious style, which is preserved in the transcribing. Bolding of certain wording to draw attention to body awareness and continue the flow of the narrative continues in this section. The following excerpts and entries tell Mimi’s story of body awareness.

**Drawing Initial Connections (First Entries)**

Her first journal entries sought to find placement for her body and she wrote a lot about the ways her body moves, “how the knee bends- the ankle rotates.” She expresses a desire to become more body aware and as she worked to find footing there was uncertainty expressed in her journaling about whether what she was recording in her journal was correct, stating that she _hoped she wasn’t writing the same things over and over_” and “_wonder if there is a right way to keep this journal._” In these beginning entries there was a noting of every movement outside of the body awareness practice, “_how the knee bends going up or down stairs, how the toes curl or the foot arches…reaching, standing on tippy toe to get something up high._” or the context of
writing her poems or making her art, possibly signaling some initial hypersensitivity or hyper-awareness of the body, which was acknowledged as a potential limitation.

As her time as a participant progressed, she notes the necessity of moving her body, especially when she was working with a local youth theater camp, in which her job was to lead students through exercises and movements before they performed. In addition to the theater, increased attention to her body through her body awareness activities (walking, yoga, swimming, and Zumba) she pays more attention to her body. She notes an added perk is more confidence and comfort with her body. From this additional awareness of her body, she begins to make connections between her body and her poetry and art. Mimi writes about walking and exercising as a way into ideas and creativity:

Creativity from walking cause I get good linking ideas- who knows why?

Its as if there is a direct plug to the universal consciousness a shot from the stars... or sun... Floor exercises- swinging arms up- over head- then in reverse-hanging and leg lifts- shoulder stands- it’s a whole routine and then running through the play two times. Zumba tonight- feel so good for my ankle and it really gets the blood flowing... wonder if there is a right way to keep this journal? Movement and body awareness or does the creative part come from doing... collages in notebook- guess its personal how I do my process and that it works for me. Movement twenty-minutes walking and then my 1.2 hour of exercise yoga, modified dance routines to strengthen core, has to be good and glad to be seeing the process of how the theater company comes together. Bending stretching leg lifts- hand and relax- tighten stomach- flex and its good the morning after Zumba-
to get the movement… wonder if I do too much leg lifts and hopping- but it’s a process and I feel younger doing it… thinking is all part of this art process- breathing and the goy that goes into it- a real part of my life… Walking and another beautiful day- and swinging my arms- think all this thinking about movement makes all the comings and goings a part of this body awareness plan. Have to think! That it’s all connected to the paying attention to the self the day and what it contains.

Increased Awareness With Movement

It is about this point in her journaling a change is emerging; she begins to make specific connections between her body movements and her creative process. I think it is important to note that her change in thought regarding the connection between her body and her work came with uncertainty, which she wrote about in the last entry. The questioning and uncertainty manifests and seems to signal a beginning reconfiguration of the body as connected to her process of writing and art making, which for Mimi are very much intertwined. What also starts to emerge is a larger connection to the world around her as feeding her creativity and she writes, “there is something wonderful about summer…Body awareness is the physical bridge to creativity.”

From these experiences she states that her “body awareness is constant motion” and “paying attention to writing and body makes me more aware and in the moment.” With these entries and those to follow there’s a distinct shift in the way Mimi articulates body awareness and connections to her poetry and art creation become more specified and poignant. She works to understand all facets of the connection between her body and
poetry, questioning whether performance and reading her poetry “counts” as body awareness, as is written in her journal

A question for body awareness does reading my poetry at the Lancaster Poetry Exchange count? Aware of thinking and standing projecting voice! And glancing up to look into the faces of audience count? Such a good evening! So many of the poets say they are amateurs but their poems are so heart-felt… and beautiful! Spent the afternoon in the studio started a new series- just a big creative burst- even it its hot in the studio with the fan on me it’s body awareness. Am aware of how the body and mind work together - it’s a sense of peace of wow of inspiration—a day of this and I feel infused with my creativity.

Channeling the Universe: “Coming in From Out”

At the end of journal #1, Mimi notes the change or shifts in her perspective about body awareness of the body and the connection to her poetry an art saying, “paying attention, it’s a constant now, reality.” Additionally in her journal she includes the following excerpt quoting from Progroff’s (1992) At A Journal Workshop, which shows that she has been exploring these concepts and doing some research on her own to further understand the connection between body and writing

…There’s an ingrained stream of images and recollections within each of us. The stream is nothing more or less than our interior life. When we enter it, we ride it to a place where it wants to go. He says this not in a discursive method, not analytic. “There’s no neat wrap-up: you don’t end with an insight. It’s an event, and when it’s happened, your life is different.” Robert Blair Kaiser
about Ira Progroff- At a Journal Workshop, which is how this process has been for me! Paying attention is a constant new reality...total body mind.

This emergent theme in Mimi’s writing is the shifting awareness and perspective of the body’s importance to her poetry and creativity. She begins to frame her work through a wider lens; one that now encompasses her sense of knowing as drawing from her body as well as her intuition. This shift also repositions the mind – body split as well and she no longer is viewing the mind or thinking as the sole process to her creativity. The shift in perspective of body awareness present at the end of her first journal was even more evident in this continuation of her participation experience, where she talks about connecting to spirituality and intuition. It is more of a holistic process for her.

Being in the moment- being aware the now of presence is what creativity is based on- its in each moment- its in trusting my intuition in the art I make its an instinctive knowing that for collage- its this and not that it’s moving things around on the page until it works- its not intellectual- its instinctual- its an ah-moment- its not so much thinking as knowing when it happens. Think body awareness works along the same lines. Deep in your being you hold a vast reservoir of wisdom and knowledge that barely gets tapped as you live your busy life. Your inner world holds the rhythms of your psyche, the seeds of your destiny and the flavor and fragrance of your unique self as it has been shaped and formed by the love of your creator and the infinite wonder of creation. In short, your inner being holds your truth. This is the treasure that resides, hidden...
I am reminded with these excerpts and the ones that follow of Merleau-Ponty (1945), who wrote about the body as being reflected into the landscape of the world, as well as the landscape mirrored back to us, in essence drawing a larger connections between ourselves, our experiences, the world, each other. She also writes about our being holding wisdom and knowledge, which ties to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of sedimentation, where experiences and journeys we take become part of who we are, blending in, and unable to be separated out from who we are. Her journal becomes more philosophical as she evolves toward a deeper sense of body awareness. The perspective of her body she offers through her journals is one clearly reconstructed, from body and mind, to this holistic and deep understanding of the body, hinting at larger connections to the universe, to a larger spirituality, and tie to the natural world.

Writing about the body in this active and reflective way yields meditative qualities that provide a window into deeper body awareness. Part of what is emergent and central to Mimi’s experience is that body awareness is linked to her writing and art with strong pulls into a larger, cosmic (“channeling the universe”) and spiritual realm. She talks about coming to realize these connections in the following way:

*The writing about body awareness has made me think more about walking and how healthy it is for everything. It’s a way of slowing down and seeing more of what is- maybe the car is not about the body since it’s paying attention in another way. And this is the funny part, when I find these small books again they are new and I am almost surprised I made them, created the art and the writing. It’s all random and linked somehow but really can’t explain it. It’s a form of meditation to do this and be lucky enough to have this in my life this time and this*
is off topic- but think some of this deep felt knowing is from awareness of other lives and experiences that have been internalized or in the atoms and molecules of my body. Life is poetry if I stop and pay attention to the moment each moment, which is why life is full.

Through her journaling about her writing an evolution clearly takes place: from one of uncertainty and desire to know the body as part of her writing and creative process to a deep, mindful and philosophical reconfiguring of her body as holistic and connected to her writing. A repeated theme is a link to spirituality, when she talks about her body as a conduit for channeling the universe, as a means to inspiration for her poetry and art. She mentions the concept of flow to describe her movements and process. Her mentioning of flow to describe her movement as she makes the art and poetry is another theme that is recognized as part of her experiences. This idea of flow is not an out of body experience for her, rather it is fully engaged. Additionally she cites the importance of past experience (she wonders if they are “past lives”) as being part of the make-up of our being, embodied and manifesting as products of inspiration and creativity. The meditative quality of her body awareness activities additionally emerged as a theme directly associated with her writing. It is interesting and noteworthy to see this described by her as she talks about her process.

Final Interview: Body and Writing Connected

The second interview with Mimi took place about 8 weeks after the study began. Her writing for this study consisted of journaling as a daily activity and poetry that is based on ideas from her artwork. Her reflections and insights in this interview demonstrate a learned and reconfigured sense of her body, a deepening of her writing and
creative processes. Present in Mimi’s reflection are threads of spirituality and intuition, which she continues to explore and work to understand. I asked her what her experience of being in this project has been like for her and if there was a significant aspect of her participation. She stated that she writes everyday and that a goal for this project was to focus on connecting to body sensations and intuition, what she calls “that cool gut feeling when I just know.” Further for Mimi, the most significant part of her participation is her realization that the writing she does, her poetry, must be very different from what she calls “real writing,” which must reference longer works, short stories, novels, etc, since she often times will write poetry after her art is created and its a different sort of writing; She lets the images she creates be used as the stating point for the writing to see where it goes from there.

For clarification, the writing done by Mimi for this project was journaling, as a daily activity and poetry, which is based on ideas from her artwork. She likes the process of I writing and thinking on the page. It provides her a place to “sort of a rant and purge and I can go on to creative things!”

Because Mimi makes a living through her creative processes of art and writing, I wondered if she noted any changes in her processes since beginning or incorporating body awareness practices. She states that she is thinking more and being more aware of her body and realized how useful it is for “grabbing the intuitive” aspects of her process. Because she identified her process so deeply, the question of bodily sensation was presented to her, specifically whether she gets sensation in certain parts of her body when she writes or even if she could describe how she feels when she writes. The “process of settling down to write is grounding” for her, especially since she’s been writing and
journaling for so long, and yet there wasn’t a specific place identified in her body but she highlights her “creative spirit” as seemingly having the “hand/eye/mind connection” that is “pretty fluid and everywhere”. This intuitive aspect, the “just knowing what she is doing is right “is tied directly to her poetry and art which she further demonstrates:

My poetry writing is based on my art...and what I am putting down on the page, along with paint, collage, additions really tends to form what I am writing.

In making art its from the body: shoulders, movement...to reach and find the exact piece of thing I am needing to place on the page; my body is intuitive and seems to know more than my brain. Writing is hand to eye coordination, as is my art making...its a flow that is all connected and not really easy to explain in words. It’s the whole of the process. And a bit of fun!!

While she makes connections here between body and writing, her individual body awareness activity was a catalyst to understanding it. Mimi cites the importance of walking and thinking, and how this enabled ideas to happen:

It could be doing something different frees up a part of the brain and lets me receive good ideas from the universe. Art and writing seem to go together for me. I wrote maybe 3 pages longhand, 1/2 an hour or so each morning and then I head to the studio to work

From all of this her level of body awareness has changed. She talks about her mind/body connection as being good and a means to be in tune with the whole of her. There is a new, evolved awareness that the body is all connected in her process, that it helps her to “focus on the whole, which art, writing, and journaling” does for her. Her final words speak to the discoveries she made about her process through participation, and she talks
about how much time she spends thinking about and being aware of how her body and process is involved in the daily activities. She spent a lot of time thinking about and processing her body awareness participation. Finally, her participation is

...Building on what I normally do - and will see if I can continue to sustain this summer creative jolt!! It was fun and does take my whole process deeper.

**Synthesizing: Final Reflection on Participation**

As a final, summative component to participation in this study, Mimi was asked to provide a brief metaphor to demonstrate her thoughts about participation, her embodied learning, what her body knows, and about writing and the connection to her body. She writes

*I am quiet and the cicadas sing, I am sure that writing tells a story that is dropped from somewhere in the universe and lands in the ink inside my pen. I am certain that ideas tumble from clouds and splash in raindrops or teardrops. I am certain that body awareness, writing and paying attention, as I did with the month long study will make total sense later, as it is absorbed and becomes a part of my daily continued practice. Learning like this, I am my best teacher, healer: sitting in silence and stillness, walking and just being present with me.*

*I don't think that I ever think about breathing, yet it’s such an important part of self and being…the sound of the tides, in and out, just like walking barefoot in the sand at waters edge, leaving footprints as the waves go in and out. Along the edge, seashells glisten in amazing colors, the sound of a bell or a faraway foghorn. Time passes, the sunrises and sets, and time keeps time with my heartbeat.*
Funny how when I slow down so does the planet: Questions arise, is this theoretical physics? How will the earth it stay on its axis moving so slowly -
How do I find my center, write, and don’t think. Go back to the steady and slow of the tide. Does the 13th wave become longer or is it when that the stillness shifts? I don’t know and yet I know, I breathe and pause, it’s an eternity and a split second, silence rushes in and I catch that wave and write.
CHAPTER SIX

DAVE

At age 57, Dave is a CEO of a private non-profit organization that works toward prevention, intervention, and education about chemical dependencies. Writing and stories have always been a part of his life, shown as he recounts his earliest experiences with writing. He cites his father, an avid reader, and his grandmother, who wrote letters that kept his family connected, as early influences on his inclination towards stories. Growing up at the foot of the Blue Mountains east of Harrisburg, the rural setting provided plenty of room to roam, fueling his childhood with imagination and love of story that manifested into extensive reading where he would be lost and consumed in the story. His first significant experience with writing happened in 7th grade when he published a funny poem in the school newspaper and received support and accolades from his peers. From this point he would write sporadically until recently, in the last few years, he made the decision to become move from a hobby writer to giving his work serious attention and time. Dave now writes daily and he continues to work on his first novel, a piece of literary nonfiction, in addition to other works of short stories and more technical writings for work.

Dave’s story presents an evolution of coming to awareness of the body, but from a place that is already very body aware. As an athlete who has practiced martial arts for over 25 years, his practice allows him a more advanced understanding of his body, whether through physical sensation or discomfort to proper movements and techniques. Initially, he did not equate body awareness and his martial art to his writing process but this evolved and deepened over the duration of this study. His body awareness story tells
of visceral reactions to his writing, the full body engagement of flow, using his experience to tell stories, deep connections to his characters, to a fully embodied writing and sensibility of his writing. Throughout the narration certain words have been bolded to place emphasis on Dave’s deepening body awareness and to not disrupt the flow of his narrative.

Initial Interview: Starting Points for Body and Writing

To begin to understand the way Dave comes to stories he explains his writing process as less focused on plot but more of a nagging idea that gets into his head and won’t let go. He begins with a seed of an idea, a first thought or through the appearance of his character, that Dave describes as “the character began talking to me… and his story needed to be told.” From this starting point he has no idea where or how the story will go, but he just “lets it flow.”

He mentions flow, Cskszentmihalyi’s (1998) concept that explains a fully engaged and automatic way of being, doing or performing a task that is used other participants to describe their writing and with this a connection to body awareness begins to emerge. He describes how he feels when he is engaged in the flow of his writing process, which he initially says is “free, eternal, and timeless,” implying that his writing will remain after him. But then he goes on to describe it as a full immersion in that experience of writing saying,

But when I'm doing creative writing I'm completely lost in that experience.

I feel connected to the emotions of whoever, whatever I'm writing. So if I'm writing something that's heart-pounding, my heart will be pounding. If I'm
writing something that's incredibly sad, there will be tears in my eyes.

Whatever. I'm feeling whatever it is that I'm writing.

These strong visceral reactions signal deep connection to his experiences; it is especially telling because it speaks to the assertion that writing is a manifestation of embodied experiences. He further explains how his experiences impact his writing:

There’s always a piece of me, always a piece of my life, but it’s definitely not memoir writing. There are pieces of me in every character in one shape or form, but I don’t write stories about some executive director of a non-profit who, you know it’s my real life, not too much in it, in terms of surface kind of stuff. But obviously everything I’ve ever felt, you know difficult experiences as a child, embarrassing situations, joyful experiences, everything that I’ve experienced. I find a way to put those feelings into and sometimes the actual experiences, pieces of them are there.

His response is especially telling as it speaks to the assertion that writing is a manifestation of embodied experiences. Because he is feeling whatever he’s writing, his affective and emotional life is present in his writing. There seems to be an already established deep bodily connection to Dave’s writing, one that has had a use for healing in his past.

Writing and Healing Connections

His indication that his writing may at times address difficult memories and experiences, the potential connection to writing as a means of healing begins to surface. Pennebaker and colleagues in extensive studies on writing as healing found that writing about traumatic experiences has been a means to healing and coping, having numerous
benefits for overall wellness as well as making sense of life experiences. Specifically, Pennebaker and Seagal, (1999) noted links between writing about emotionally traumatic experiences having an impact improving physical and emotional health. Of additional significance is the study by Campbell and Pennebaker (2003) who determined additional benefits to writing about emotional experiences, noting decreases in anxiety, secreted stress hormones and lowering blood pressure. Dave additionally notes the healing capabilities of writing, specifically how he has utilized it in this capacity:

*In terms of healing emotional wounds from all throughout my whole life it's a way to understand them, or see them from a different perspective. Or to see them where a difficult decision to be made, or something like that. It's easier to let a character solve the problem than for me to solve it sometimes. So it does both. Sometimes, when I'm in the midst of writing, a character will say something that I sort of didn't know the character was going to say until I actually wrote it down. In some ways that will open up a wound from the past. And, at the same time it'll then provide the same healing to that wound that it opened up. So I think it does both; it opens wounds sometimes and it heals them.*

This use of writing to heal, along with the description of his writing process as flow, the influence of embodied experiences, and visceral reactions to his writing, his body has multiple dimensions and levels of involvement in his writing. He views his body awareness in his writing as multifaceted when he describes the different ways he’s aware of his body as part of writing.

The way he positions his body when writing can vary from sitting to lying down, but writing can also be a highly physical process for him. He states that he will actually
“move in accordance with whatever it is that I'm writing” going on to explain that he will put himself through the movements of the characters to accurately get a bodily sense of the action, resulting in better description. In one instance where he was writing a character rolling down a hill and hitting something at the bottom, Dave recounts getting “down on the floor and rolling and popping up, rolling and popping up, with something right in my face to make sure I really had it in my head.” In this way, Dave experiences an overlap as to what he knows through his body and what he already knows in his body. Creating the experience to learn what it feels like to roll down a hill and pop up makes this experience of his body, something he internalizes and can now describe in his writing. Actually having the experience prior to writing or creating the situation to experience what he wants his character to do or feel is a way that Dave connects body to writing. Experiences become part of who he is and provides a pool of embodied knowledge in which he can pull into his writing.

Body movement is an important component to his writing. His twenty-five plus year experience practicing the martial art Tae Kwon Do (TKD) allows him to get “super focused and kind of intense” and if he does TKD forms and breathing before writing it translates directly to his writing practice. He also states that the TKD while focusing, is not appropriate for all of the writing he does; something more relaxed or humorous requires less intensity. He pointedly says that he physically feels or will make himself feel what he’s writing to make sure it comes across in the story.

The Role of the Body in Writing
The attention paid to Dave’s visceral reactions to his writing and his already heightened sense of body, clarifications and further elaborations are called for, specifically with regard to awareness of bodily sensations in certain areas of the body.

First he cites physical discomforts, limitations, and specific health conditions related to aging and the disruptive quality it has on writing. But his experience is that through writing he has been able to not pay attention to pain or discomfort or lessen its impact by “making friends” with it, by acknowledging its presence. Outside of pain and discomfort he describes the sensation of writing as anticipation or as if he were entering a potentially dangerous situation:

*I still feel there's a sensation* when I know something’s about to happen in the story, but I don't know how it's going to go yet. *I have that same feeling as if I'm stepping out like when I used to live in a pretty rough section of the city.*

*It's kind of like stepping out onto that street at three o'clock in the morning, and waiting to see what's around the corner. It's something exciting is about to happen here. It could be something scary, it could be something’s about to happen. And I begin to feel that and I can feel it in my body as I'm getting close to that point while I’m writing. Sometimes I notice it after it happens because its just writing intensely at that point and then I kind of take a deep breath and look back; it's kind of like I just went through an experience or just after going through a fight. It's an adrenaline drain that happens then after that.*

**Disruptions to the Writing Process**

An emergent theme is the disruption the creative process has on the body, which came to light after he spoke about feeling tired after a writing session. As Dave
described the sensations of his body when he writes, certain things came to light; the most important being the disruptions due to physical pain and the level of exhaustion he experiences after writing sessions. Sleep disruption emerged as part of Dave’s narrative. His sleep is interrupted or put off because of ideas about stories and he says that he cannot go to sleep some nights unless he writes, which he admits is annoying. But once he is able to clear the thoughts through writing he cites restful sleep.

For some writers these disruptions of pain or interruptions in sleep may lead to difficulties in writing or so-called writer’s block. Dave does say he experiences these difficulties and how he is able to clear them through physical activity and movement, another way his body is connected and integral to his writing process. When he has days where words don’t flow and he can’t make the writing work, he walks away to do something else like kayaking, walking, biking, or going to the karate studio. The physical activity “clears his head” and he will either revisit the writing the same day or take a break until the following day.

There are days where and it’s usually in a rewrite more so than the first draft kind of thing. There are times where I know a paragraph or a whole scene needs to be rewritten and I just look at it and it’s like (sigh), I just cant make these words fit. I know there are other words to do this. I know there’s another way to present this. I just can’t do it. On those days I usually find it’s best to walk away from it and do something else, go kayaking, go take a walk, do karate, bike ride. This is very effective for his writing process and demonstrates the impact movement and exercise has for Dave, thus drawing further connection between his body and his writing process.
Body Awareness Activity

Since he is very active, I asked specifically what type of body awareness activity he would be practicing for this study. He began by telling me his experiences with physical activities, which are varied and extensive. His experience with practicing and teaching TKD for over twenty five years has been significant part of his life, not just providing him with physical health but mental and emotional well-being too. He believes in the perspective of TKD that the martial arts are not about fighting necessarily, but about uniting the body, mind, and heart as one unified whole. Dave additionally applied Csikszentmihalyi’s (1998) concept of flow to his martial arts practice saying that he loses himself in the traditional forms of TKD and it becomes hyeong or “moving meditation” for him. Dave explains “hyeong” to mean a form that are specific sequences of martial arts techniques resembling combat against an imaginary opponent. These are sometimes called katas and can contain between twenty to fifty or more movements. These hyeung became the focus of his body awareness practice. In addition to TKD he notes kayaking and the feeling “that my heart, my lungs, my mind, my arms, my legs, everything is all connected the way they’re supposed to be” to the kayak through movement as providing him another outlet for body awareness practice.

At the conclusion of the initial interview it became clear that Dave does already possess significant body awareness. But to get a sense of his perspective he provided his definition of body awareness, offering that stress makes him feel disconnected from his body, as not functioning as a complete unit, or that everything is separate. Stress is an awareness that the body is out of control. Body awareness is more peaceful and unified; it is the feeling that the “heart, lungs, arms, legs, everything are all connected the way
they’re supposed to be… just the same way I have the sense of the kayak, and of being connected to the kayak and the water.”

**Dave’s Study Diary: Evolving Body Awareness**

Initially upon reading Dave’ journal, there is a striking level of body awareness already present. He is an athlete; has practiced Tae Kwon Do for over twenty-five years and holds a 5th degree black belt. He also teaches his martial art.

In the beginning entries of his journal he expresses a desire to relearn a form of Tai Chi called Yana, which focuses on movement and breathing. But he encountered difficulty recalling it, even stating that he has “forgotten how to breathe,” feeling his breathe coming in his throat and chest, not the deep abdominal breathing that comes with meditation. The frustration he feels keeps him from writing even with aggressively doing push ups to relieve his frustration. Breathing becomes a focus for him and he works on finding his breath for calm, relaxation and focus which he frequently writes about:

*I begin some simple breathing exercises…left hand on ab, thumb in navel, right hand resting on the left, in and out, then drop my hands, close my eyes and find some calmness. My eyes twitch annoyingly and I breathe until the twitching stops. I recall how I used to find relaxation when I would settle myself enough to feel the pulse in my lips, so I wait for that. When I sense it, I continue to breathe for a few more moments and then open my eyes. I look out my kitchen window and follow the shape of a serviceberry tree. I am reminded of stories of how Native Americans used the branches of those trees for arrows because of their straightness. I feel a brief but powerful connection to something long ago… an understanding of that tree meaning more than just landscape artistry…*
Through this awareness of breathing Dave is able to settle into a more relaxed and comfortable state, readying himself for his writing. His connection to something outside himself, to other stories prompted by seeing the tree is powerful for him, and draws on his sense of body memory. Dave makes an interesting connection to something outside of himself as a way to momentarily center himself and collect thoughts. To Merleau-Ponty (1945), nature and the body are interrelated: “nature finds its way to the core of my personal life and becomes inextricably linked with it” (p. 405) and it is through the body that the world and nature is experienced. While Mimi identifies a connection to the larger universe, Dave’s citing of the connection to nature speaks to the larger theme of nature and it’s influence and impact on the body and the creative writing process. The natural and involuntary act of breathing has become a focal point for Dave. His connection between body awareness and writing process begins to deepen as he continues his martial arts practice.

“In the Zone” of Embodied Writing

Dave’s writing is impacted by the TKD and breathing exercises, which he next details in the next entries. This furthers the assertion that his body does play a role in his writing process. As his body awareness evolves there is a deepening of understanding and at times a surrendering to the writing. With the continuation of his practice, his journaling becomes more philosophical and introspective pointing to a change in his perspective on his writing-body connection as he discusses in the following journal excerpt where he starts with the impact of a tough physical workout at the karate studio:

*It was a physically tough workout, after I stayed up until a little after 2:00 to write. The intense physical activity allowed me to relax and focus on the*
writing….Began with breathing exercise and then did two TKD forms, concentrating on breathing throughout. Wrote approx. 2 hrs, did 3 forms, wrote for 1 hr, did 2 forms and wrote for another hour. The writing came easily, but I sensed I was missing something. It’s difficult to describe, but it’s as if I was just out of hearing range of someone trying to tell me something important…like I’m a reporter following the president who is trying to catch a train. I’m catching most of the words but know I’m missing something.

His practice continues with additional focus on breathing and how this impacts writing.

There is a deepening of understanding and at times a surrendering to the writing.

*Same breathing exercise* as yesterday afternoon followed by two forms, but just finished them at 6:45 a.m. *Feel calm and “smooth” in the sense of how my eyes take things in…grasp and hold what’s in my line of sight….objects have a fullness, not flat…they have a relationship to each other, one touching and flowing (almost speaking) to another.* Wrote without interruption until 10:15. Reading over what I wrote, I believe it has *some depth, some honesty.*

*Feels spoken by Burung (my story’s narrator), like I really listened to him.* Sit in ancho, close eyes and breathe. Fluttering in eyes stops. I sense tightness in lips. Relax them until I feel my pulse in them. Drink water and feel calmer. I wrote for 2 hours. *Maybe Burung wrote for me, I don’t know.* It flowed and I haven’t read it. *I feel a closeness to Burung’s story, a dreamlike sense that I am in it.*

Something unique emerges within Dave’s writing and there is a curious link between Dave and his character Burung. Described as a sinking into, Dave almost seems to channel Burung to tell his story, which I believe is an embodiment of his experiences.
as they are manifesting through his character. Interestingly enough, there have been links made between meditative breathing and writing some 30 years ago by Moffet (1980) noticing the process of breathing and visualization, enabling the meditator to gain access to inner speech or embodied knowledge. Further deepening into his body awareness and connections to his writing, he writes about meditative breathing as a way to relax, settle in, and better connect to his characters.

*I breathe my way into the early morning again.* Everything is rich, curved, burnished and asking to be explored. Glimpses of Burung, Arif and others who want to tell (and hide) their stories fade in and out of a mist in my mind. So I’ll write...4:15 p.m. – Did a lot of writing throughout the morning and up to about 1:30. Kept returning to the breathing and forms when I’d lose focus. Needed more intense activity around 11:30 when the story thoughts seemed to keep going in circles. The writing feels very “close in” to the characters...true to who they are and what they want to say...In my writing this morning my hands kept moving on the keyboard without much thought or effort. A couple of times I seemed to lose awareness of what I was writing. This afternoon when I read what I had written earlier, there were brief sections I didn’t recall doing, and at least at first glance, they look good. So, maybe little elves came in and wrote those sections; maybe I have early stage Alzheimers or maybe I was just “in the zone” for those sections. ...Sat in ancho position to breathe, then stayed on the floor to write without doing any tkd forms. Felt drawn in to the story...almost like my whole body being pulled right into the keyboard where the story lives. My back contended for attention and drew me back out of the story after an hour. Got up and did 3
forms, feeling each exhale connected to critical moves. Wrote on the sofa for another half hour.

Dave speaks of being “in the zone” and losing awareness, which is being contained in a state of flow. Called “experiential moments” and “full body engagement,” by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) flow is an all-consuming, embodied stream of conscious way of engaging the body in an effortless way. For him to write so closely to his characters draws upon his embodied experiences, making the writing more automatic, intuitive, and less focused in thinking. His journal continues to show the deeper connection between the breathing and physical exercises as a way for Dave to surrender into his writing. When Dave writes about his meditation as a way to gain focus, it is becoming clearer that his increased attention to his body has had an impact on his writing process as noted through his journaling:

*The body awareness exercises keep me “in” the story regardless of what time of the day I am writing, but in the mornings I am mostly outside of the characters and observant of the whole scene, while in the evenings I am mostly inside that scene’s main character looking out. Both viewpoints are helpful, but it would be nice to have more control over moving from inside to outside of the characters and from wide-angle to close-up views as well. The exercises I’ve been doing...breathing and tae kwon do forms...help me capture morning’s dreamlike observations, and they allow for an evening transition from the workplace strategic mind to the place where I can “hear” the story being “told” to me, but I either need a different exercise or the ability to apply the exercises I’m currently using to direct my mind’s ear and all of its other senses to the place in the story*
where I most need to listen or touch or smell or feel. In future sessions, I’ll see if I
can drift my awareness in and out of characters and choose whether to be inside
of one looking out or observing from the outside rather than letting the time of
day dictate the viewpoint...

Made the decision to use my morning breathing exercise as a time to
enter and stay in the mind of Burung (main character) and see, feel, experience
the scenes only from his POV. Found myself frequently drifting back outside to a
position of observer. That’s okay to be there, and I still have a pretty visceral
connection to the scene, but I’m looking for a way to anchor myself within a
character to stay true to his feelings and reactions.

“Knowing Down to My Ribs”: Feeling His Story

The problem of perspective Dave is having with his writing he works on through
his meditation and breathing sessions. This has given him the time and space to come to
the solution of envisioning his characters’ conflicts and relationships as objects, such as
“pressure” or “a crumbling dam.” Through doing this he is able to “more rapidly get in
and stay in the character’s mind and body after letting myself feel as much as possible the
weight of a dam crumbling onto me and trapping me below water…”

Through this exercise I could more rapidly get and stay in the character’s
mind and body after letting myself feel as much as possible the weight of a dam
crumbling onto me and trapping me below water. Although I’m not going to
drive myself all the way to a state of terror and panic every time I write a scene
with this character and his father, I’m already finding that the “crumbling dam”
tag is enough to freeze my gut and chest and keep me in a space that let’s this character kick and claw and fight for air.

Dave’s connection to his characters runs very deep and he takes great care in letting them tell the story. Previously he spoke about how physical the writing process can be as he rolled and popped to gain intimate perspective of what it looks and feels like to complete these actions. This knowledge is embodied becoming part of his repertoire of character actions to be described. The characters manifest what he knows, what he experienced and connects the writing directly back to his body.

Additionally through his body awareness activities his body evolved as something like a conduit for knowing, feeling, and sensing his writing in a very intuitive way. E describes this in relation to his writing:

I know down to my ribs what’s important about this scene, what each person feels in the tug of the conflict, how much they’ll fight to hold on, how it feels to be yanked off balance, who is going to give up first...all of it feels right, and I am connected to it, held in the warm mud of it. I did my breathing and two forms before reading over my scribblings about the scene I had reflected on in my last session. I recaptured the imagery of the conflict and focused on the question of what was drawing me into the conflict and into the scene. I let myself feel physically drawn into it to see what part of the story I was being led to. Amazing really. I ended up somewhere unexpected and wrote the scene from an angle I doubt I ever would have considered. It feels right. After breathing in ancho and doing one form, I re-read some past work and then closed my eyes to find the
sense of whether it felt right. That worked for one section I read. There was a kind of “hug” that was right for it.

This part of his body awareness evolutions is most telling and demonstrates his advanced simpatico of body and writing process. Through participation in this study with attention to body through meditation and breathing, Dave’s body clearly has an impact if not significant role in his writing process.

**Final Interview: Further Body Awareness**

The second interview with Dave took place about 8 weeks after the study began. He continued to work on his novel and completed a daily journal documenting his participation and evolution of body awareness. The reflections and insights provided in this interview demonstrate a deepening awareness of the role of his body in his writing process. Although at the beginning of the study Dave already possessed a keen sense of body awareness due to his athleticism and participation in martial arts practice, what happened here was the emergence of being able to sense and feel his writing, his characters in much deeper ways. He embodies his characters and they are extensions of him and his experiences. While he cites that his experience in the study have been positive he continues to understand the connections between his body and his writing which helped “discover better ways to sink quickly and deeper into the emotional content of my writing.”

A significant take-away from his experience as a participant has been giving senses, feelings, or conflicts tags or finding ways to name it as an object, which allowed him to link his body more closely with the particular relationship or conflict that he was writing. This strategy helped him be more consistent and get to the heart of the conflict,
which he feels is a more natural and intuitive connection between body and word. He talked in further detail about the strategy stating

    I tend to lose contact with the senses that are so important to my writing.

   Initially in this project, body awareness exercises helped me slow down the mind-racing strategic brain and let the limbic system take more of a lead in understanding the story. As I continued, I began to get occasional connections that linked my body more closely to the particular conflict or relationship I was writing about at that moment. Giving that sense a tag with a name and an image helped me gain more consistency in staying with what seemed to be the heart of the conflict or relationship.

This connection between body and word is still changing and evolving for Dave. He has discovered subtle differences in how his body feels when he’s writing about certain relationships and he now pays closer attention to those feelings. The verbal and visual “tagging” he does helps him pay attention and become fully connected with the goal of being emotionally true to the characters, their relationships, and actions. The body awareness exercises also allow him to take a break and check to see if he is still connected to the core of what he’s trying to communicate.

In his journal he started to talk about ways he was sensing the writing in his body, so he was asked to clarify this after his participation was concluded. He says

    When I’m writing well, I lose myself in the story, becoming the character or characters in the scene. During the writing itself I’m not always aware of my own body until I catch myself doing what my character is doing or reacting physically to what he or she is experiencing. Depending on what’s going on in the
story, I might find a coldness in my stomach, a tensing of my biceps, a widening of my face (I know that sounds strange, but it’s just a complete relaxation of it), a tightness around my chest or a warm feel of a hug.

He describes himself as a physically engaged person who is more focused when he is moving. What’s interesting is he goes on to explain that when he reads and writes his “body infuses with what he reads and writes” and his body “experiences what I am reading and writing.” The link between writing and his body he notes is achieved through physical activity, which words to attune him to his senses and once he reaches this feeling, the

“energy and awareness infuses with the writing. Coming the other direction are the feelings derived from what I’ve written. It’s a stretch to say this, but it’s analogous to having kids. Initially you create them, but in the interactions over the years, they recreate you. You feel their stories in your body the same as you feel your own story.”

Pushing this further, he talks about engaging his body in writing by doing what his characters are doing, in a sense become the character, connect to their experience, and allow himself to be recreated in a sense as the character to understand and fully embody his creation.

Finally, he sums up his participation by discussing how his level of body awareness changed, stating that while he is still learning from this project is acquiring a greater understanding of certain emotions and physical senses that cluster and then attach themselves to certain relationships, situations, conflicts and resolutions. For the sake of writing, he says he further understands and recognizes those clusters and truly feels them
in his bones, muscles and organs, and the more he knows his writing is tapped into the essence of the scene.

**Synthesizing: Final Reflection on Participation**

As a final, summative component to participation in this study, Dave was asked to provide a brief reflection to demonstrate his thoughts about participation, what he learned, and about writing and the connection to his body. He writes:

*As a young child, maybe four or five years old, I didn’t merely listen to stories. I felt them. Santa Claus made my heart pound with anticipation; the flying monkeys made it pound with fear. Word and body were one. But time and intellect conspired to divide the two as if each could stand alone, as if Romeo could stand without Juliet. We know one cannot live without the other no matter what tragedy they spawn together.*

*To write with felt sense is to write within a union between mind and body that is at once both necessary and impossible. To write with felt sense is to reach the soul of the conflict. It is to choose neither Romeo nor Juliet but rather to welcome the destiny of Romeo AND Juliet.*

*Finding new ways to reach into that sense and hold fast to it during my writing has brought me back to the power of the stories that gripped me as a child. My intellect is stronger than it was then, but it lacks depth unless it joins with what moves inside of me. This study has helped me reconnect my mind and body, my Romeo and Juliet. That union may prove tragic. Then again, it might produce some damned good stories.*
CHAPTER SEVEN

JOAN

Joan was born in Lebanon, PA right before the start of the second World War. Many families were supported by the steel foundries that lined the railroad cutting through town, and Joan’s family was no different. Because it was expected that girls would marry and not attend college, Joan’s parents placed her in commercial courses in high school which would give her skills for office work upon graduation. But her true desire was to become an English teacher and her love of the subject contributed to her earliest and significant writing experiences, including writing poems mimicking the styles of Laurence Ferlengetti and Bob Dylan, or writing sonnets for her mentor and English teacher. Her English teacher not only recognized and encouraged Joan’s writing but helped her get into college, eventually becoming an English teacher working both in the U.S. and Canada. Joan’s life has been rich in experiences gained through travel, living, and working all over the United States. Extensive letter writing and journaling chronicled these varied experiences that include civil rights worker in Michigan, a weaver in Berkley, and teacher in Pennsylvania, to mention only a few. Currently she is an English professor at a local college where she believes in writing with her students. She journals regularly capturing personal reminiscence in her journal, and does some short story writing. She continues to write daily and has received honorable mentions for works submitted and published in local publications.

Initial Interview: The Body and Writing Connection

Joan’s primary body awareness activity is yoga which she does almost daily on her own and attends at least one class per week. She maintains her daily practice to keep
her body moving as she ages. Additionally she offers a definition of body awareness stating

*I think you tune into what is going on with your body and what it needs. And that includes what kind of, what kind of food you need, or, or whether you’re thirsty, what you’re putting into your body. I’m probably very, very body aware just trying to keep things moving and keep myself going for as long as I’m going to be able to.*

The body and writing connection manifests in different ways for Joan. Her story of body awareness provides an interesting insight and connection to her past. Body awareness and movement act as a catalyst through which Joan is able to open doors into her embodied knowledge and experiences. From body movement, thoughts of past memories arise, turning ideas into thoughts and eventually manifest in her writing. Throughout the narration certain words have been bolded to place emphasis on Joan’s deepening body awareness and to not disrupt the flow of his narrative.

**Making Sense: Writing Open Wounds**

Joan’s writing tends to the personal, capturing family history as well as her own personal story as focal points. Because she does indicate that she writes at least a little bit everyday, she was asked to describe her writing process. Though she calls her writing process “very stimulating, and even just being with the students and looking at things that they're going through is stimulating too,” she doesn’t elaborate further on her writing process; instead she makes an interesting and almost immediate connection to the possibilities writing has for making sense of life’s experiences, which according to
Pennebaker (2000) facilitates healing. She shifts the conversation to talk about writing in response to her mother’s death:

After my mother died I thought, "I'll write about this." But, you know, you don't. It took a long time, I mean I was sort of trying to write about how it was, because what happened was I found her, and it was on Labor Day. I came over to pick her up to take her out to a picnic at my place. She had been legally blind for the past 12 years, and she was six months short of 90. She had had a bad summer. She had even been in the hospital one time during the summer. I phoned her that morning, and it was rainy and I said, "Well, I guess we are gonna’ have to have our Labor Day picnic indoors," and she said, "Yes. Well, I have the macaroni salad made." And I said, "I'll come in about 2 o’clock and pick you up." I was a little bit late, and when I walked in, I mean, I could tell right away that something was different and wrong. And you just kind of proceed with everything that needs to be done. You make the phone calls. You go through all the arrangements, all the legal stuff and I was very focused on that for a long time.

But I knew that it would be something I wanted to write about and I kept trying to figure out how to capture it. And I really couldn’t. The closest I have come to it was that I had been remembering one of my students who wrote a really great story about the time that she and some cousins and friends in Philadelphia had found a body in a car. And she wrote it wonderfully. They were on their way to play baseball and they passed this blue car, and then they noticed that there was a man in the car and he looked a little funny. He was the same shade of blue as the, car. I guess they ran and got some grown-ups or something who called the cops.
I said, “You know, I have always thought about this. What it must be like for people who you read in the papers about a body that was found in the woods by a hiker. Or some kids were playing and they found somebody that hanged himself or something like that. And I’ve always wondered, “what that was like.” The lasting effect for her was when she sees a car that color of blue, she remembers that; I was thinking and thinking about that. In fact, with my mother ailing, I had been wondering whether I was going to have that experience myself one day. And then sure enough... so I've scratched the surface with that.

A significant and pivotal experience, the passing of her mother continued to be something she works on in her writing, like tending to a slow healing wound. Interestingly the use of writing to deal with the experience of discovering her mother was not her own as she in some ways used the writing of her students who discovered a body in a car to begin to make sense of her own experience, something she stated was part of her writing process as well. Writing provided a connecting point between the student’s and Joan’s experiences, thus enabling her to make sense of or create some meaning to the questions she had before and after her mother’s death. In this way, sharing experience through the use of story provided the first step into writing as a means for healing the eventual loss of her mother. Reading this student’s experience had an impact on Joan. It had been a source of questioning and uncertainty that the student’s writing was able to begin to provide some answers. Evidenced by her repeatedly recalling this student’s work, Joan incorporated this experience with her own memory of her mother’s death; it became part of her story. This idea is further articulated through Merleau-Ponty, who says that in our co-existence with others experiences are taken up, reconstituted and
experienced, thus becoming part of us (1945, pp. 381, 408). This experience then is like a mirror, reflecting back and forth between Joan and her student. To conceptualize in this way, the student’s experience becomes became part of Joan.

Using this experience with her mother to further the discussion, she was asked about whether she had other experiences where she may have used writing to help her make sense of life, for healing purposes, or just to work out emotions. It is interesting to note that her first experience with writing in this way was when she was in junior high school, but it wasn’t until she was asked the question in the interview that she made these connections to using writing to deal with problems or to “feel better,” thus making a connection between writing and healing. She recalled the horrors and “hell” of her junior high experiences, specifically when in the 8th grade she had realizations that she could write out her feelings and get a sense of relief making her feel better. The resulting sense of feeling better and dealing with her teenage angst though writing, and set the stage for her later experiences of writing about, grieving, and processing of her mother’s death. The writing is healing connection is significant.

This correlates to the work of Pennebaker (1999a, b; 2002; 2003), who along with colleagues in numerous studies demonstrated the various impacts writing for a duration of time about emotional traumas or upheavals can contribute to the feelings of emotional well-being. Writing about her mother over time has been an evolving and continuing process, one that has enabled Joan to process and make sense of not only her loss, but the experience of being the one to find her mother. During times when Joan was working on pieces about her mother she tells about having episodes of sudden onsets of emotion that would come during time when she wasn’t necessarily in the act of writing. One instance
happened during a yoga class she went to a short time after a writing session where she worked on a piece about her mother. She tells of having a sudden rush of emotion, with tears coming to her during the yoga class. She knew the spontaneous onset of emotion had connections to her mother, stating

This was, maybe, six months after she had died and we had gotten very connected during those twelve years when she was legally blind because I was the daughter that lived ten miles away, so you know, I was her transport. I wrote her checks for her, and all kinds of stuff that she needed. My husband and I helped her fix up her house so she could still stay; she was still in her own house, getting around, doing ok. She was very smart and very resourceful and she really wanted to stay in her own house. I knew the feeling had something to do with my mother, and I think it was after that I started writing about the student writing about the dead body, and my feelings about finding my mother and all of that. It isn't done yet, but it surprised me that that was when it happened, during that yoga class.

A recurrent thread is this link to Joan’s body awareness activity of yoga, triggering the release of her deeply emotional, embodied experiences. Again processing her own experience through writing about her student adds another window into Joan’s body-writing connection.

**Body Engagement and Awareness**

In addition to writing and healing she makes other connections between writing and the body, which touch back to her writing process. Stating that she believes in handwriting (as opposed to typing everything), she elaborates on her writing method and how it relates to her body. Joan believes in handwriting. She feels it provides “much
more wealth of detail and much greater richness of language because you’re moving your hand and there is that physical connection. There’s value in moving your hand.”

stimulates the brain through movement of the hand, creating a physical connection to what’s being written, a gesture of her body. Further, when asked if her body is present in her writing, she mainly talks about what is her physical position (“sit your behind down”) and writing needs (writing in her notebook, with pen only). She also mentions various locations like coffee shops, restaurants, McDonald’s- places with tables and chairs. While seemingly obvious and potentially insignificant, all of these speak to comfort not just preference. For Joan finding a place where she is physically comfortable and relaxed lends itself to her writing process and another way she demonstrates awareness of her body, thus connecting body and writing.

Through this she talks of how she writes, where she sits, and physically goes, also the kinesthetics of writing by hand as opposed to typing, therein this demonstrates a starting point for her understanding of body awareness and how she connects her body to her writing. Additionally to this point, expanding to ask about sensations in certain parts or areas of her body or if her body is ever affected in any specific way by writing she again speaks of her mother.

Actually, at my mother’s funeral... that summer, I had been trying to write about the things I’d noticed, you know, her increasing frailty and the stuff I imagined she must be feeling and going through. Either the day before, or the morning of her funeral, I had been trying to write about her experience of what she's feeling like now. She had tried a new doctor and had asked her cardiologist whether he knew of any gerontologists who might be able to, kind of figure out a
meaning for all these diverse symptoms she seemed to be having, all these weird things that seemed to be going on with her. He gave her a couple of recommendations and I had taken her to a couple of appointments with this new one, and I think on the morning of her funeral, it finally came together, and I wrote about what, what she might say to her new doctor. And I read that at the funeral. And actually, I contributed it to the literary journal. It was all about I’m not really this person that you see, I’ll answer your questions, but this isn’t really how I am. I’m actually a hundred and forty pounds, and I’m five foot eight and my skin is nice and firm, not this wrinkly old stuff that you see here, and I drive very well. I was wondering whether I would be able to do it and I had no problem at all. I don’t know, it doesn’t, I know that there are immense triggers and what I will do is run up against dead ends and, and road blocks after awhile (referencing writing). I think maybe that happens to me more than getting into something and experiencing physical symptoms. However, what I do love is that even the attempts that don’t work out, you read them and it brings back the feelings. It brings back the feelings and lots of other things that recreate that whole time for you. And, and I love that.

Be Here Now Be Here: Being Present in Writing

Because Joan has written extensively over her lifetime in journals, through personal essays that capture her experiences, observations, and emotions, the question about whether or not she’s in her writing or short stories as a character reveals the depth of her connection to her writing. She says that if she’s writing a piece in a first person perspective that she will be the person she’s expressing as if she is being-in-the-world of
the character. When talking further about perspective and character with regard to if she
is in fact in her writing, she divulges

now this has not happened to me very often, and when it does, I've loved it

--- is that all of a sudden, something comes out of the blue that you didn't even
know that you would think this. But it's this person that has taken you over. All of
a sudden this person that you're being, and they're suddenly knowing, or
thinking something that you didn't even know. I don't know. I think that there is
a writer's... I think there is some kind of realm that creative people tap into.

She goes on to tell about leaving teaching in the 1970s and moving back to PA making
her living weaving and selling the pieces at craft and art shows, mainly in the warmer
months. In the down time of winter she would make stock to sell the following summer
and here she begins to further expand her body awareness connection, stating

And then you'd start actually working and this is where the body
connection I believe. I'd be sitting at the loom, I'd be doing these dumb little
things that I knew I could sell by the dozens next summer. And then other ideas
would start to come. It would be in the act, and that's what happens when you are
writing, you sort of have to keep, keep the connection going. Essentially I write
for the trunk; all these journals I fill up. I wouldn't mind if somebody read them
someday. But you know, I have, probably, twenty-five notebooks sitting there, and
nobody's ever gonna' plow through that stuff. The writing was all very physical
and I really do believe that creativity, there is some kind of realm that people
who are creative tap into things that you can't otherwise and that's why this
whole thing about well, Shakespeare couldn't have really written those plays
because how would a young guy from, you know, the hinterlands possibly have
known all that stuff?  It doesn't matter!  I mean he's on another level, but there's
something that people tap into and that has only rarely happened to me, but once
in awhile it does and then it really feels wonderful.

Her description makes her writing seem automatic, not controlled and creativity
(either through writing or another art) is a process that utilizes the body as a whole.
Those wonderful times of tapping into her state of flow, simultaneously and fully engages
her body and writing. For some people this process of writing can be one of feast or
famine, writing either with the ease of flow or inhibited by great difficulty. This idea of
being taken over by a character deepens the connection Joan has to her writing. It is
additionally reminiscent of Csiksentmihalyi’s (1998) idea of flow, which in Joan’s case
she describes it as being “taken over” and that “there is some kind of realm creative
people tap into.” Further connection between writing and the body is made when she
talks about struggling to write. When faced with an inability to write she will “just pain
quit” or take to physical activity such as walking that allows her to think about and mull
over things she wants to write about. Quickly, she recalls walking their dog some 20
years ago as being the perfect time to mull things over and let ideas come saying “That's
another physical thing a lot of movement and it’s interesting because I had never
consciously connected that.” Her statement at the end hints at her changing perspective
about how evolving body awareness is connected to her writing process.

Joan’s Study Diary: Writing the Body

What has emerged thus far in Joan’s story is the way her body awareness opens
the door for writing her stories that are born from memories and experiences. There’s
also the recognition of her body’s presence in her writing and an acknowledgment that through nurturing and care she will have the opportunity to further bring forth her stories through her body awareness and movement. Additionally, her journal captures her curiosity; an explorer’s spirit bent to further understand what connections may be present between her writing and her body. While the story that continued to emerge through her journal doesn’t necessarily show a particular or specific evolution to complete or overall body awareness and writing connection per se, what it does show are the smaller, quieter contributions and connections to a more embodied sense of the origin of her stories. In addition to capturing her voice and story, certain words have been placed in boldface to highlight the connections between body and writing and to not disrupt the flow of the narrative.

**Smaller, Quieter Contributions**

Her body awareness activity of daily yoga practice enabled her to engage in connecting to her past through remembrances of specific times and incidents, for idea generation and brainstorming for her writing and for continuing to write about her mother.

Her first journal entry was written after her morning yoga session that she would do outside on her deck surrounded by the natural beauty of her garden, something she wrote about frequently in her journal. This particular yoga session affected her writing by taking her back to the Omega Institute, which was a writing/yoga retreat she went on years earlier. She tells about spending five days at Omega with William Lest Hart Moon. Institute participants were to spend their afternoons out on our own looking for our subjects and have a piece written to share on the last day based on the theme sense of place, so important for Hart Moon’s work. Essentially she was writing Creative
Nonfiction, a genre that she seems to continue to visit with her writing and journaling. Joan remembers finding stone fences, making her think “about the farmers and earlier residents who made them, now lost in the woods and wrote about that.” The fence holds Joan’s memories and memories of the world. Reflection through her body awareness activity of yoga and the resulting writing that is produced is how Joan connects writing and her body. Reflection doesn’t seem to be a new discovery or connection; as she recounts in this journal entry reflecting on the farmers and residents who created the stone walls she was trying to write about. Reflection, memory, and her reminiscent writing all emerge as a result of her body awareness practice. What is really significant about Joan’s writing and body connection is that it does rely so heavily on her embodied knowledge and experience. Reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty, through her body awareness activities she recalls events and essentially falls deeply into her stories where she is able to feel the emotions of the time or event, and see and hear with such vivid detail as if she were in the present again living the event. In this way, her embodied experiences and subsequent stories are more significant than flashes of daydreams.

Another incident where her body awareness practice triggered reflection that became writing was when she used her “big yellow ball” to bend and stretch her back, allowing her head to fall backwards. This made her think of being a kid on a swing, remembering

*I loved to go high and lean way back, let my hair hang down. I had pigtails then, my hair was never really cut until I was in 5th grade. I was 10 then.*

*For some reason, the feeling memory I have is of long, lose hair hanging down*
behind me off the swing. But hanging, feeling upside down, looking at the sky and the world- I like that.

As an example she goes on to talk about her hair as it evolved from following a controlled style, to being long and free after seeing Hair on Broadway, to cut, permed and set, following the rules of style. She writes about feeling her hair and how her hair in some ways told the evolving story of her activities and beliefs, marking the periods of her life:

I got it cut and permed when those crazy frizz perms got popular in the summer of 1984. Our cat had died, our barn had burned down, and my mother had been hospitalized. So I never had long hair since. I like the shortness, thought I miss the warmth in the winter, but in this weather it’s perfect and if I hang back on the ball I can still feel the feeling of the fall of hair.

Her body awareness and memories allow for an unlocking of embodied experience that she writes about with such vivid detail making connections past and present in time.

Writing for Joan has been a collection of her past, and her multiple journals (25+) record her history in verbal snapshots much like photos in an album. Calling them a “grab-bag of whatever crosses my mind” she sometimes tapes in obituaries, ticket stubs or library slips, or includes her gardening progress notes.

Joan recognizes other movements of the body can be viewed as meditative and a way to connect to her memories. The mundane act of sweeping her deck triggered a body memory from the 1960s of a family member who refused to care for her third child, which she captured in her journal.
A memory while sweeping the deck, surely meditative activity: my mother’s youngest cousin, only 6 years older than me, who refused to care for her third baby after doting on her first two. This was probably 1960 I was in college, sage now, with psychology under my belt and recommended a psychiatrist to my parents only this was only being whispered about among the aunts and grandmas. Horror! A psychiatrist? No one we knew saw shrinks. Her older sister took the baby, had always wanted kids and had trouble conceiving and adopted her and that was the absolute end of the story, fini, never spoken of again. Sweeping, I thought of this and wrote what is maybe a poem or a start.

For Joan, body awareness and the connection to her stories that ultimately manifest in her writing are like opening the door to a time machine and journeying back through her experiences and memories. Like turning the page in a scrapbook the act of sitting on her yoga mat fingering the calluses on her feet, she traversed the landscape of her life’s clock landing in her childhood, vividly recalling time spent in Ocean City, MD:

And another sketchy page of words about walking barefoot. This time I was regarding my feet, sitting on my mat, fingering the calluses and thinking about the pride I used to take in getting my feet tough enough to walk over stones out here as a kid, and later the pride of being able to walk across the hot sand and even the parking lot without flinching during summers working at Ocean City. It marked us as insiders, non-tourists. My friend Judy ever was known to stamp out cigarette butts with bare feet. The real motive of those who’d stay after all of us summer people left, didn’t do that and real country people back in my childhood would surely have preferred shoes if their pocketbooks and
employment had allowed it. We did it to show we belonged, hmmmm, to a class we really were not part of? Like hippies changing our demeanor in the 60s and 70, we are not your oppressors, see, we are outsiders too.

Turning another page emerged another snapshot of Joan’s history. A day of physical exertion clearing downed trees from storm damage prompted thoughts and plans for writing her family’s stories and time together, then passing these along to other family members, something both she and other family members have done. Even in the latter portion of her journal Joan works to formulate and understand concrete connections that directly link her yoga practice to her writing, the body awareness that movement cultivates triggers memory and experiences that feed her writing. She states

One of the hardest things about writing is actually sitting down and staying there long enough to do it. I am not noticing an effect of yoga, or swimming, or sweeping or woodlot clearing on my writing except that my mind can wander over thoughts and sensations then. All of that can only enrich one’s consciousness and this writing. The value of whatever writing life I have is the knowing that I am going to write most days. That has been a real pleasure.

I find that if I do my body awareness activity and then write my reflections, the writing I thought I’d do evaporates- at least so far. Can’t get my behind onto that chair for too many more of those hours or minutes. So it is more satisfying to me to do my yoga or brush hauling and then write and reflect on how it came together. This morning looking at the leafy layers from my shoulder stand, I thought I’d write about divorce and how unknown is was in my childhood, not like now, when most of my student’s parents are divorced and even lots of them are.
And I do want to, but what I actually got back to was my breakaway journey, this time my move to my very first apartment. I’ve written about finding my first apartment in Landsdale and exploring Philadelphia. I smile as I write. It was so exciting, exhilarating. I was what I had been wanting through high school and college and I reveled in it. In myself! I feel that smile and excitement.

Through her journaling and participation body awareness and writing emerged through the links to knowledge and experiences embodied within Joan.

Final Interview: The Potential of “Stuff”

Her participation has yielded other dimension and insight into understanding and articulating the varied responses, connections, and manifestations of the role of the body in the writing process. The final interview demonstrates her learning and thoughts on the opportunity to do “a lot of writing.”

Within her daily writing practice what she wrote consisted mainly of her own “stuff,” journaling for this project or reflections on what she had written. Her body awareness practice was primarily either morning yoga or a walk, although there were with occasional references in her journal to swimming and tending to the land, either through watering plants, brush clearing, or gardening. The most significant aspect of combining the writing process and body awareness activity was simply that it motivated her to write a great deal, which she enjoyed. When asked what she sees as the changed or different about her writing process since her participation began she shares

I noticed things a little bit more. I mean, I would be doing yoga or taking a walk, or I mentioned in the journal one morning I was sweeping the deck, and you know, that kind of work can be very centering and meditative too. And some
ideas came to me. Mostly I was honestly not able to feel the kind of twinge or tingle or whatever --- in my body but just to notice what my body was doing and I know I have always mirrored my facial expressions to what’s going on in the writing. But that’s the biggest thing I noticed. It made me more aware of what I was physically doing when I’m actually writing.

While she admits she feels like she’s always been body aware and has always noticed emotions, she did not indicate any new insights in this specific area. She does say that yoga or walking did give her numerous ideas to explore through writing. Additionally, she makes a strong statement about the very act of writing itself, saying that she believes “that for me it is the writing that's more the meditation that's where it's in the act of writing itself that more things come to me.” Through attending to her body awareness she explains:

   *It certainly has made me pay attention to it a bit more than I normally would have. I have been paying attention to my body for quite a while because jeez, it's that or, or you end up not being able to do things. And, I know, years ago, my doctor complimented me; he said that "I can see your, your very much in touch with your body and I hope you stay that way." And I think that's the case because I rarely, feel sick or have some physical problem so far in my life it's like anything else, I'm feeling good so let's, let's let it take care of itself. Except I'm going to keep on doing what I can to maintain.*

Overall a significant bit of learning that she will take away from her participation is learning how others are looking at and exploring writing. Referencing the work of Sondra Perl, Joan gained exposure to her as part of her participation but did not
incorporate Perl’s work into her writing practice. She also leaves participation with a
notebook full of stuff and intentions to continue to explore her body writing connections.
CHAPTER EIGHT
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall intent and purpose of this action research study was to identify connections between the body and the writing process. In particular the purpose was threefold:

1. It was to first examine how creative writers describe their writing process with particular attention to their perceptions of the role and awareness of the body in the writing process;

2. secondly, it was to engage these writers in a series of exercises about body awareness;

3. and then finally, it was to explore their perceptions about the effects of an increased body awareness on their writing process.

The participants identified themselves as writers and worked in various genres with different levels of intensity. For the duration of this study each participant committed to a daily writing practice where they worked on their own personal projects and kept a reflective journal. I approached this project with an optimistic hopefulness and expectation that certain connections would emerge from the participants’ experiences and narratives; but due to the nature of what participants were asked to explore, there were at times more uncertainties and anxieties than outcomes. My hopes were that participants would find themselves in their stories and through drawing attention to the body through exercise, meditation, or some other body awareness practice, avenues of opportunity and depth of understanding of their personal writings and storytelling would
increase. Awareness would bring more stories and clear the path of blockages and missteps.

What unfolded through their narratives can be compared to a prism catching sunlight and scattering innumerable rainbows across a room; on the surface each rainbow appears to have same range of colors, but a closer look reveals intimate variations. The participant stories on the surface are threaded with numerous themes and similarities, but closer examination reveals deeply personal and individual connections between their body, their writing, and their process.

The narratives were described in detail in Chapters Four through Seven. This final chapter works to first summarize and synthesize these narratives and interviews demonstrating what was emergent and additionally how these themes and details throw back to the literature and theories that provide the underpinnings and support for this study. Beginning first with a summary of significant themes that emerged via analyzing the narratives, the discussion will next include implications for theory and practice related to writing and the body. A discussion of the limitations and suggestions for research follow. Personal reflections and insights from my experiences as both researcher and participant add a final punctuation mark on this discussion.

**Threads and Tales: Summarizing Significant Connections**

At the start of this study it was assumed that participants would have some degree of body awareness. What was not known was if this perception of body awareness was connected or related to the participants’ writing processes; the assumption was made that it wasn’t initially connected. Participants’ narratives of evolving body awareness unfolded over the six-week duration of the study. Part of the study focused on the
process of the coming to awareness of the body as it manifests in their writing. The narratives of shifting body awareness come to light through their personal explorations, connections, and understanding as they constructed (and reconstructed) their story of body awareness and connection to writing process. As each phase of their participation progressed, specifically the journaling they completed on their own, layers and dimensions of learning emerged: questioning and reconfiguring the role of the body in writing; processing past events through writing and healing; and deepening the writing-body connection. Through these interviews and journals I gleaned that the participants’ stories are not stationary or static; they are evolving and dynamic accounts of an increased body awareness and connection to their writing.

**Back-story and Context of Encouragement in Writing**

One of the underlying curiosities behind this study has been trying to gain further understanding of embodiment through drawing attention to the body in order to understand whether a connection exists with the writing process. Understanding embodiment is to understand how we live and experience the world and make meaning (Wilde, 1999); the concept of embodiment furthers the definition of body awareness. In this perspective embodiment is what the body knows in a distinct way and appearing in a distinctive form. It is knowledge in and through the body which centers the body in meaning making and allows our experience to be a key component to the body’s knowing. It reveals the world to us in ways that escape our rational categorizations of reflective knowing. Each participant offered their definition of body awareness and some overlaps are noted. Inclusion of these definitions demonstrates how body awareness is conceptualized and provides a starting point for their evolution to further body awareness.
While there are many reasons people come to writing, communication, recording events, and for art’s sake can be highlighted (Smith, 1994). In many cases, and relevant to this group of writers early experiences with writing are significant and can give writers the push, confidence, and motivation to continue. In the case of the participants it was the encouragement and attention of an adult, usually a teacher or professor who recognizes their talent and pushes them to continue to write. In doing so the participants establish a sense of self-efficacy that gives them confidence to continue writing. In the initial interview Joe said

*I was going through a rough patch in life. I would go out, sit down, and journal a lot, and discover things that I wanted to discover. It was in English 101 when I wrote the first story that kind of helped me figure things out. I didn’t think writing was practical until a professor pulled me aside and told me to send it in for publication and it got published.* (Chapter 4)

According to Runco (2009) writing can lead to self-discovery and disclosures, and this turning point for Joe was significant and provided him with an outlet that has turned into the focal point of his schooling and future career.

Mimi also mentions early influence of a teacher who praised her writing, “*I had to be about nine years old and I was writing something when the teacher said ‘Isn’t this beautiful.’ Whoa! I can write something that moves somebody besides, you know, my mother!*” From this experience, Mimi journaled and kept her thoughts and writing private. As an adult she started writing poetry in conjunction and as a compliment to her artwork.
A teacher was influential for Joan. Miss Nichols, whom she would write for in English class recognized Joan’s abilities and encouraged her to continue writing. Joan recalls

*You know you didn’t do a lot of essay writing in public schools in those days. Not in my English classes. You did your book reports and stuff like that, but in Miss Nichols’s English classes we wrote personal essays and thing like that. And I really liked that, and I got a lot of encouragement. She kept encouraging me.* (Chapter 7)

Writing as process is taught in school in linear episodes, such as that used by Flower and Hayes (1981) consisting of planning, generating, and revision. It is of significance that Joan’s preferred writing has been personal essay and keeping extensive journals recording her personal experiences. Joan’s early exposure to personal essay, not of the norm in her classes, had a resounding impact on the writing she would do throughout her life.

Dave additionally talks about a school experience and being asked to write something for his school newspaper in seventh or eighth grade, which was his first significant experience.

*And so I wrote just a little poem and that got published. It was neat to see my name in the paper, but the best thing was that kids thought that what I had written was funny and they were repeating it to each other. The fact that somebody actually cared about something that I wrote was a really neat experience.* (Chapter 6)
Because he was encouraged, his confidence grew and he developed a certain level of self-efficacy with writing, seeing himself as a writer, which was important to his progress. This nostalgic connection enables an understanding of what their past writing experiences are and how these may contribute to the way they conceptualize themselves as writers and the significance of their writing. Writing extends beyond what is created on the page to implicate the experiences of the individual and fold them into the writing process. While they all stated that they initially wrote for themselves, keeping their thoughts and journals private, this one significant experience of recognition set them on the path to pursue writing with confidence. This is another example of embodied learning. Mentally, we may feel like isolated “individuals” of the Cartesian “I think, therefore I am,” but on an embodied level where perceptions entwine with others, emotions ebb back and forth, where we share in elaborating imagined zones of experience, etc., the experiencer is part of a “we,” in which others may help us gain a sense of self.

**Initial and Evolving Definition of Body Awareness**

To further establish context and a starting point, all of the participants were able to express what they felt body awareness meant and each participant indicated having a certain level of body awareness, usually due to a focus on salubrious activity or a health concern, but their sense of body awareness evolved through greater consciousness and attention to it throughout the action research component of this study. But establishing an individual definition as a starting point helped add clarity since the body is complex and represented in various ways by individuals (Bermudez, Marcal, and, Eilan, 1995). While each participant indicated an initial body awareness, they did so somatically-through body movement or awareness drawn through injury or illness. Asking them
about their initial definitions of body awareness helped establish the way individual participants conceptualize their bodies at the outset of the study. To verbalize their definition they all said it was a variation of “paying attention to” or being “aware.” For Joan, body awareness is defined as being a way to “tune into what’s going on with your body and what it needs” and she states she is “very, very body aware” because she is trying to keep herself moving and going for as long as she’s able.

While Mimi partly came to her body awareness through a broken ankle and weeks of physical therapy, her definition of body awareness was “paying attention to your body, and if it hurts or feels funny, you need to figure out what this is all about.” A connecting point between Joan and Mimi is in both women’s desire to do their best to stay fit and active as they age, both citing the deteriorations of their mothers’ health as something that reinforced and contributed to this desire. Mimi stated that she could see the decline in her mother, who was ninety-six when she passed; she thus came to the realization that “if you don’t take care of yourself, it’s gonna’ be way worse if you live to ninety-six.”

An athlete and active his entire life, Dave’s sense of body awareness no doubt came from understanding the way his body moves through his martial arts practice. Tae Kwon Do and the moving meditations of hyuengs as part of his twenty-five year TKD practice, enabled a certain knowledge and understanding of his body. What is interesting about Dave’s body awareness definition is in the way he chooses to define it:

I’m almost better at describing when I don’t have it. There have been times in my life where I was under so much stress that I felt completely disconnected from my body. As if I had no control over it, that my breathing was somehow separate from my walking, separate from my writing.” (Chapter 6)
Defining body awareness in this way, Dave alluded to the sense that body awareness is more holistic and that when he has a “good sense of body awareness everything is connected.” Under times of great stress, he feels disconnected and as though he cannot function “as a complete unit.”

When asked about his body awareness, Joe initially spoke about degeneration in his hip that causes him great discomfort, especially when sitting for long periods of time. It is a discomfort that impacts his entire body position and can cause headaches. In defining body awareness Joe called it a “mind and body deal and I think both affect each other, but you need to start somewhere, and it’s easier to start on the physical side.”

As a significant source of personal knowledge and learning the body is important (Johnson, 2007). Because this study sought to understand the connection between the body and writing, each participant offered a definition and impression of their body awareness. What presented in the data were stories of evolution and changing perspective; beginning with the context of simply defining terms establishes the opening lines to their story of body awareness that even at the end of their participation continues to be explored and written.

Each participant formulated their definition of body awareness by reflecting back on their experiences of their body, a notion that will be further explored in the next section. But now that context and definition of body awareness have been established, the following sections will cover the major themes, threads, and connections emergent in the participants’ narratives. These major themes serve as entry points into the body and writing connection and include a connection to healing practices; the state of flow and larger connections to the universe and nature; embodied writing through personal
experience, visceral reactions, and creation of character; and the impact of body
awareness through discomfort.

**Healing Connections**

Each participant indicated a use of writing for healing purposes. The literature
that highlights the writing-body connection through healing provides insight into one of
the primary uses of writing by these participants. In general findings from the literature
summarize instances of stress, trauma, and turmoil that can be successfully alleviated
through expressive forms of writing. Both physical and mental implications have been
recorded furthering the connection between body and writing.

Specifically the work of Pennebaker, along with colleagues, has extensively
explored the use of writing to facilitate healing. In this regard, expressive writing has
been used for multiple purposes such as making sense of one’s life and experiences
(Pennebaker, 2000).

A significant part of Joe’s narrative, the writing and healing connection has been
profound. Experiences numerous personal tragedies and difficulties, suicides of his
mother and close friend, Joe wrote to heal and cope with these events. Citing early
“rough patches” he would journal and write about these experiences. It wasn’t until he
was asked to recount a significant and life changing experience for a college class that he
wrote about the death of his best friend to suicide and the journey he took as a result.
Writing this experience became “something I had to write and I wrote it one shot and
there was kind of this intense time, and when I was done I just felt relief.”

Joe also talks about using his poetry for healing purposes, sharing that he’s
worked on numerous poems in the past that the subject are “harsh memories, things I
Writing for Joe, regardless of the genre, has enabled Joe a connection to his body through writing about traumatic events and difficulties he’s experienced. Citing intensity followed by relief, it is clear that writing has an impact. He recalls writing the piece on his friend as “being in some kind of zone where he could feel it, touch it, taste it, see it.” This has ties to Csikszentmihaly’s (1997) concept of flow, which will be discussed further in the next section, but it is important to mention here because of the level of intensity of writing this experience had for Joe. He has said that he “hasn’t achieved that kind of presence in writing since” despite writing additional pieces that are so “close to home.” Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) found specific links between storytelling and the body; that writing about such events resulted in improvements in physical and emotional health.

When Dave was asked if writing was ever a form of healing for him his answer was an emphatic “yes!” Upon further elaboration he presented the varied ways that writing is healing for him. Where Joe wrote in response to events to make sense of the experiences, Dave’s writing works in the same way, it additionally creates and opens wounds when he might not have been purposefully seeking them. He discusses this in the following way:

*In terms of healing emotional wounds all throughout my life, it’s a way to understand them or see them from a different perspective, or where a difficult decision has to be made, or something like that. At times its easier to let a character solve the problem for me than for me to solve it sometimes. I think writing does both in this regard. Sometimes when I’m in the midst of writing, a character will say something that I didn’t, didn’t sort of know the character was*
going to say. In some ways this will open up a wound from the past. But, at the same time, it’ll then provide the same healing to that wound that it opened up. It opens wounds, and it heals them. (Chapter 6).

Liehr et al (2002) state that people know the world through their bodies and face everyday realities and create their own personal stories. These stories created moment by moment bring both remembered past and anticipated future to the bodily experience of the present moment. This is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the pre-reflective and how we cycle between the pre-reflective and reflective states of awareness. Using the character and dialogue in this way signals a deep connection to his writing and further ties to experiences that are part of who Dave is and that his writing is an extension of his person. Through writing about his experiences, Dave is able to make sense and work out issues.

Mimi’s use of writing for healing purposes was straightforward and simple: “Oh I think all writing is a form of healing because it just gets anything out.” And while she doesn’t initially provide examples of emotional trauma, like that of Joe’s and Dave’s experiences, she did spend a lot of time focusing on the physical trauma of injury. The break to her ankle prompted her to do “a whole book called Wrestling the Volcano while I couldn’t walk. I had to stay off my foot for seven weeks and not put any weight on it.” This book did become a way for her to write about her body and process the injury and the extent of work she would have to do to heal. Throughout her journal Mimi mentions her ankle frequently and almost keeps a log of how she has adjusted to the new way she has to position herself to create art, or perform body awareness activities such as yoga and Zumba, or even how it impacted her daily commutes around the city which she does
on foot. In this way, she was able to make sense and meaning about her physical injury and cultivate self-discoveries. Pennebaker (2004) highlights narrative and journal writing as an important way to cope and make sense of experience. Writing about the physical impact of her injury was important and a focal point of her reflections.

Joan’s experience with writing for healing purposes started early, in seventh and eighth grade when she would journal about her adolescent emotions and feeling left out. She states directly that this early experience writing, filling up journals “with how terrible I felt and how much I hated my best friend and this boy who said something mean- it was wonderful. I began realizing that I could write out my feelings and I would feel much better.” Keeping journals her whole life, Joan worked extensively on writing about her mother’s death. She states that “it took a long time” to write about her mother, when she was finally able to break through and start writing a piece, one she feels is still in progress. She recalls a particular time when writing provided a release of her emotions about her mother’s death:

Actually one of the times I was writing about my mother, it was earlier in the morning and I had been in yoga class. I don’t remember exactly what we were doing but all of a sudden I found tears coming to me and I knew it had some connection to my mother because I had been writing about her. This was maybe six months after she had died. I knew the feeling had something to do with my mother... I was writing about the feelings about finding my mother and about the student writing about finding the dead body, and all of that. It surprised me that was when it happened. (Chapter 7)
It was through writing that she made the connection to her body and this cathartic release of her emotions came to be. She had been and still seems to be processing the passing of her mother whom she talks about as being very close to. In fact at the funeral she read a piece that seems to sum up the way she views her mother, similar to the way a snapshot captures us in our youth:

*I’m not really this person that you see. I’m actually a hundred and forty pounds, and I’m five foot eight and my skin is nice and firm, it’s not this old wrinkly stuff you see here… I wondered if I would be able to do it (read it at the funeral). I know there are immense triggers.* (Chapter 7)

The use of writing for healing purposes was a significant thread between the participants and they still utilize it when necessary. Healing, like writing, can be an ongoing process with outcomes and final products manifesting in unique ways. As the studies indicate, the effects writing can have on health are enormous and contain both significant physical and emotional benefits. Writing in many instances is an important part of the healing process. It becomes evident through the narratives that using writing in this manner is one way to connect writing and the body.

**Flow, the Universe, and Nature**

All of the participants spoke of their writing as having some level of an automatic quality or component. This is referenced by Lubart (2009) as when the story unfolds, voice takes over and writing process becomes “automatic.” To describe this full engagement in the writing process participants used words and phrases such as “channeling,” “sinking into,” “being taken over,” “connection to another realm,” and pulling “something in from out.” While the concepts of flow, the universe and cosmos,
and nature all can be dealt with separately, the participants connected and attributed them to inspiration. When referencing the writing process and the concept of flow, writing is a non-episodic flow of words where the writing has limited control (Smith, 1994). To consider writing in this way frames the writing process in a non-cognitive way, centering it as a deep process that brings forth stories from “within our bodies” (Herring, 2007) tying much in the same way to Gendlin’s (2004) notions of engaging felt sense to carrying forward the right words for a piece. Writing is an embodied practice. While description of these experiences had so many similarities that it cannot be overlooked as a key component to body engagement in the writing process, clarifications are necessary.

Use of the term flow manifested in the participants’ narratives in their own words. In general though, the participants were using the term in the broader, looser sense as is common in popular culture. They did not use the term in exactly the way that Csiksentmihalyi (1997) does as discussed in Chapter Two, although elements of what he’s talking about are present and indicated in the examples to follow in this section.

For Joe there are constant waves of relaxation and anxiety with his writing. He states that when he writes poetry he is always in a relaxed state and his ideas come easily. Because he views his chosen career path as a writer will focus more on prose writing, he indicates a strong sense of anxiety, saying he gets extremely tense and uptight before he writes. Although there are times when he is able to get “in the groove and be able to jump right into the next chapter, naturally.” This ease to which he speaks of being in a groove is similar to the state of flow as described by Csikszentmihalyi. Flow as an embodied practice is a stream of consciousness, automatic process where the body is fully engaged in writing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). When the writing goes well and ideas
flow and Joe is able to separate himself from the strong and at times disruptive anxieties he feels signals another level of engagement with his writing. Earlier in the first interview he spoke about being in “some kind of zone” where he was transported back to the event in which he was writing, stating he could feel, touch, taste, and see the events he had experienced and was writing about. It was vivid, visceral, memorial and emotional reactions to his writing, which he achieved through this automatic, yet controlled state of writing. In this way his body was fully engaged in his writing process.

Similar to Joe’s experience of flow and the manifestation of visceral and sensory aspects of what he’s writing about, Dave cites an almost identical experience with his writing. For Dave though, it is less based in the story and more germinated from the appearance of a character that allows the story to take off. In his process the character is the focal point that dictates the goals and purposes of the overall story. The assertion is made that the character is an extension of Dave and therefore a manifestation of his embodied knowledge. Once the character appears to Dave through a snippet of dialogue, one line, or more specifically he describes it as “the character begins talking to me” he will begin writing the story. That Dave allows the character to drive the story while he writes is an intuitive flow experience. He describes what happens next as

*starting with an idea that I have no idea where its going to lead, but I just go ahead and let it flow. And then as I get into the writing, I begin to understand where the story is going.*

Dave is describing flow as an action that happens as he begins to write and tell his story; he is fully engaged in his writing experience. Again, Csikszentmihalyi (1997) defines flow or flow experiences as what happens when a person is fully emersed within an
experience. Flow then becomes a “metaphor” to describe the “sense of effortless action” people feel when they are engaged in some activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 29). Further, he describes the feeling he gets when writing as “eternal” and

*timeless, where its just being fully immersed in that experience, whatever it is that I’m writing about. When I’m doing creative writing, I’m completely lost in that experience. I feel connected to the emotions of whoever, whatever I’m writing.* (Chapter 7)

Being lost in the experience of writing and so immersed in the story and lives of his characters signals deep connection and bodily engagement in the sensory and pre-reflective. The connection to his character is great, at one point writing in his journal about his character Burung, whom Dave feels “a closeness to Burung’s story, a dreamlike sense that I am in it.” He further describes writing Burung’s story as being a state of “sinking into” the narrative, “losing awareness of what I was writing,” and being “in the zone” and a felt sense of “almost like my whole body being pulled right into the keyboard where the story lives.”

Additionally, Dave recounting his writing as giving him a sense of timelessness or eternity harkens connection to the larger scope of experience and the impact of story, as if what he puts out there makes the statement that he was here; he existed, and his life meant something. But in this way he also makes a connection to nature. Before a writing session he spotted a serviceberry tree, which immediately prompted him to think of Native American legends about the use of the tree for arrows, and he states that he feels “a brief but powerful connection to something long ago, an understanding of that tree meaning more than just landscape artistry.” Dave’s connection to the tree demonstrates
how he is in the world and serves as an example of being-in-the-world. To look at the
tree is to plunge into it, to become part of its history and it apart of Dave (Merleau-Ponty,
1945). To Merleau-Ponty (1945) time is the past as a part of the present and “each
moment of time calls all others to witness; it shows by its advent ‘how things were meant
to turn out’ and ‘how it will finish’” (p. 79). While seeing the tree pulled him into a
deeper connection to story, one that he goes on to say relaxed him and enabled him to
sink into writing Burung’s story with such ease, as if the character controlled his hands
and Dave was the conduit; seeing the tree also brings him into contact with the past and
time that folds into itself, bringing a memory of a life before his own. In recognition of
this, he was able to “plunge into” and become immersed in his writing (Merleau-Ponty,
1945, p. 78). Flow, as an all-consuming, experiential and fully engaged state can be
likened to an active meditation. Goldberg (2005) draws connection between writing
practice and meditation, stating they are “coincident,” meaning both practices draw
attention and focus to the body, in this case drawing on the body’s knowledge to guide
the writing process.

Mimi’s experience of writing poetry and creating art is an interconnected process
that comes together in ways that she calls a “sieve,” and something that “filters in from
the universe.” Her process of creation, her practice of writing and art making, and what
she produces as final product are “inextricably intertwined,” pulling from her experiences
and intuition (Waitman & Plucker, 2009) which again could be a tapping into of the pre-
reflective realm. For Mimi, creation of poetry and art hints at something larger and
bigger than us. She shares the idea of “channeling the universe” and in doing so she is
given the inspiration and motion to create. This was a frequent and recurrent theme in
both the interviews and her journaling. Linking to the concept of flow, when she is working off inspiration and what she receives from the universe, she has a “deep felt knowing” that is “a form of meditation.” Mimi states

“There is a flow to the movement [of creating] and it’s funny how its all a random process and comes together as its supposed to, or the universe brings it to me and I am just a creative conduit. I love seeing how it all comes together, seeing new ideas and of how the body and mind work together. It’s a sense of peace, a wow of inspiration and I feel infused with my creativity. (Chapter 5)

By positioning herself as a conduit who channels the inspiration given by the larger universe Mimi lets her creative processes take over in a way allowing her body to disappear and surrender to her writing process. She is no longer in control, thinking and making decisions. Instead she is guided by the knowing of felt sense as to whether she places her materials and “bits of this and that” in the right spot on her canvas, whether the absolute correctness of word is appropriate. Referencing and pulling from an embodied “felt sense” ties directly into what Mimi describes as “deep felt knowing” or the sense of just knowing what works in her poetry and art. Felt sense pulls from experience and reflective thinking as well as emotional and bodily sensation to guide writing (Jordi, 2011; Gendlin, 1992; Perl, 2004). This idea that we are able to tap into felt sense speaks to a holistic sense of the body and embodied knowledge that dips beyond imminent recognition of specifics of emotion and thought, yet it is a known, understanding on possesses. Knowing in this way is flow, and while she says she is uncertain as to the specific origins of her ideas or movements as she writes and makes art, she surrenders to the process and is rejuvenated in her creativity.
As part of her interviews and journaling Joan did not provide as frequent or numerous accounts of flow experiences as the other participants, she does speak about flow in relation to character and point of view in her writing. Likening the idea of flow to “some kind of realm that creative people tap into” Joan talks about instances of flow she has experienced when writing

...something comes out of the blue that you didn’t even know that you would think this. But it’s this person that has taken you over. All of a sudden this person that you’re being and they’re suddenly knowing or thinking something that you didn’t even know... (Chapter 7)

This idea of being taken over by a character makes her writing seem like an automatic process and that the character is using Joan to tell his or her story. In this way, the connection between Joan and her writing is deepened and her body and writing process are unified and fully engaged. Because of her extensive writing, capturing her experiences in the bound pages of journal after journal, Joan freely states that she is the character whom she is writing. But what flow does is take this from beyond a first person narrative, to embodying the character and allowing the character to tell the story. For the participants the connection between writing and the body, or embodied writing, is a significant way of knowing.

**Embodied Writing**

As a concept, embodiment is difficult to articulate and it can take on numerous meanings and implications in varied contexts. Embodiment implies both the ideas of self-containment and a coming to being or understanding with the common denominator of experience at its heart. Merleau-Ponty (1945), in his philosophy of the body, located
the body as central to meaning making, knowing, perception and experience providing a
tantage point for being-in-the-world, and an enmeshment with the world. In this
perspective the body is necessary to the experiences that eventually manifest in our
stories, poems, personal narratives, and art as extensions of self and our embodied
knowledge. Experiences, as we have them, are forever ingrained within who we are and
become contained within our body, become a key component to our knowing and
understanding of the world, thus becoming embodied. To operate from a position of
embodiment there needs to be an assumption that the body and the mind are unified
rather than disconnected entities of privilege or relegation.

Joe, Dave, Mimi, and Joan all wrote stories, poems, and personal literary
nonfiction to make meaning of life events that were joyous, tragic, mundane, and
exceptional. Visceral reactions cited by Joan and Dave as heart pounding, blood pressure
elevating responses to their writing, the intuitive felt knowing Mimi talks about when she
channels the universe in her creative process and Joan specifically searching to make
meaning and to connect to her student’s experience of finding a body and her own
experience of finding her mother, recognize that what each of these people articulated
through their writing draws on implications that what was expressed in their stories and
narratives contains a deeper embodied meaning that enables them to formulate new
understandings and connections between the body and writing.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1945), what we experience becomes part of our
being. Embodiment requires a certain level of belief and distinction and an argument
could be presented challenging embodiment to be mere recollections or memory, inviting
distinctions to be drawn. Memory while enacting recall of events and details I believe, is
solely the action of the mind (reflective); whereas embodiment engages the whole body, bringing visceral responses, emotions, imagination, and memory, along with engagement (pre-reflective, implicit, sensory) so deep that it is to be transported across space and time to almost relive events. In this way, the writing that is considered embodied writing is an extension and outward manifestation of embodied knowledge and embodied experiences. It is in this way that the narratives of the participants unfolded evolving body awareness and the multiple connections between body and writing.

**Experience, Reaction, and Body**

There is a connection between writing, experience, and the body. Writing stories, poems, and personal narratives offers an opportunity to learn through experience (Clark, 2001). Using writing in this way legitimizes the body as a source for knowing. While the participants may not have started this project focused on learning it became evident at the end of their participation the reframing or reconstructing of their perception of body as an active and significant factor in their writing process provides them with additional avenues to produce the writing they desire. Through an increased and active body awareness the writing produced is done so through a holistic, fully engaged, and embodied practice.

In Joe’s poetry and prose writing he draws from “things I’ve seen, things I’ve experienced or done” acknowledging he would have great difficulty writing about topics that he did not directly experience, relying heavily on conclusions based on his experience. Even the characters he creates are based on snippets of himself, his personality, moods, emotions, and struggles or idealism. Joe’s writing is heavily fed by his personal experience and when he draws inspiration from the outside world, it is still
through the lens of his own interpretation. In speaking of viewing photographs or reading news stories, he filters through his own embodied experiences to make meaning and draw inspiration to tell his stories. Details are derived from his observations, characters are created based on the interactions he’s had or witnessed through others, motivation and movement can be pulled from understanding human interaction and relating based on his life experience. Articulating this experience and inspiration is a means to connect and engage the experience of others to create personal and emotional meanings (Todres & Galvin, 2008). He is not forgetting these things once the experience is complete; however these interactions and observations become contained within his being, a reservoir of pre-reflective and implicit understanding to be tapped.

Additionally, the visceral reaction he has when he writes come from what he experienced and processed to be a certain emotion. This ability to “feel it, touch it, taste it, see it” takes him into his embodied experience, acknowledging that through his writing he is able to evoke tensions, emotions, and responses from the body (Todres & Galvin, 2008). Visceral reactions fully engage his body. He speaks of a time when this was significant

As I went through the actions, like when this is the climax there were several points when my blood pressure was probably through the roof. I noticed I was very excited and I was trembling as well... it was very intense the whole way through... It was very heightened. (Chapter 4)

Understanding the emotions of the characters he was writing about in this particular piece, tap into his own knowledge of emotions and understanding of what sparks fear and discomfort within him and potentially others. Understanding that emotions evoked
within writing are a way to engage embodied experience and possibly the experiences of others (Todres & Galvin, 2008). The heightened sense he describes further defines the way Joe’s writing and body are connected through his embodied experiences and in this provide additional levels of understanding experience, particularly relevant when writing is used for healing purposes as previously discussed.

Dave too approaches his writing by drawing directly from his embodied experiences to create his stories. Similar to Joe’s visceral reactions when writing, Dave will experience his stories in the same way, describing

*If I’m writing something that is heart pounding, my heart will be pounding. If I’m writing something that is incredibly sad, there will be tears in my eyes. I’m feeling whatever it is that I’m writing. There’s always a piece of me, a piece of my life in every character in one shape or form. It’s my real life, not* too much in it in terms of surface stuff, *but obviously everything I’ve ever felt, experienced, difficult experiences as a child, embarrassing situations, joyful experiences, everything that I’ve ever experienced is in my writing.* (Chapter 6)

Dave acknowledges creating experiences just so they will become part of him, so he is able to add more detail and descriptive elements to his story or make characters more believable. In this way Dave has not only given his body as a form of expression but as a general instrument of comprehension making his body a relevant and essential part of his writing process (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 273). What makes this so interesting is that instead of drawing on his embodied knowledge to create details or imagine what something might look like, he wants to see it first-hand, bringing it within himself and making it part of his base of knowledge. He describes one experience of rolling and
popping up, just to get a sense of what it looks like to roll down a hill and pop up with an object in close proximity to his face; something that he incorporated into the characterization of Burung. In doing this, he is able to “get in and stay in the character’s mind and body after letting myself feel as much as possible” what the character is going through.

Embodied writing for Dave is also highly intuitive. He states that he

\[ \text{knows down to his ribs what’s important about this scene, what each person feels in the tug of the conflict, how much they’ll fight to hold on, how if feels to be yanked off balance... and if it feels right and I am connected to it.} \]

(Chapter 6)

The description is especially reflective of Gendlin’s (2004) “carrying forward” and the process of “zig-zagging” between the implicit understandings and the writing. To write with such knowledge is to tap into an embodied, intrinsic way of knowing, and thus connects Dave to his writing in such deep and meaningful ways that his writing is a direct extension of his body. This knowing, while difficult to specifically articulate, is a key component to both Dave’s and Mimi’s writing.

As stated, Mimi views herself as a conduit for channeling the universe, which provides her with inspiration and creativity. Poetry and artwork is intimately connected to its creator; an extension of what is embodied within the artist. Merleau-Ponty (1945) states that art cannot exist separately from the artist and that the two are always connected. In this sense, the artwork and poetry Mimi creates are extensions of her body, her way of being in the world. The foray into her private studio to see how she works, viewing the studio space as a giant, changing and living collage reinforces this idea. But
while she sees herself as the conduit, getting messages from the great without, this can also be viewed as her push, her inspiration, motivation—essentially what she is supposed to do. What she is channeling is her “deep felt knowing” that what she creates is right. She states this is

from awareness of other lives and experiences that have been internalized

or in the atoms and molecules of my body… (Chapter 5)

Her citing past experience and past lives is an important make up of our being and is a nice articulation of embodiment. She describes these further as

Deep in your being you hold a vast reservoir of wisdom and knowledge

that barely gets tapped as you live your busy life. Your inner world holds the rhythms of your psyche, the seeds of your destiny and the flavor and fragrance of your unique self as it has been shaped and formed by the love of your creator and the infinite wonder of creation. In short, your inner being holds your truth. This is the treasure that resides, hidden… (Chapter 5)

This vast inner reservoir Mimi refers to, does often times get overlooked as we live and move through our days. Body awareness activities enable a turning inward of our eyes, and what we uncover is a treasure trove of experiences to feed writing. This intrinsic and intuitive felt sense pushes beyond emotions and physical sensations to add clarity, filling in the gaps that could exist between body and writing. It provides the sensibility and action to continue the process of writing (Gendlin, 1996, 1998, 2007) that could exist between body and writing. There is a connection to what “hovers at the edge of our thinking (Jordi, 2011) and engages the writing process as a “wholistic, implicit, bodily sense of situation” (Gendlin, 1996) Looking at ourselves in this way provides
another avenue to create stories, stories which are always an extension of our embodied knowing.

Joan’s story of body and writing connection relies on body memory when it comes to tapping into her embodied knowledge. For Joan, all of the writing that she does is directly connected to her past. Her early experience of writing personal essays in her high school English class made an impact, and she has spent a lifetime filling journals recounting all aspects of her life’s experience and story. The key to unlocking these deeply personal, embodied stories is through movement of her body either through exercise or mundane household tasks such as sweeping or gardening. As she moves, stories bubble to the surface; it is these stories that she will turn into the seed for larger stories and personal recollections.

Her journal reveals numerous moments where a physical action thrusts her back to an event: a yoga position makes her a kid on a swing letting her long hair brush the dirt as she soars back and forth with her face up to the sky; sweeping her deck took her to the 1960s and the family turmoil of her aunt who refused her third child; sitting barefoot on her yoga mat walked her path of her story back to Ocean City when being barefoot meant being accepted. She is able to feel again the emotions and understandings of those times through her body memory. Merleau-Ponty (1945) saw this ability to tap into our embodied knowledge of a place and time as a way to re-experience and re-immerse ourselves in these moments through imagination and memory, stating we are no longer present when we are lost in the places of the past, as if we are existing in two places at the same time:
Our body and our perception always summon us to take as the centre of the world that environment with which they present us. But this environment is not necessarily that of our own life. I can be somewhere else while staying here… (p. 333)

Emerging as smaller, quieter contributions to her writing through exercise, the depth and richness of her stories recounts vivid detail, transporting her back through time to plant firmly in the event, as if she is in a present-tense reliving of the moment, thus tapping into her embodied knowledge.

**Implications for Theory and Practice**

This portion of the chapter seeks to continue the participants’ stories by addressing embodied writing through its theoretical implications, suggestions for practice, and further research. A common thread to the works that build this study’s theoretical frame lies in what are the silent, unspoken spaces between the words, the something underneath and behind words, and the perception that words are of the whole body, felt and understood. All feed the notion that knowledge of the body derived from living and experience is an important way of knowing, and also has implications for theory, practice, and further research.

**Implications for Theory**

The major basis for theoretical framing of this study lies in the philosophy of the body as per Merleau-Ponty (1945), and Gendlin’s (1996; 2004) notions of felt sense, carrying forward and the zig-zag. The study was also influenced by Pennebaker’s studies of writing as healing, and adult education discussions of the role of the body in learning.
The findings of the study are interpreted through these theoretical elements, and bring to light theoretical implications of a number of key interrelated notions, discussed in this section. The first being the dialectical notion of the pre-reflective and the reflective, or of the body conscious and unconscious, in that there is a constant cycle of body awareness and dissipation experienced by the participants. Second, the notions of carrying forward and the zig-zag, which draws the body into the writing process by zig-zagging deeper and deeper into the implicit knowledge of the body that is then carried forward into the writing. Third, writing with embodiment and how it is theorized in adult learning is considered next. Finally, this section concludes with a consideration of writing as healing.

The dialectic of the pre-reflective and reflective. The notion of a dialectical presentation of the reflective and pre-reflective as it emerged in the study has an inherent tension of a duality or binary, such as those of the Cartesian mind / body split or the body and the soul as examples. Thinking in this way the mind cannot exist separately from the body, nor is the body able to walk away from the mind and do its own thing. The same is true of the reflective and pre-reflective—neither can exist or occur outside the realm of perception and for perception to occur both must be present. This study brings to light the notions of the pre-reflective and the reflective nature of the body that Merleau-Ponty (1945) discusses, though the focus here is on writing.

As a general rule people tend to not think of or hold a conscious awareness of their body in writing; at least that was the case for the participants in this study, particularly at the outset. They were vaguely aware of their bodies, but in a pre-reflective sense. It was by attending to the body in writing, specifically through writing in their
journals about their body awareness exercises, that they became reflective about the role of the body in writing. But this was specifically because they were asked to do so. It is important to note when they would go back to their regular daily writing projects, they did not consciously think about the body in writing; rather they thought about their writing. This is clarified through Mimi’s narrative when she talks specifically about making her art, which was one of her body awareness activities, and then writing afterwards. She says, *making art is from the body: shoulders, movement to reach and find the exact piece* then she goes on to say that she feels her art making *frees up* something within her that allows her to *receive good ideas from the universe*. She is noting here that through her body awareness activities she is able to go deeper within her writing by tapping into something she frames as akin to something *coming in from out*; that it makes her feel *infused* with her creative process. Joe additionally talks about sinking into his writing process after taking meditative walks by recalling a time when he was in *some kind of zone* where he could *feel it, touch it, taste it, see it*, referring to writing a particular story. Thus, their consciousness of the body is fleeting; seemingly returning to a pre-reflective state that is always part of the body and what is naturally returned to when conscious awareness leaves. So by being asked to be reflective on the pre-reflective body in writing after engaging in body awareness practices, participants were again drawn back to the pre-reflective but in a deeper way that hints at what Csikszentmihalyi (1997) refers to as *flow*. Dave’s narrative further supports this notion when he says he seems to *lose awareness of what I was writing* further stating he was in *some kind of zone* which he was able to access after completing his hyeung practice.
In sum, it appears that the participants, by attending to their bodies through physical or meditative activities, were able to facilitate a greater consciousness and understanding of their bodies. By this increase they were able to gain fuller and more open access to their embodied knowledge, which had an overall impact on their writing process showing greater depth and emotional connectivity to their writings. Dave wrote in his journal about engaging emotional aspects and using this as a way to deepen his writing and engage his characters after his hyeung meditations and physical exercises. He says that through his writing and meditation practices he was able to more rapidly get in and stay in the character’s mind and body after letting myself feel as much as possible what his character is experiencing by tapping into the pre-reflective. He also noted going through specific motions to get a better sense of what his character would be seeing in particular moments in his story; for instance when he simulated rolling down a hill and popping to his feet, an action that gave him specific understandings he used to write with more detail. What actually occurred then is a constant shifting between engaging and letting go, with body awareness enabling the focus to tap into embodied knowledge. In this case, attending to the body raises consciousness of the body in writing. They were able to cycle between the pre-reflective non-awareness to the reflective awareness, then back to a new state of pre-reflective non-awareness that is constant and inescapable, highlighting a dialectical necessity between reflection and pre-reflection.

Finally, it is important to note that this shifting between reflective and pre-reflective is a naturally occurring phenomenon that occurs organically or it could be facilitated in other ways. Here it is pointed out that while writers were operating under the circumstances of facilitated awareness as part of the action research cycle, reflection
and pre-reflection are constant. In this study the narratives indicate that through purposeful engagement of a body awareness activity as part of their writing process enabled the participants to engage in a flow state that facilitates their writing. By recognizing this relationship gives further significance and importance to what the body knows, the role of perception, expression, imagination and memory, and how these play into the writing process.

**Connections to Merleau-Ponty’s thought.** The focus of inquiry was to see where, how, and if the body’s presence drawn through awareness and attention had an impact or role in a creative writer’s writing process. The heart of Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) philosophy is the pre-reflective that is experienced by a holistic body that is central to everything: experience, knowing, learning, perception, emoting, relating etc. The body is the vehicle that makes all we encounter become part of the body and who we are. Thus the body functions as a “general instrument of comprehension” and the “fabric into which all objects are woven” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 273). Experience is key; essentially what Merleau-Ponty is asserting is the “reflective ideal of thetic thought will be grounded in the experience of the thing” (p. 252), meaning that while we can reflect on experiences, reflection does not tell us completely what the experience was like in terms of the implicit, or felt sense essence. To access this knowledge we must cycle back to the pre-reflective part of our knowledge of the body in order to carry forward with our projects, in this case writing.

In further consideration of Merleau-Ponty, writing with the body in this way is a pre-reflective act when we are able to rely on embodied knowledge and experiences, our understanding and intuition, and felt sense to guide the writing what Mimi cited as her
body being relaxed into some sort of knowing, what Dave calls knowing down to his ribs, and what Joan calls the realm that people who are creative tap into. Pre-reflection is the essence of our experience as it is captured through the body, whether we have awareness of it actually happening. Merleau-Ponty sees experience as a “non-thetic, pre-objective, and pre-conscious” (p. 252), so in relation to this study, participants were essentially asked to create a “reflective ideal” of their experience of the body in writing. To create this reflective ideal, participants have to think reflectively about their pre-reflective experience. Experiences are perceived through sense and interpretation, and since one cannot exist separately from the other—as Merleau-Ponty says, knowledge of the dynamic between the two is “provisional” and “merely possible” (p. 252) as is the dynamic between the reflective and pre-reflective.

So much of the participants’ stories relied on experience and the way experience is synthesized through the body to make meaning. Joe speaks directly about pulling from things he’s seen and done to source inspiration for his poetry and prose, citing a specific photograph as the basis for a poem, or writing about intensely personal events of a friend’s suicide. Dave created experiences to better enhance his writing through careful description and detailing. Joan’s writing was based primarily on her experience and ties directly to the events and history of her life. Each participant articulates their experiences in writing through the body using both the pre-reflective and reflective.

**Gendlin: Carrying forward and the zig-zag.** The theoretical implications of using Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and pulling in Gendlin’s felt sense, allow a place for the body to be grounded as a legitimate form of knowing that can be used as part of the writing process. Gendlin’s (1996) felt sense, not derived from writing or composition
theory, was developed as a means for people to tap into implicit, embodied knowledge to facilitate change, solve problems, or make discoveries from personal experience. Felt sense is asserted as a way to get into meanings delving far deeper than the surface; there is something prior to or underneath words that is not visible, easily recognized, but viewed as gaps or silent spaces between words, as cited by Merleau-Ponty.

Additionally important are the notions of carrying forward (Gendlin, 2004). This idea is reminiscent of the pre-reflective in Merleau-Ponty, but it further implies a directional sense of action the pulls from the well or pool of embodied knowledge gained through our experience, much like how Joe states that he is drawing from things he’s seen, things he’s experienced, or done. Gendlin (2004) points out “we live with situational bodies which always sense themselves in sensing anything else” (p. 129). This ties back to Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) notion of perception and perceiving the world, where the body then finds itself not just in the world, but inseparable from it and in this way perception is lived experience. All of what we come in contact with in our daily lives as we experience the world becomes reflected within us and thus extends from the body back into the world, to others, to nature as an expression of who we are (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Joan’s experiences are of particular interest with regard to this idea since her body awareness activities would trigger reminiscences of past events, which she would recreate through her writing with vivid and intense detail. She recalls being able to have the feeling memory of these events come to the surface as she’s writing. Carrying forward relies on the implicit knowledge of the body, but to carry forward implies a constant movement back into the implicit, much like the pattern of a zig-zag. From here the concept of the zig-zag emerges and functions as part of this process. Zig-zagging takes
us between the implicit understanding, to dealing with the words outwardly, by carrying forward in the writing. To carry forward is to feel through situations by using “implicit sense” of the body, meaning when the body is engaged we get a feel, a felt sense of what to do within a given situation (p. 131). Dave uses breathing exercises to allow himself to settle into his character Burung’s story. In this sense Dave is almost allowing Burung to tell the story, as if he is channeling this character to which he states he feels a closeness to Burung’s story, a dreamlike sense that I am in it. He further reinforces this idea when he states that he knows down to his ribs what’s important about this scene; he in essence knows what words feel right and carries them forward into the telling of his story.

Specific to writing, there’s a felt sense to the words; Gendlin (2004) notes the “coming of words is bodily, like the coming of tears, sleep, orgasm, improvisation, and how the muse comes” (p. 132) and when words do come, they emerge as “fresh language” that “no longer hangs there” but are carried forward with new meaning in the writing (p. 134). When the body is engaged in this way, the words that come are noted as feeling right. The understanding of what is deeper than the words chosen by writers, that inherent sense that this direction of the story or the nuances of words chosen for poetry just feels right is understanding can only come from the body. As Joan says this is like an all of a sudden something coming out of the blue that has taken you over as other ideas start to come. Participants discussed felt sense as intuition, or allowing for a flow or ideas that coupled together results in a knowing for what their writing needs or storylines it had to follow, possibly what Mimi recounts as her channeling of the universe and trusting my intuition. Recognizing a state of flow as per Csiksentmihalyi (1998) as articulated in their experiences further signals a transition between the reflective and pre-
reflective states. But there are deeper implications within Gendlin that further explain the participant’s experiences.

Gendlin’s (2004) notion of carrying forward needs to be addressed because it has similar implications as the reflective-pre-reflective dialectic of Merleau-Ponty. For the writers in this study it was verbalized as just knowing what to do or having the words feel right, even channeling the universe as Mimi stated or pulling in from a creative realm from Joan. Again paradox emerges within the participants’ narratives in relation to this idea of carrying forward and another concept Gendlin (2004) discusses called zig-zagging. To build upon these ideas further, Gendlin’s (2004) zig-zag relates to memory and imagination in Merleau-Ponty. As Mazis (1988) states, imagination is another “texture of one’s experience” (p. 39) that works with experience and perception. The participants in their writing process activated their imaginal sense, tapping into memory and experiences they had to create their stories and poems. The role of imagination cannot be understated; it is central to getting closer to perception, experience and articulation of these experiences into meaningful gestures of ourselves (Mazis, 1988).

As writers were being asked to engage their bodies through various exercises, they were additionally asked to return to writing after exercise. During this period of writing, they were not necessarily thinking about the body when they wrote, but were tapping into the pre-reflective, implicit aspects to do what Gendlin describes as “carrying forward” while writing. “Zig-zagging” back to the implicit to find the right word, phrasing, or do what feels right, using the felt sense to understand and push the writing forward is not deliberate in a conscious sense, rather it is just something that naturally
occurs. The idea of “zig-zagging” is the movement between the implicit and external, which Gendlin says could be talking about writing.

Again, the writers through reflecting on their experience of the body in writing once again fall back to the knowledge of the body to write and cannot avoid doing so. Manifesting in writing more as an intuitive understanding of what should be written, what Dave referred to as “a knowing down to his ribs” or the “feeling of a warm hug” that what he was writing was right. Drawing on Gendlin’s work, Jordi (2011) called this “an unclear body felt sensation” often time detected in the “throat, chest, stomach, or abdomen and hovers just on the edge of our thinking” which is consistent with Dave’s description (p. 13, 56) and with Gendlin’s (2004) carrying forward. Drawing on the “carrying forward” by dipping into his body’s knowing he is able to find the right words and path for his story, drawing them out to carry forward with his writing. He additionally talks about allowing his character to take over the story as he writes and permits a certain level of understanding of where the story will go. Mimi references felt sense in her journal, recognizing it as a component of her intuition that makes her a creative conduit for channeling the universe. She says this is a knowing what’s right and what works in her writing and art.

At the beginning of this study participants indicated high levels of body awareness, mainly achieved through a sense of the body when it didn’t work right or was injured. The participants next noted an increased sense of flow as they were writing that is characterized as a letting go or surrendering into the process where the body seems to dissipate, creating a cycle between the pre-reflective and reflective and a zig-zag between the implicit and carrying forward of words.
Adult learning and embodied writing. Clark (2001) initially explored the role of embodied learning in adult education, and emphasized kinesthetics and physical elements as contributing, to somatic and embodied learning. As noted in Chapter Two, a number of others in the field have contributed insights to the role of the body in learning (Fenwick, 2003; Freiler, 2008; Horst, 2008). This study brings to light not only the role of the body in learning, but the relationship between the unconscious body, and reflection and pre-reflection and its role in adult learning.

Jordi (2011) has recently contributed to theorizing about the body, tying together embodied experiences and aspects of cognitive processes by drawing on Gendlin’s Focusing method to provide a way to expand reflective practice in experiential learning. He argues that using reflection is a means to engage both the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects, making room for all aspect of our experience to be engaged in learning. Joan’s narrative makes the most of reflective practice. Through her body awareness activities she was able to engage her memories of specific situations, calling these specifically feeling memory, which implies a dialogue between her embodied knowledge of the memory and her writing. Examining this implicit, pre-reflective knowledge of the body could have implications for learning and meaning making, revealing deeper insights into a mind-body connection. In the case of Joan, it also contributes to making sense of experience, which could have implications for further personal growth and learning. Jordi (2011) additionally give a nod to neuroscience, which he states “points us toward the physiology of mind-body integration” (p. 182). Swartz (2011) makes links to neuroscience, embodiment and adult education and explores the connection between
embodied learning and wisdom. This study perhaps shows how participants were able to tap into their own body wisdom and draw on it in their writing.

More recently, Sodhi and Cohen (2012) discuss the ideas of reflection and dialogue, concepts that have been traditionally emphasized through adult education. According to Sodhi and Cohen (2012) the use of reflection was shown to be an “integral component of embodied knowing” and that through reflection participants were able to “make sense of their bodily reactions” (p. 127). This appeared to be somewhat the case with my own participants. Participants were asked to engage the act of reflection on their body as part of their writing process; there was a constant cycle of reflection on the body. This appeared to help them to be more likely to enter a flow state in their writing; then their sense of body was once again more in the background. They largely returned to the pre-reflective state, pulling in the implicit felt sense and carrying forward (Gendlin, 2004) during writing until the writing was complete, then going back to engaging the body through exercise or other body awareness activities, writing again, reflecting, is the continual zig-zag of reflection and pre-reflection, and to check in with the body’s felt sense for validation.

For writing process, engagement of the body has clear implications as described by the participants as a deeper connection, facilitating a way to sink into story and character, a way to feel from the past and connect to new discoveries and meanings. Thus, the study has implications for how writers as adult learners may potentially draw on their body wisdom. Thus far, although attention to the body is gaining momentum in adult education, it does not directly speak to the role of the body in the writing process. This study makes a contribution to that end.
**Writing as healing.** To some extent, Pennebaker’s multiple studies that provided a link between writing and the body from the medical perspective of healing also informed this study. His work highlights findings such as lowered blood pressure, better immune systems (Pennebaker, 1997), reduction of anxiety and depression (Pennebaker, 2000), improvements to overall health and wellness (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999) and reduction in visits to physicians (Campbell & Pennebaker, 2003). While these particular elements were beyond the focus and means of this study, the overall significance to understanding the links between writing and the body are profound, and these studies demonstrate how writing can provide healing influence on the body. Though Pennebaker does not talk about this with regard to the role of the body in the writing process, maybe it is through the process of carrying forward and zig-zagging back (Gendlin, 2004) or pre-reflection and reflection (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) that enables people who use writing to come to healing.

Much of Pennebaker’s work referenced for this study demonstrates the impact of writing to cultivate healing and facilitate self-discoveries. Pennebaker (2000) emphasizes the importance of narrative for people to make meaning and sense of their lives. Joe, Dave, Mimi, and Joan all indicated healing qualities as part of their writing experiences. Joe and Dave specifically highlight experiences journaling with intentionality for figuring out their lives, solving problems and bringing understanding to traumatic events. Joe in particular had the most poignant experience with writing in this way when he journaled to help him through the process of grieving his friend’s suicide. Similar to the results of Pennebaker’s numerous studies, Joe stated that there was a great sense of relief and release after he was done writing.
Storytelling, free writing, and journal writing with traumatic experiences as the focus brought consistent results in improvements in overall physical and emotional health with the findings “replicated across age, gender, culture, social class, and personality type” (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999, p. 1243). Telling stories by choosing words that have a positive connotation was shown by Remirez-Esparza and Pennebaker (2006) as having links to good health. As indicated through this study, each participant in their experience of writing noted healing qualities. Berry and Pennebaker (1993) additionally support these findings and implicate both writing and talk therapy as beneficial. Liehr et al (2002) cited links between the body and writing, talking and non-verbal forms of expression, like art, also have benefits for health, but noted for shorter durations of time in their study.

These studies do represent the common thread that there is a clear link between the power of expression and the impact on the body and once again, it may be recognizing the conscious awareness and surrender that permits writing to have implications for healing. Leihr et al (2002) frames this in a way reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty’s (1945) philosophy of the body and Todres and Galvin’s (2008) discussion of the body to be naturally at the center of all our experiences and personal stories, stating further that the “personal stories created moment by moment bring both remembered past and anticipated future to the bodily experience of the present moment” (p. 28). In light of this, the next section will offer implications for practice.

**Implications for Practice**

This project works to unravel some of the existing tensions surrounding body, specifically in academia where the body is wrought with issues of absence and obscurity
(Leder, 1990). It was established at the onset of this project that the body is situated as absent not just in learning, but throughout daily living unless we are reminded of it via illness or injury. Attending to the body calls for a change in perspective and certain assumptions must then be made. The body provides other ways of knowing and learning that are outside of traditional Western perspectives (Merriam & Sek Kim, 2008) that rely heavily on experience as a key factor to learning through the body (Beckett & Morris, 2001; Horst, 2008). These are outside of the ways are thought to be more rational and traditional in their understanding of knowing and learning. The body is a significant source for individual learning and knowing (Clark, 2001; Sodhi & Cohen, 2012) and this knowledge can be utilized in writing practice. As a teacher of both creative writing and various types of composition courses, and as someone who writes daily either creatively or academically, there is a desire to bring something additional and new into writing practice. Thus suggestions for practice are offered both for creative writing practice, and for teaching creative writing.

**Individual considerations for the creative writer.** The body’s role in writing goes beyond kinesthetic aspects or being physically comfortable when writing. First, a shift in perspective and philosophy regarding writing practice is a necessary change to bring the body into writing. This includes acknowledgment that the body and mind are not separate, that we experience the world through the body, and the body accounts for experience holistically and through multiple dimensions of knowing. The stories that creative writers tell can be thought of as a blend of imagination and partially reflective pieces, drawn from experiences and observations they have had that are embodied. Further the thinking about the writing process needs to change from episodic stops and
starts (Flower & Hayes, 198-) to one of more cohesive flow. Creative writers draw from a reserve of experiences that are not one-dimensional events captured in compartmentalized snapshots, so approaching a writing process that incorporates the body should not be done so in piecemeal.

Second, making conscious effort to attend to the body and pay attention to the body in process. In choosing physical, meditative or mindful activities such as yoga or silent walking, art creation, participants were able to do something that intently drew their attention to the movement and feel of the body. Each participant noted a mindful or meditation practice and it’s been noted that these practices are a way to engage the body and bring more focus to writing (Lewica, 2009). Meditation has an impact on increasing creativity (Stephens & Burke, 1974; Domino, 1977; Wenger, 1976) and for gaining access to internal speech, which is can be viewed as an access point for engaging embodied knowledge (Moffett, 1980). Creating the time to do something with the body outside of writing enabled participants to over time gain an increased sense of their bodies.

Third, utilizing reflective journaling to facilitate embodied writing, space and permission for the body to become part of the writing process much be given. Purposefully drawing attention to the body through some self-determined body awareness activity is necessary. It is important to note that making time for reflection and thought on the body and the impact it has on writing facilitates awareness. Participants in the study kept detailed journals documenting their body awareness activities and their writing process. In doing so, at the end of the study there was a noted increase in body awareness and better understanding of the role of the body in their writing, specifically by noting
felt sense, channeling the universe, intuitive feelings, and knowing what feels right, the shifting between the pre-reflective and reflective, as well as the zig-zagging back in order to carry forward (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Gendlin, 2004). Additionally understanding the through reflection permission and space should be given by the writer to allow periods of transition into states of awareness and reflection, to pre-reflection and flow. When writing allows for the presence of the body there should also be an understanding that there will be times of unawareness, and lack of bodily presence, usually when the writer is engaged in the act of writing. Pulling attention to the body is a compliment to the process, not the process itself. The writer must be allowed to sink fully into the writing process, body and all.

Fourth, acknowledge that journaling allows writing and the body to be connected in other ways outside of process. Writing and journaling in general about all aspects of life, including the emotional and physical impacts is a way to draw a bridge between body and writing. Personal writing, such as reflective personal essays are another way to place attention in the present and to pay attention to the experiences one is having or has had (Kroll, 2008). As per Pennebaker (date) writing allows room to make sense of experiences which in turn could have implications for healing is possibly another way to bring the body into focus.

**Considerations for the writing classroom.** Many of the suggestions for practice listed for the individual creative writer can be carried over into the classroom context. While there is much instructional and pedagogical literature that highlights the dos and don’ts for the writing classroom, overall suggestions will be made with regard to inclusion of the body into this world of academic and community based writing group
settings. Since the goal of this study was to see how creative writers engaged their body as part of the writing process, the implications for the writing classroom are numerous.

A significant and recurrent practice is that of reflection. So much of what is focused on in writing pedagogy is production and meeting established curriculum goals which many times neglect creating the space for reflection. Again, the act of journaling is a cornerstone of this practice and should be included as part of every writing course or personal writing experience. Journaling in the writing classroom allows students the place to think and dialogue with themselves, practice, and once introduced, write about how they feel both physically and emotionally or ways in which the body is engaged in writing. Journaling also provides a place to write without constraints or rules, which makes the flow of words much more free and uninhibited.

Second, like in the individual writing practice, reframing the way writing process is presented, relying less on documenting the episodic steps developed for composition classes in the 1970s to prove revision has taken place and focus more on the cultivating the individual writer is a must. By focusing solely on what’s produced by students or members of writing groups, we are in essence pulling the writer away from their stories. An understanding of the writing process needs to be expanded beyond a cognitive exercise for organizing or composing (Rose, 2009). Allowing students to write in a less linear ways and giving part of the class time for less structured, possibly stream of conscious free writing allows for a writing process that is more discursive and self-discovering (Runco, 2009). Writing in this way has already been cited as having implications for healing and engaging the body in a flow state.
Moving beyond reframing the process, we must make room, and bring time and attention to the body, deliberately through active engagement within the classroom context. Guided writing methods such as those established by Sondra Perl (2004) engage the “felt sense” of the body which is a way to engage the intuitive knowledge of the body for storytelling and composition, thus drawing deeper connection to the writing. Extending this idea of guided writing, are acts of guided imagery, visualization, and meditation which engages the person entire bringing a holistic approach to writing. Campbell (1994), Moffett (1980), and Goldberg (2005) highlight how meditation practices can engage the whole person physically, emotionally, and spiritually, creating attention and drawing upon the knowledge of the body much in the same way Perl (2004) utilizes felt sense to guide the writing process. In this way space for dialogue and room for using the body in writing is created.

Because many writing classrooms are set up to be more traditional and do not acknowledge the body, and many writers will have come out of these writing environments, some might not view engagement of the body as part of the writing process as valid or appropriate. The experiences of the individual participants as captured through their narratives assert the value of being mindful, reflective and aware of the body and the impact it has on writing process. The next section presents suggestions for further research in hopes of bridging this gap or lessening resistance that may still remain to engaging the body in writing.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study was designed to be the first step of many on a longer, windy road of further thought, research, and inquiry. The scope of this study through purpose, design,
theoretical framework and influences is by no means exhaustive and the nature of
conceptualizing the body and placing it into a context is broad and wrought with
limitations, and suggestions for further research. The role of the body and related
concepts are emergent and requiring more study.

Limitations

There are numerous limitations of the study. First, there were numerous
limitations emerged regarding participation and time. From the start, recruitment outside
of a classroom context or trying to sift through the red tape to gain access to a community
based writing group were major challenges for this study. Expanding the participant pool
from professional, published writers to adults who identified and saw themselves as
writers was necessary. However widening the participant pool in this way still garnered
little interest in participation, noting there were only 4 participants recruited for this study.
Because the participants were not all coming from the same writing group or from a
specific class, there were constraints in planning group sessions or common interventions
to simulate the commonality of the group session due to lack of interest, reluctance to
work with strangers, or scheduling conflicts.

Additionally from the outset, studying embodiment and the role of the body in the
writing process is difficult, mainly due to the numerous definitions of embodiment, which
appear in the literature. This creates confusion and establishes embodiment to be abstract,
obtuse, and difficult to define. The highly subjective nature of embodiment is not
generalizable and relies heavily on personal experience and reporting from participants.

Yet it is my belief and assertion that embodiment should be studied and further
engagement of the body is warranted in the classroom. What we know before entering
the classroom is valid and can make contributions or establish further, more personal contexts for learning, which may in the end result in deeper, more meaningful learning experiences.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

There are a number of possibilities for future research that the study brings to light. Overall the six-week duration of the study was just long enough for participants to begin to notice their bodies and begin the evolution to being more body aware. When the final journals were collected, noted changes and shifts in perspective that once situated the body outside of the writing process really began to show depth of understanding, curiosity for further exploration of their writing process, more philosophical reflection, and less self-consciousness. They became more willing and open to personal experimentation, playing with the ideas and pushing them into their practice. A recommendation would be to continue the action research cycle using the same pool of participants but for a longer period of time. Additionally pulling from a community based writing group or even a writing class would keep a core group together for a longer span. Expanding the duration of the study would allow for further self-exploration and deeper reflection on body awareness and what it means for the writing process. A recommendation for the future may be to work with community based writing groups where a structure for meeting is already in place. This would make implementing a common activity for participants easier too.

Another recommendation for future research would be to replicate the study with other writers from different backgrounds and levels of experience. It would be interesting to select from a pool of published, professional writers whose sole occupation
is writing. The participants in this study committed to writing daily or numerous times per week, but the question remains if consistent writing practice that purposefully makes considerations for body awareness practice would yield increased results. Further study with a sample of professional writers could also explore whether or not there are variances in desire and feelings of pressure to produce their writing would be linked to livelihood and what impact this has on writing process.

Based on the assertions by Swartz (2011) the implications for exploring biological and neurological components for further research is of interest. While this type of research would be out of my range of knowledge it would be interesting to see what happens within the brain when it is engaged in the state of flow as described by Csiksentmihalyi (1998) and by the participants.

Future inquiry should also explore the way the body is introduced into the writing process and activities incorporated to draw attention to the body. Given that each participant began the study with an individual body awareness practice in mind, they all ended up doing the same action in the end, which was some form of meditative practice. Seeking answers to whether or not utilizing the same activity should lead to ideas for further practice, potentially developing a method to be used by those seeking to connect their body to their writing process. While meditative practices have been studied, using meditation to facilitate body awareness for writing needs further exploration. Additionally, making considerations for studying the impact of other activities from other disciplines such as art creation, music or dance, possibly even spiritual practices to draw attention to the body for writing should be explored. In doing so, participants may tap
into other dimensions of learning or ways of knowing that are more relevant and meaningful for them.

**Writing My Body: Final Thoughts and Reflections**

As someone who engages in and teaches creative writing, and drawing heavily on my own experiences in tandem with both imagination and memory, I recognize the need for stories to have an end. To draw this journey to a close it seems fitting to reflect on my own experiences and go back to the beginning of this story that began with turmoil more than 5 years ago and that now ends in peace. I end with a reflection that uses my creative voice. Just as I did in the participants’ stories, so the reader has a sense of how writing and embodiment are linked, I have bolded those words that highlight my body awareness and sense of embodiment.

*Clam shells follow me  
waves of wonderment abound  
Deep of blue, cool sea*

The **tide of my internal sea has shifted to a flat, calm surface**. The sun flashes and glints over the shades of blues and greens, as the journey continues toward a yet to be determined destination of horizons yet to see. This easy sea signals transition and with this change there’s evolution and new understanding that I’ve drawn from my experiences in my doctoral program and with the participants in the dissertation study. My education and the experience of this study enabled me to understand myself, my writing, and my learning in a new way. I’m drawn to the sea with the same **natural urgings as I’m drawn to write**. Metaphorically, the sea continues to represent how my body feels when I write: at times it is **wildly frenetic, shifting and roiling with unstoppable force, like wind-driven waves that just has to blow until it spins out of**
energy; other times it’s placid and cool, easy to sink into to escape an oppressive heat. Thinking in this way, my body and my writing have been connected all along, but only revealed once attention and awareness brought it to the surface.

**Toes at the Water’s Edge: Finding My Body**

Admittedly, I’ve learned through this study that to write with the body is to dive into murky waters; what can be intensely personal is often time juxtaposed with the unsettlingly unfamiliar. While I know I have a body, it wasn’t precisely clear in what ways my body was present. My story of body awareness and the role it has on my writing process is equally complex when compared to the participants in my study, despite the fact that I have explored events of my body numerous times under the academic microscope. But exploring and awareness are two separate concepts, functioning as more cause and effect than synchronicity.

Prior to doing this dissertation where my body was situated was never given much thought. Like most, I only drew an awareness of sensations in my body when I was sick, injured or felt uncomfortable within certain situations. **Initial awareness of my body was framed within illness and injury.** Books and story on the other hand, were always present. When I think back to my childhood the picture that blurrs into quick focus is of me, as a little girl just surrounded by books, paper, and pencils. Most of my days were spent sifting and flipping through books read so many times they were loose at the seams. When the covers opened and the bindings cracked, from the first words, I would fall completely into the stories. **Story is one of my oldest memories.**

These stories influenced a vivid imagination, which resulted in my own writing and stories that I created. I now understand these to be a combination of my embodied
experiences, reflection, and writing what I just feel has to be written, like that discussed by Gendlin and Merleau-Ponty. I said in Chapter One that I tend to think in story, and this is still true. Although the components of the story now incorporate aspects of my body, giving more depth and dimension to what I see. But understanding the body, and re-fleshing it as part of the writing process came not with deliberate attention while I was writing, rather my body came to me as a result of the emotional upheavals of loss coupled with pain of injury and illness.

From doing this study, I am now able to see the many ways my body is engaged in my stories: the horizon lines within my perception of memory of pain and suffering, falling into my experience, reliance on what my body knows, and the need to express this knowledge. Similar to the participants in my study, my body awareness story begins with pain. The debilitating pain of a degenerative bone disease in my wrist made not only the daily task of living wrought with pain, but made writing next to impossible some days. The rubbed raw frustration of grinding bones had no buffer of medication or relief of cartilage to soften the pain. Acute awareness was drawn to this tiny bone and it was as if the rest of my body disappeared. While this pain increased and grew to a low roar that I was constantly aware of, I began to see my body differently. This bone disease took my yoga practice and it took my ability to write until I felt satisfied. My body would no longer do what I needed or wanted to do. My inner sea of emotions became unsettled and unpredictable and I fought against myself to avoid getting sucked into the tormented currents.

At the height of the physical pain, during a short, six-month span of time, my inner sea rose into a long tsunami caused by the death of my basset hound, Greta, and
the ending of my marriage not long after. **With all its pain and turmoil, my body came rushing up at me.** And then I began to write.

**Pushing Into the Break Water: Body and Writing Connecting**

Through reflection I am able to see how I was using writing and for what purpose during this time. When Greta died, I took a simple, brown paper covered journal and **wrote everything I could about her, capturing the way she moved, what she sounded like, her smells, favorite memories.** I wrote them all down so they would be preserved. It felt desperate; I wanted to write them all down before I forgot them, as time tends to put distance between memory and emotion. It reminds me of what Merleau-Ponty says about reflective experience; that we are never able to go fully to engage the entirety of the experience, to once again be the experience. We are only able to recall through reflection, never re-live experiences, so it was important to capture her before time darkened these memories. Many days I would write through tears and the pain was wrenching. This was my first experience with the loss of a pet, and while I had a dog before Greta and Lucy came into my life, **I had never felt this degree of closeness to an animal** before. So I wrote as much of our five years together that I could and when I was done, **there was a sense of relief, and freedom to grieve without regret, momentary steps to healing her loss.** **Memorializing her in this way, kept her with me, and in doing so I felt her within me.**

I briefly recount this story because this period of my life is one that resulted in scars both literal and emotional. It was during this time when I made the connections between what writing has done for my body, and how tapping into what my body was feeling and doing, was revealing. Like the participants in this study, and the clinical
work of Pennebaker, I wrote to heal. Capturing it all in these journals enabled me to not only document the time because it marked when I began my life’s journey solely as me, as an independent who felt like an adult for the first time. **Writing calmed me and it released me. I felt as though I was no longer walking against the push of breakwater rushing and pounding the shore, but I felt I could dive under or fling myself ever gracefully over turbulent waves to get to calmer, quieter water.** It was through this that I discovered my body awareness activity.

**Swimming Past the Breakers: Writing and Body Connected**

Through my work in this doctoral program, completing this study, and writing the dissertation I began to make new connections between my body and writing. Writing has mostly been an easy process for me; it was my comfort zone and enabled me to establish my own escape from reality or to find myself by writing my thoughts and feelings. My dissertation process at time made me uncomfortable; the academic social science writing style was new and required different elements than I had been used to in the past. Where writing was always a settling and comforting experience, writing the dissertation challenged and unsettled me. I was no longer comfortable with writing and that was disorienting. I needed to find a way to deal with what I was feeling and calm myself down well enough to write. Meditation practice had been in and out of my life for years, mainly as the capstone to end a yoga session. In working at a refining a practice that worked for me as I progressed through my studies, I was able to find **quiet in short spurts** at first, then longer sessions over the next few months. Meditation continues to be a daily practice.
Meditation allowed me to feel my body and experience it in a new way and I focused on the intensity to which these realizations came to me. Either through visualization or strong emotional pulls, my body told me what to do. I can’t say how it gave the information to me, but I just knew. It was powerful and it felt bigger than me in a very spiritual, energetic way. My feet began to feel sticky as if I belonged to the Earth and it felt as though I was guided to what came next. I began to write.

The writing that resulted after the meditation session was and still is intense. The meditation practice has opened me up to a deeper understanding of myself; it has shown me to trust what is intuitively manifesting within my body that flows up from my center, through my arms, fingers move effortlessly over the keys. Gendlin (2004) calls this experience of words coming from the body a carrying forward. It is knowing instinctively in and through the body which words feel right, trusting and using this information to carry forward in writing. It is in these moments that my body dissipates, falls back to the guidance of the pre-reflective, implicit and works within a state of flow. When writing happens in this way, I feel filled up, yet drained. When I write, my body rocks in a rhythm as if something else guides me, conjuring to push-pull the story forth. My body is connected deeply to my writing, much like the participants in this study. It is a powerful connection.

Swimming Towards the Horizon: Ending the Story

Floating in the calm waters beyond the breakers, the eye is drawn to the horizon; the place where the sea meets the sky in a seemingly unreachable line. Swimming or sailing out towards the deep open ocean the horizon moves and shifts, racing from the light of day to blend together in cool dark night. The connections made between writing
and the body form horizons as well, as places that appear and disappear. The various ways this study revealed that the body is engaged in writing, through healing, by tapping into embodied experiences and knowledge, by just knowing how the next word to be written will feel, are all points on the horizon that appear as purpose for writing or as the body warrants. It is up to the individual writer to determine which horizon to swim toward or to turn back to shore, and ride the way in contentment to what has already been found.

This research project has been of great importance and significance for me. The loss, grief, and turmoil have provided opportunity for personal learning and growth, and for fully realizing my body. Some of what was discovered in the participants’ stories were experiences that I had myself and hoped would be found in their narratives. Each story and experience contributed to further understanding of the role of the body in all aspects of living, not just writing. What I ended up discovering was that we are all reflected within each other, connected through threads of common experience.

Finally, the work of this study and the writing that brought it to fruition are in flux and constant motion, much like the sea. Writing, like this study, is a process. Body awareness too is a process, an ongoing process of adult learning that also affects my work as an educator who teaches about writing. Swimming towards the horizon line will find no end to the stories, understandings or connections between writing and the body, but continuations or new beginnings. I look forward to seeing how they unfold.
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Appendix A

Potential Interview Questions for the First Interview

Questions about Background as a Writer
1. Can you tell me a little about how you grew up, and how you became a writer?
2. What is your first significant experience that you remember in terms of seeing yourself as a writer?

Questions on Writing
1. What type of writing do you do? (Genre)
2. Can you describe your writing process?
3. How did you come to writing? (How did you choose writing as a hobby/profession/etc)?
4. How do you feel when you write?
5. Is writing a form of healing for you and if so, can you describe how? (or can you describe an experience of ….)
6. You are a part of a writing group. Why did you decide to become a part of a writing group?
7. How is your writing process affected by being in a group, and how is it different than if you simply write on your own.

Questions on Writing and the Body
1. How is your body present in your writing?
   a. Do you have awareness of a certain part of your body or sensation in it?
   b. Do you ever write about your body, or about embodied experiences, and if so what?
2. When you write in ____ genre, do you get a sense of the writing in a certain part of your body?
3. What are the connections between your body and the stories (or ---) you write?
4. What happens when you struggle to write? (“writer’s block”)
   • Where do your stories (poems, ideas, ---) come from?
   • Where are YOU in your writing?
   • Describe the link between your writing practice and your body?

Questions on Experiences Drawing Attention to Body
   • (focus on art, meditation, exercise, or experiences drawing on both

Body Awareness or Body Attending Activities
1. What is your experience with body awareness activities? (To clarify suggest some examples like meditation, exercise, massage, yoga, etc)
2. How do you define body awareness?
   a. Associated with a spiritual practice?
3. (If he/she has a practice) Can you describe your body awareness practice?
4. (If he/she has a practice) What is the purpose of your body awareness practice?

Appendix B
Tentative Journaling Prompt for Participants

Participants will be expected to complete this on their own, between sessions as outlined in the prompt section below. It will be distributed and discussed during the first session.

Writing and the Body

As participants in this study you are being asked to complete exercises on your own, between our meetings, that are intended to provoke body awareness and reflections over the duration of 6 weeks. Body awareness practice is up to you and you should choose something that you are most comfortable, that you have an interest in learning or continuing.

PROMPT:

Meditation or other body awareness activities have been called a “tethered awareness to an object” (or task, image, movement, etc) (Gross, 2010). Find or continue a practice of body awareness that works for you. Some suggestions for you to consider may be choosing to participate in sitting or walking meditation, yoga practice, deep breathing, exercising (running, walking, swimming), getting massages or some other body work (etc,) or creating a piece of artwork, for example. This practice will be individual to your desire, ability, and willingness. It is additionally suggested that you complete your body awareness practice for at least 5-10 minutes at least twice per week for the duration of this project, which is 6 weeks. Longer duration or more in frequency is up to you. After completing your body awareness activity, write and reflect on your experience with particular awareness of your body.
Appendix C

Potential Interview Questions for the Final Interview

General Questions
1. What has the experience of being in this writing project been like?
2. What was the most significant aspect of the experience for you?

Questions on Writing
1. What kind of writing do you do since being a part of this project? (Genre)
2. What has changed about your writing process since beginning (or incorporating) body awareness practice?

Questions on Writing & the Body
1. When you write, do you get a sense of the writing in [a certain part of] your body?
2. Since starting your body awareness activity, how do you feel when you write or do you note a change?
3. What is the connection between your body and the stories (or ---) you write?
4. How is there a link between your writing practice and your body?
5. How do you engage or use your body in your writing?

Questions on Body Awareness Activity
1. Tell me about the individual body awareness activity you chose?
   a. What did you do?
   b. How often did you do this activity?
   c. How much time do you spend in each session?
2. How has your level of awareness of your body changed since this activity?
3. In what ways (or Has) the body awareness activity drawn awareness to your body?
4. What do you think the most significant thing you have learned from being in the study?
5. What do you hope to take from it?
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