



Associate Director's Corner

And she cried

By Cassie C. Ferguson, MD

In this Associate Director's Corner, Dr. Ferguson explores the concept of embodiment...

Anytime I cry now, I pay close attention. Since beginning Lexapro in May of 2020—a time in my life when anxiety had hijacked my brain, my sleep, my sense that there was a ground below my feet—I haven't cried. And for someone whose tears have always come quickly and easily (even if in private) this side effect feels odd, although it has made more time in the day.

Life, it seems, is packed full of tragedies and bittersweet moments worthy of tears, and as a pediatric emergency medicine physician and teacher and mother of three, I spend many hours of the week feeling fear, loss, injustice, or despair. Perhaps crying wasn't the most productive way to deal with life's never-ending realities, (author Rachel Aviv writes in "Strangers to Ourselves" that her friend refers to Lexapro as "Make the Ambitious Ladies More Tolerable Pills") but I have missed the release of it.

To be honest, I didn't notice I had stopped crying until a friend pointed out that she hadn't cried since starting the same medication. It is not that I don't care, or that I don't feel sad, it is just that my body doesn't respond with the same sense of woundedness. Lexapro has absolutely made it possible for me to walk in the world without incapacitating fear *and* I sometimes wonder if it allows me to be more myself, or if it is muting something essential to who I am as a human. Regardless, now when I feel the pins and needles behind my eyes and the tears begin to well up and distort my vision, I pay very close attention to what or who is causing them.

"Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh and the greatness which does not bow before children." - Khalil Gibran

Kaitlin Curtice is an author and an enrolled citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, and she writes on the intersections of spirituality and identity. On a recent [podcast](#), she spoke with Amanda Doyle, Glennon Doyle and Abby Wambach about what it means to be embodied.

Even as a years-long practitioner of meditation and yoga, and someone who espouses the importance of being in the present moment and practicing embodiment, I admittedly don't always understand how to operationalize that in real life. In her book, "Living Resistance" Curtice explains that being embodied is difficult for many of us because we have been taught to be ashamed of our bodies; many of us have had to shed a part of ourselves to survive in families, or institutions, or societies that wanted to disconnect us from our power and our history. As a result, we default to living only in our heads because allowing what we are feeling to "seep into our body" is scary or even painful.

To feel present, to move from her head into her body, Curtice looks at a picture of herself when she was 8 years old that she keeps on her laptop and asks herself, "What does 8-year-old Kaitlin need?" This helps her to come back into her body because 8-year-old Kaitlin is "not going to say that she needs a new business strategy. Ten-year-old Kaitlin is going to say, 'I need rest. I need to walk outside. I need fresh air. I need to scream.'"

"Maybe you don't know yourself until the mirror of the water reminds you of your goodness and brings you home again." - Kaitlin B. Curtice

I was driving to work when I listened to this podcast. And I began to think about 8-year-old Cassie, about what 8-year-old Cassie needed. *And I started to cry.* I began thinking about 10-year-old Cassie who would force herself to stay awake on long drives with her family because she was convinced that her (very capable, very responsible) Dad would fall asleep and crash the car. I thought about 13-year-old Cassie who was stood up on her first date and learned what unworthiness felt like. I thought about 20-year-old Cassie who for the first time in her life got a grade that wasn't an 'A' and whose entire identity was suddenly called into question.

I kept crying as I thought about what they needed then, about the anxiety that they carried around in their bodies before there were words for that, about how lonely it felt to believe that love was conditional on performance and perfection. I thought about how I would care for them now, about what I would say if they were a student that came into my office in pain...

I think I would say this: I know the expectations you have for yourself and the expectations that others have for you feel heavy. I know that sometimes the person you feel like deep inside doesn't always match up with the person you think other people need you to be. **Please believe** that it's ok to feel this way; that you are not the only one who feels this way. **Please remember** that worthiness may always feel mysterious and slippery, but if you pay close attention, it will reveal itself in unexpected kindnesses, in the sacrament of friendship, in that very first moment you look at your pager and realize they are calling for you.

Perhaps I cry when I think about my 10-year-old, 13-year-old, and 20-year-old selves because my 46-year-old self can see their worthiness so clearly; when I think about them, the love I deny my present self rushes in and envelops me.

As our graduates prepare to let go of this phase of their life, may each of them (and all of us) know that immediate and circumferential love and self-worth. May we all be reminded that it has been present in our bodies all along, that it lacks conditions, that it can hold us when things are difficult.

***Cassie C. Ferguson, MD**, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at MCW and the Associate Director of the Kern Institute. Her mind is occupied with thoughts of her husband and three sons, whatever book she is currently reading, and the well-being of her students.*