FEELINGS WHEEL 2.0

A Model to Increase Emotional Intelligence by Identifying, Understanding, Communicating, and Regulating Feelings

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PREFACE

"I feel…" is a phrase that we hear all the time when people make arguments, convey their inner selves, and discuss politics. Yet when you ask people to explain or describe where their feelings come from, they often struggle to conceptualize or understand them. I have noted this paradox in feeling and understanding emotions since I read Goethe's Faust in high school.

My take on Faust is this. Dr. Faust is a famous professor of all the subjects, yet he *feels* unfulfilled and depressed despite achieving an understanding of most human knowledge. Faust's negative feelings are so intense, and he feels so out of patience (Goethe, 1980, p. 55), that he sells his soul to the Devil to feel joy (pp. 55–57). Here is the story of a man who possesses all theological and worldly knowledge and will, by choice, spend eternity in Hell to feel joy now! After reading that, the power and risks of emotions took root in my mind.

Since then, without really noticing it, my intellectual life has primarily been learning about how feelings work and impact the world. In college courses for my History degree, I could see how feelings impacted history and philosophy. As an Animal Science major, I gained a new strong focus on animal rights and animal feelings, which had a great impact on how producers and the population at large thought about how to raise and treat animals. This is in contrast to the past; animal science did not seem to care much if animals had feelings, and success was determined mainly through empirical production measurements.

This shift was so profound that I became the first master's student in the Animal Science Department at The Ohio State University to study Animal Welfare/Behavioral Psychology. My actual research was preference testing (basically asking pigs what they preferred between options). Feelings must drive preference, so in a roundabout way, even my master's degree had a strong focus on how emotions worked, at least in pigs. I then worked for many years reviewing and consulting for animal handling in slaughterhouses; no doubt this work was also driven by the modern concern with how animals feel. Of course, when I did the graduate work to get my Clinical Mental Health Counseling degree and license, there was much talk about emotions. However, I do not remember good explanations for what the feelings were for or how to help people understand them better.

I was given a copy of the original Feeling Wheel by Dr. Gloria Willcox at the beginning of my counseling career. The copy I got did not indicate where it came from or how to use it. But at least here was some model to work with. I started giving it to clients and found that it often got the client to engage more in discussions about feelings.

So, I started looking for more information about using the Feeling Wheel in new and creative ways to help people understand and regulate emotions. I was disappointed with how little there was on how to use the Feelings Wheel, despite how helpful it seemed. Since then, I have made it a mission to find new ways to help people with the Feelings Wheel model. I first explored how feelings worked based on the Feelings Wheel in an article in *Counseling Today* early in my career that explored how emotions were different in adults with autism from the general population.

As you can see, I have been thinking about feelings for several decades. Then, using my clinical experience and research, I spent several years developing an updated model of the Feelings Wheel. Now, I have spent over two years writing this book explaining it. The FW 2.0 model and this book are the fruit of these many years of thinking and research. Here is a model and book that will help you practically understand where the feelings come from, what their jobs are, and how you can take charge of your emotions.

You will learn how the FW 2.0 model of feelings was created. You will see specific examples of how to use FW 2.0 to change the feelings you struggle with. You will understand the purpose (and what they are not good at) of each feeling family. You will comprehend the interactions between the emotions, body feelings, behaviors, and

the language of the feelings. You will undoubtedly explore many other things about your feelings as you explore this FW 2.0 book.

By exploring feelings with you in this book, you will develop the ability to understand, communicate, and change your emotions. Using FW 2.0, unlike Faust, you can find positive feelings in your life without engaging in unhelpful thinking/actions or avoiding dealing with your emotional challenges. Finally, don't sell your soul to the Devil for joy. He is clearly not good at finding positive emotions in his own existence.

INTRODUCING FEELINGS WHEEL 2.0

I'm sure animals have feelings, even the lazy cat that lives in my house (see picture on this page). I am sure I have feelings, despite sometimes not paying attention to them. I also think other people have feelings, though what they are, often I have no idea. Yet, when asked, I struggle to define what feelings are. Most of us do. Feelings are often hard to understand, communicate, and regulate. That is a problem for most people.

Feelings are all around us and significantly impact the world. In fact, without feelings, we could not survive. Feelings are essential to everyone. This is easy to see, as feelings and their purposes have been continuously discussed since ancient times. The problem is how to talk about and define feelings to yourself and others. The fact is that feelings defy any rigid and easy-to-understand definition(s). Even researchers of feelings can't agree on what they are and their function(s) (see Plutchik, 1980). As with the most vital things in life, there seems to be a distinct mystery about feelings.

Despite this mystery, much thought, time, and money are spent on understanding feelings. We try to understand and regulate them through contemplation, mental health treatment, meditation, drugs, and education on feeling "emotional" intelligence. Despite all this time and money, I still find that most people have trouble understanding and talking about feelings in an organized way.

Feelings are essential to understanding ourselves and the world around us. We should be able to develop and define important aspects of feeling functionally, even if imperfectly. This is so that we can know what to do with feelings, how to use them to experience life fully, and how to learn the knowledge they teach. Ultimately, if we could define how feelings relate to one another, it would be much easier to change the feelings that cause us distress. If only there were a tool to help with our feeling quandaries! Lucky for us, there is one, and that tool is the **Feelings Wheel 2.0**.

Introducing Feelings Wheel 2.0 (FW 2.0)

Meet the Feelings Wheel 2.0 a tool to help you with your problems in understanding, communicating, and regulating feelings. The Feelings Wheel 2.0 (which I will refer to as **FW 2.0** in this book) is an easy-to-use and understandable tool. This is what FW 2.0 looks like (get a high quality color download of FW 2.0 at www.TheFeelingsWheel.com):

FW 2.0
The Feelings Wheel 2.0

Original FW concept by Gloria Willcox (1982). Additions by Kenneth Smith (2023).

THINKING / CONTEMPLATION / LEARNING EMOTIONS

ACTION / URGENT EMOTIONS

Figure 1: Original Feeling Wheel from Willcox (1982)

The basis of FW 2.0 was the Feelings Wheel, created by Dr. Gloria Willcox in 1982. I will refer to the **original 1982 Feelings Wheel** as **FW 1.0** throughout this book. This is FW 1.0:

To create FW 2.0, I added features to FW 1.0, which I updated to reflect modern research and understanding of feelings to make an even better tool. At its core, however, FW 2.0 and this book could not exist without the work and brilliant creation of the late Dr. Gloria Willcox's Feeling Wheel. I hope she approves of my work, and I dedicate this book to her.

Hey, I Have Seen the FW 1.0 Before!

Many of you will note that FW 1.0 is widely used in mental health and creative settings, though FW 1.0 may be presented in various forms and with modifications. This is true—to the point that most creative people and mental health practitioners have seen FW 1.0 before. So widely known is FW 1.0 that you can buy pillows and clothing with it (often with slight variations) on them.

Why Make an FW 2.0 and This Book if FW 1.0 is Well Known?

Despite FW 1.0 standing the test of time, two important reasons exist for creating FW 2.0 and writing this book.

The first reason is that despite the widespread use and knowledge of FW 1.0*,* almost no books or materials show the many ways FW 1.0 can be used to help people. The article introducing FW 1.0 was only two pages of text, so its information was limited. When it is presented in psychological and creative materials, a picture of FW 1.0 is presented without explanation, and there seems to be an assumption that people should *just know* how to use it (and you know the old saying about assumptions!)*.*

The one book I could find directly dealing with how to use FW 1.0 was by Dr. Willcox (2001) herself: Feelings: Converting Negatives to Positives. However, even this book only captured one way to use FW 1.0, so it does not show its full potential. Feelings: Converting Negatives to Positives has minimal background in constructing FW

1.0. Also, this work is not widely known, I do not think it has been printed since 2001, and I suspect it was self-published.

Despite the wide use and knowledge of FW 1.0, there seems to be no organized and clear resource showing how to use it or even a broader theory behind it. More specifically, there is no resource I can find that sets out various ways to use FW 1.0 to help understand and regulate feelings. This limits the usefulness of FW 1.0 in self-help, mental health therapy, and creative applications. This book has been written to show a clear theoretical basis for both FW 1.0 and FW 2.0. Most importantly, this book will show numerous creative and impactful ways to use FW 2.0 that are difficult to find or figure out without help.

The second reason FW 2.0 is needed is that FW 1.0 has not been updated since its creation in 1982. Without updates, FW 1.0, though an excellent resource, is much more limited in usefulness than it could be. For instance, not including anything about behavior or bodily feelings limits FW 1.0. Features of FW 2.0 and new additional resources put forward in this book are meant to update FW 1.0 and to make it an even more helpful tool.

What FW 2.0 and This Book Will Teach You

FW 2.0 and this book will teach you the following:

- FW 2.0 as a visual model of the different families of feelings.

- How different feelings are related to each other.

- General behaviors that are observed and experienced with different feelings.

- The feelings' job (i.e., how both individual and groups of feelings are trying to help you).

- Bodily sensations tables linked to FW 2.0 so you can figure out your feelings by measuring body sensations and somatic reactions.

- Ways to use FW 2.0 to change and regulate feelings.

- FW 2.0 as a model and touchstone to communicate with others about feelings.

- Various situations, kinds of people, and examples of how to use FW 2.0 to help yourself and others.

FW 2.0 as a Teacher for Natural Feelings and a Foundational Tool for More Complex Feelings

Now, will FW 2.0 do away with all our problems in defining, understanding, and discussing feelings? The short answer is no. FW 2.0 is designed to be a foundational tool and model for understanding and regulating feelings.

When most people learn math, they must start with the basics (e.g., arithmetic) and then build on this foundation with the more complex concepts (e.g., algebra, calculus). FW 2.0 is like arithmetic for feelings, a base on which to learn about more complex feelings. Unlike math, there are many bases to build an understanding of complex feelings, but FW 2.0 is one of the clearest and easiest to conceptualize.

Like any clear and easy-to-conceptualize model, FW 2.0 does not teach us about every nuance or complexity of feeling. For instance, you will notice that on FW 2.0, all feelings are what I usually refer to as natural feelings, not more complex feelings.

Natural feelings are seen in every person from a very young age. This is well illustrated if we note the six root (or center) feelings on FW 2.0. The root feelings are Sad, Mad, Scared, Joyful, Powerful, and Peaceful. These feelings can be observed in infants, young children, teens, adults, and the elderly.

Complex feelings are a mixture of feelings, beliefs, morals, values, and societal expectations (Tangney et al., 2007). An example of a complex feeling is shame, which you will not find in FW 2.0. Shame is a complex feeling with many drivers, primarily focused on fitting in socially.

FW 2.0 is a valuable tool for understanding the natural feelings (e.g., sad, ashamed, guilty, anxious, etc.) that contribute to the experience of shame. However, it could not form a complete understanding of shame. FW 2.0

is a good teacher and guide to foundational feelings that participate in complex ones. If you do not have the foundations to build something, how can you understand the complexes built on them? Thus, mastering the natural feelings shown on FW 2.0 will allow for a better understanding and regulation of complex or unclear feelings.

FW 2.0 is also an engaging educational device because it adds valuable knowledge and usefulness to FW 1.0. The FW 1.0 (and variations of it) have stood the test of time. It has been widely used in mental health settings and creative circles since 1982. This is quite an accolade since many—probably most—emotional, creative, and psychological tools introduced over the last 40 years have gone extinct or have been proven worthless (scream therapy, anyone?). And some popular psychological tools/approaches have even been proven harmful (e.g., repressed memory theory, which was so harmful that it sent innocent people to jail (Otgaar et al., 2019)). So helpful updates to the reliable and time-tested FW 1.0 to create FW 2.0 make for an even better tool.

Overview of the Chapters

Now that we have seen why FW 2.0 and this book were created, let us briefly review the chapters and see what valuable knowledge is contained in each.

Chapter 1 is a ***very short history of emotional research***. Understanding how thoughts about feelings have developed and been conceptualized through different historical pathways is important. Exploring the history of feelings also gives us some background to the theoretical development of FW 1.0 and FW 2.0.

Chapter 2 deals with ***the development and foundation of FW 1.0 and FW 2.0***. It includes a brief biography of and influences on Dr. Willcox (creator of FW 1.0). This is vital to understanding FW 1.0's development. The influences, construction, and evidence base for FW 1.0 is summarized and why FW 1.0 (and, by extension, FW 2.0) is an evidence-supported tool. Finally, the ***updated additions to FW 1.0 that make FW 2.0 a better*** and more up-to-date tool are discussed.

Chapter 3 examines the concept of ***alexithymia***, where individuals have difficulty putting feelings into words. Alexithymia is maladaptive and quite common in many (likely the majority of) mental health disorders, and we will specifically look at various mental health diagnoses that have alexithymia as a feature. Alexithymia often interferes with relationships, as being unable to communicate what one feels is detrimental to effective communication, understanding, empathy, and intimacy (Luminet et al., 2018). FW 2.0 is an excellent tool for treating alexithymia, and the reasons for so will be discussed.

The focus of **Chapter 4** is the three central sections that form the ***Core Circles*** sections on FW 2.0, which is basically FW 1.0. This includes all the divisions within this core with an exploration of each. We discuss the relationship between feelings, such as which are closely related and the opposites of individual and groups of feelings. How to use core circles to regulate feelings will be shown. This will include the concept of bridging as a strategy to change feelings that we find undesirable, step by step, into more desirable or helpful feelings.

Chapter 5 describes the ***Behaviors Circles*** division on FW 2.0. The Behaviors Circle correlates the behaviors we usually observe–either in others or in ourselves–with specific feelings. These behaviors can be used to measure and figure out what feelings a person is having at any one time, which in certain people and situations may be much easier to do than trying to get people to communicate feelings. Additionally, behaviors can be useful in feelings regulation as practicing behavior(s) that are different from the feeling a person is experiencing may be an effective strategy to the regulation of feelings.

The ***Thinking vs. Action*** division in FW 2.0 is important to understand why the feelings are acting at any one time and what they are trying to motivate a person to do. Basically, Action emotions want us to act now. Acting now can be very important but has the cost of usually limiting the ability to reason and to learn. Thinking emotions are much more able to allow reasoning and learning, but often at the cost of acting rapidly. Understanding which emotions foster Action versus the ones that foster Thinking are very important when dealing with emotions in different situations and contexts.

Chapter 6 explores the concept and theory of *interoception*, which is about how body sensations translate into feelings. This will include what interoception is and discuss how it is a sense of the body (like sight, smell, touch, etc.). Why interoception is critical to understanding feelings is demonstrated. Finally, we look at additional interoception tools to use with FW 2.0, especially the new interoception table matched to FW 2.0, to measure feelings better using bodily sensations.

The *Interoception Examples Section* on FW 2.0 will be the focus of the second section of Chapter 6. The Interoception Examples Section integrates interoceptive and body sensations often felt when experiencing different feelings. This section is to give a narrow overview of body sensations often linked to specific feelings and is in no way exhaustive. The limitations of the Interoception Example Section will also be examined, and it is important not to over-generalize or attribute certain body sensations to individuals if their interoceptive experience is different.

The third section of chapter 6 is the *Body Sensation Temperature Gradient*. The Body Sensation Temperature Gradient is highly related to interoceptive and bodily sensation experience. This temperature gradient is used as it gives a smoother-appearing visual understanding of how one factor of interoception/somatic experience—that of the sensation of body temperature—can help us determine, communicate, and regulate specific feelings or feeling families. The Body Sensation Temperature Gradient has limitations similar to that of the interoception examples section and will be examined to prevent misunderstanding and misuse of this section of FW 2.0.

In **Chapters 7 through 12**, each of the feeling families on FW 2.0 is explored. Remember these six feelings families are *Peaceful, Powerful, Joyful, Scared, Mad, and Sad*. Each of these chapters is broken into two sections. The first section looks at the following features of each feeling family:

- An overview of the feeling family.
- What jobs the feeling family is good at.
- The interoception, or body sensations, that correlates with each feeling family.
- What jobs the feeling family is bad at.
- Addiction and mental health challenges that the feeling family may play a significant role in.
- Any interesting patterns noted in the feeling family.

The second section of chapters 7-12 briefly describes each feeling on FW 2.0. The exploration includes defining each feeling and any other helpful information about each feeling on FW 2.0.

Chapter 13 examines approaches and ideas on how to use FW 2.0 with different populations and problems. We look at examples of using FW 2.0 to help with adult problems, feeling education in children, self-help uses, and ideas for mental health professionals. Specifically for professionals, we look at examples of how to use FW 2.0 with particular mental health diagnoses, such as Autism and PTSD. We will also look at ways to use FW 2.0 in specific psychological approaches, such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT).

Special cases and interesting notes about certain feelings and cases involving FW 2.0 will be put forward in chapter 13. This chapter will contain concepts from color theory that influenced the making of FW 1.0 (and therefore FW 2.0) and how these concepts can be used to further expand understanding and conceptualizing feelings using FW 2.0. Also included will be speculative patterns that might be present in certain feelings families, which lead to creative ways of adapting and understanding feelings using these possible patterns from FW 2.0.

Closing

FW 2.0 is a great tool to help you identify, understand, communicate, and regulate feelings. FW 2.0 is based on the original FW 1.0, which has been popular since 1982. This book will show you how to understand and use FW 2.0 with various populations and yourself. This work will also show you why it can be hard to understand feelings and give you examples of different kinds of people that FW 2.0 can help. Now that we have seen the

fantastic potential of FW 2.0, let us look briefly at the exciting history and research that helped develop FW 1.0 and FW 2.0!