December 1998

Emotional and Embodied Knowledge: Implications for Critical Practice

Colin Peile
University of Queensland

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol25/iss4/4
Emotional and Embodied Knowledge: Implications for Critical Practice

COLIN PEILE
The University of Queensland
Department of Social Work and Social Policy

Within the practice orientation of the Critical Social Work tradition there has been a dominance of conceptual and rational processes. This has lead to a failure to acknowledge the importance of bodily and emotive knowledge for practice theory. This paper offers a rudimentary and tentative epistemology which recognizes the importance of the body, emotions, ideas and their context. These ideas invite a reconsideration of critical theories of change.

This paper explores the problems that emerge for social work practice because of the neglect of bodily and emotional knowledge (with a particular focus on critical theory) and provides a tentative theory of how bodily and emotional knowledge can be understood in relation to conceptual knowledge. This will provide a possible direction for reformulating critical theory and critical approaches to social work practice. To begin it is necessary to first explore the place of rational knowledge.

It is a common view that to achieve enlightenment requires rationality and as a consequence the subjugation of our bodies and emotions which are associated with irrationality and desire. Turner (1984) suggests this is in part a reflection of the western Christian tradition which sees the body as the location of corrupting appetite, of sinful desire and of private irrationality. The body needs to be controlled to maintain the social order. This is also consistent with the influence of Cartesian thought where it is the mind which defines humans as social beings (Shilling, 1993). In this context, knowledge is associated with ideas and thinking. We develop knowledge about bodies and emotions, they have no knowledge of their own. This paper will seek to demonstrate that the body and emotions are a way of knowing which need to be valued equally along side conceptual knowing.
Interestingly, the neglect of the body and emotions is not only epistemological. Turner (1984) and Shilling (1993) have both highlighted the neglect of the body in sociological theory. This is also the case in psychology (Golman, 1996) and so not surprisingly, the dominance of rationality is assumed in the social work literature with few exceptions (Kondrat, 1992). Critical social work practice is no exception (Healy, 1996).

Critical Theory and Rationality

Critical theory grew up within the enlightenment tradition which claimed a rational process of developing knowledge could enable us to gain control over our social and physical environment. This tradition grew in tandem with the rapid development of technology and capitalist societies and it gave rise to a class of experts that could guide industry and governments to further the goals of capitalism. In this context deterministic, biological views of the body and emotions dominated, encouraging an understanding that the body and emotions needed to be controlled to enable a civil society and efficient production. This control became the goal of the social sciences with positivist embracement of a detached objectivity the main epistemology (Fay, 1975; Ife, 1997).

The critical tradition positioned itself in opposition to the private ownership of capital and the domination of the wealthy. This domination was seen to lead the powerless to a false understanding of their own situation in which they conformed to the ideas of the ruling class. Enlightenment thinking however generated the notion that the oppressed by becoming rationally aware of their circumstances could break this false consciousness and then act to achieve the development of a non-oppressive society and process of government (Fay, 1987).

The critical tradition also challenged positivist epistemology. Marx and other critical theorists drew on Hegel's concept of the dialectic. Hegel used this notion to understand the process of developing knowledge, describing a dialectical progression through four stages. He begins firstly with sense certainty which is a belief that we can know the world directly through our sense experience and that such experience offers an objective truth. This however, is challenged by the second stage of perception which highlights that
observation is actually language dependent and so perceptions do not arise from the object specifically but are universals which we bring to the experience. Perception however is also limited as all perceptions require a perception not only of the object but also of the opposite of the object, (that is, all the things it is not). This requires understanding the relationship between perceptions. The stage of understanding however also fails and leads to his final stage of self-consciousness. In self consciousness we realize we are not separate from the object of our observation but are actively involved in manipulating and changing that object. That is, reality is a product of our actions and so can only be properly understood by recognizing, in a self-conscious way, our own part in this process of transformation (Hegel, 1910; Marcova, 1982). For Hegel the truth could only be uncovered through an active involvement in reality not from a detached objective position.

Marx adopted a similar position (Bologh, 1979) but in contrast to Hegel’s conservatism he saw the need for a revolutionary consciousness. This involved a recognition by the oppressed of the ways in which this oppression has occurred along with an understanding of how such oppression could be resisted. Knowledge only has validity by attempting to transform reality (Fay, 1975; Mao-tse-tung, 1967). This Hegelian/ Marxist epistemology is in stark contrast to the positivist underpinnings of capitalism but the dominance of rationality is still not challenged as the rational conceptual process of consciousness raising is a precondition for radical action to change society. Implied in this position is that bodies and emotions are socially constructed rather than biologically fixed, but nevertheless, rationality is still dominant and is still the vehicle for achieving change to our bodies and emotions.

The notion of dialectics allowed a social theory which made conflict, contradiction and transformation unavoidable aspects of social life. This gave impetus and legitimacy to the development of social movements and processes of social change. Broadly within the enactment of the critical tradition, two styles of practice can be identified and perhaps seen on a continuum. On one end we have a dogmatic approach which legitimated a vanguard acting on behalf of the oppressed group and which tried to educate or raise the consciousness of the oppressed in a didactic way. At the other end activists engaged in a process of
asking strategic or critical questions (Fook, 1993; Mullaly, 1993) to help an oppressed group recognize for themselves their own false consciousness and to formulate their own revolutionary consciousness. Armed with an analysis that their problems are not their fault it is assumed that this oppressed group will then be in a position to challenge their oppressors and to transform their reality (Fay, 1975, 1987; Fook, 1993; Mullaly, 1993). Freire calls this the process of conscientization (Freire, 1972). Critical social work in the main has been attracted to this second Freireian tradition (Leonard, 1984; Ife, 1997).

The critical objective of consciousness raising and conscious action assumes that knowledge resides in peoples’ minds: an ‘idealistic theory of behaviour which assumes that people’s behavioural, perceptual, and emotive dispositions are solely the result of mental, essentially discursive processes’ (Fay, 1987, p. 149). The extent of the domination of the rational is given a clear illustration in Ife’s (1997) embracement of the image of critical social workers as ‘street level intellectuals’. This rationality is not only a character of radical or critical practice however, it is in accord with most styles of social work practice (see Howe, 1987; Payne, 1991) which seek via a process of ‘talk’ to enable clients to gain new insights and understandings.

This intellectual elitism assumes there is a vacant territory that is waiting to be colonialised by rationality, but it will be argued here that the territory is full, and ready to sometimes resist and challenge rational forms of knowing. Fay (1987) points out that while the exploited may adopt a radical consciousness, their bodies may continue to behave in ways that reinforce their oppression. Our bodies have learnt to survive and move in the world in particular ways. A rational decision to behave differently does not mean our bodies will follow or that anyone else’s body will follow.

**Limits of Rationality**

Critical theory over the last hundred years has waxed and waned in popularity principally in relation to the strength of conservative positions. Recently however challenges to critical theory have emerged from the non-conservative postmodern and
feminist postmodern directions. Postmodernism has challenged the very idea of rationality, the possibility of self conscious actors and the desirability of any positions claiming truth or universal applicability (Leonard, 1997; Peile, 1997). This has lead to what Grosz (1993) calls a ‘crisis of reason’ and to the disappearance of the epistemological certainty on which critical praxis has relied (Leonard, 1997). A consequence of this has been for the movement of many critical theorists to a more postmodern framework or for attempts to redevelop critical theory in relation to postmodern insights (Healy, 1996; Leonard, 1997). This epistemological uncertainty has opened up an interest in more marginal ways of knowing such as to do with feelings and intuition (Ife, 1997).

In addition feminists have long challenged the dominance of positivist epistemologies, advocating a more open epistemology (Harding, 1986) and the relevance of bodily and emotional knowing (Jagger & Bordo, 1989; Grosz, 1993, 1995). Thus, both Postmodernism and Feminism have lifted up the importance of the body (and emotions) for social theory (Healy, 1996; Tayson, 1998; Tennant, 1998). While drawing inspiration from both traditions, my own theorizing does not neatly fit with either, as I have reservations about the way the body is treated in both. It needs to be acknowledged that both areas are experiencing rapid theoretical development with a huge variety of different positions within each, so I do not want to close off the potential for engagement with either in the future. However, in the context of this paper I think it will be useful to situate myself in relation to these traditions at least in a very general and crude way.

The postmodernists talk about the body as a site or text upon which various discourses are inscribed (Leonard, 1997). For some the body is pictured as ‘docile’, while for others as a potential site for resistance (Tayson, 1998), but in both cases the materiality of the body is neglected (Shilling, 1993). At best its fleshy reality is relativised as just one possible discourse about the body. Radical poststructural feminists recognize the body as a site for alternative knowledge building and action (Healy, 1996). They suggest male and female bodies have different capacities which arise from different lived experience but that these capacities are not just inscribed in our consciousness they are inscribed on the body (Healy, 1996). For postmodern feminists, knowledge can
not be disembodied but rather, ‘the inclusion of embodied experience is argued to be central to, and indistinguishable from, the knowledge making process’ (Tayson, 1998). Knowledge is thus relativised as a consequence of the different embodied experience of different people.

While the relativism of postmodernism and postmodern feminism provides a useful orientation from which to develop a critique, it is not very useful to the development of constructive actions (Peile, 1997) something that is essential to a constructive critical tradition. My own orientation has arisen more from the work of Fay (1987), Polanyi (1958, 1966) and Schon (1983) and has a more grand theorizing quality. I take seriously the criticisms of feminists and postmodernists about the totalitarian qualities of modernist grand narratives but suggest that the problem is not with their grand character but rather arises because of their determinist cosmology (Peile, 1994; Zimmerman 1989). The totalitarian quality comes from their belief in the very possibility of control (Bateson, 1972) based on a deterministic world view, not from their attempt to make sense of the whole. It is through attempting to make sense of the whole that one can gain a respect for the parts. The interdependence of things, which has similarities to the critical concept of over-determination and totality (Bologh, 1979; Resnick and Wolff, 1987) encourages motivation for constructive action, as people recognize ‘we are all in this together’. The postmodern position however can tend to an ethical relativism which mitigates against action and in a sense adopts a new form of determinism ‘discourse determinism’. I see both ‘reality determinism’ and ‘discourse determinism’ (Leonard, 1997, p. 11) as problematic. Attempting to make sense of the whole, without assuming certainty, I think is a better platform for social work practice.

Having situated myself in relation to Feminism and Postmodernism I want to now return to the neglect of the body and emotions and to explain something of what I mean by bodily and emotion knowledge before further theorising about them.

Body and Emotional Knowledge

Fay (1987) suggests there are real limits to the process of consciousness raising because of the privilege it affords rationality.
He points out that knowledge not only exists in our minds but is also enfolded in peoples' muscles and skeletons and the existence of this knowledge calls into question the privileged place given to conceptual knowledge. Much of our everyday life is reliant on this bodily knowledge. Some basic forms of knowledge are to do with movement: walking, running, jumping, standing and so on. Our knowledge of how to do these things is primarily unconscious and involves no rational thought, the knowledge is contained in our bodies. The body has its own form of knowing and can learn directly through 'bodily discourse: through images which tell us what clothes, body shape, facial expression, movements, and behaviour is required' (Bordo, 1989, p. 17).

Further, it becomes apparent that rational knowledge in some situations, is an inferior form of understanding. It has been estimated that a written manual sufficient to accurately describe all the muscular movements and choices necessary to ride a bicycle would be over a hundred pages long. However if a rider tried to consciously implement such rules the calculations would be too difficult and slow to avoid falling. Rationally, it is a very complex behaviour and yet our bodies can learn to ride without this conscious understanding. This body memory is clearly evident when contexts change and we continue to behave in the same way even though such behaviour is now unproductive or even dangerous such as when motoring in a country which drives on the opposite side of the road. Phobias and eating disorders provide other examples.

As Schon puts it 'it seems right to say that our knowing is in our actions' (1983, p. 49). Kondrat (1992) suggests that knowledge embodied in the act is the most readily useable practical knowledge. This 'knowing-in-action' as Schon (1983) describes it, refers to a skilful action which does not arise from an intellectual operation and may have been learnt without a conscious rational process. Polanyi (1966) adds to our appreciation of these issues through his notion of tacit knowledge: the knowledge which informs our actions and yet can not necessarily be consciously recalled. He demonstrates how all observation and so all science is dependent on this type of knowledge and so with it the personal elements that are enfolded in this subsiderary or tacit awareness.

For Jaggar (1989) reason is seen in opposition to emotion. Rea-
son has been over time associated with the male, while emotion is devalued in its connection with the female and with irrationality. Indeed, the enlightenment sought to replace emotion with reason. Jaggar seeks to reverse such valuations by recognizing the importance of emotion in the process of inquiry. Our emotions represent habituated responses to certain events that resonate with other similar experiences. They represent our emotional evaluations of different situations and so are essential to our processes of observation and understanding. We feel sad for others when they have suffered a loss; angry when we see others dominated or exploited. Such feelings can provoke us to action, to support or to challenge. This store of attitudes and evaluations forms our actions and can be seen as a store of knowledge. ‘Emotions prompt us to act appropriately, to approach some people and situations and to avoid others, to caress and cuddle, fight or flee’ (Jaggar, 1989, p. 155).

Healy (1996) gives attention to the gendered body knowledge in practice. She suggests that female workers tend to have a bodily knowledge in the form of unconscious communication processes which seek to minimise status differences and which emphasise their connectedness to the other. This knowledge is consistent with the egalitarian objectives of critical practice but at the same time made women vulnerable to questioning of their competence. She claims that activist literature has tended to assume the powerfulness of the worker but missed this more contradictory and complicated understanding of the power of female activists, an analysis made possible by attention to the bodily knowledges involved.

In social work, bodily and emotive knowing is sometimes implied in discussions of the nature of practice wisdom, however such wisdom is still generally spoken about in a conceptual way where it refers to: the accumulation of various pieces of information, assumptions and judgements (DeRoos, 1990); or implicit cognitive schemata (Scott, 1990). The rational is still privileged. The revalorizing of bodily and emotive knowledges will require a different perspective and new understandings. To begin to move in this direction we need to consider: the relationship of body and emotional knowledge to conceptual knowledge; their rela-
tionship to the context; and how both develop, that is the process of bodily and emotive learning. Each area will be looked at in turn.

**Mind, Body and Emotion**

In the forms of bodily knowledge already discussed cognition can have varying degrees of possible involvement. We can consciously decide to alter our habitual movements, for example to be patient with our children rather than to physically discipline them. While this is initially difficult, our bodies can gradually learn or accommodate this cognitive instruction. In this way the body is formed by the mind. Alternately, our bodies appear to learn directly without any conscious involvement. It is a debatable issue as to how much our bodies are preprogramed from conception, but it would seem evident that how we breathe, our physical characteristics, and our desires for food and physical comfort are built in. Given that all these things impact and constrain what and how we think, we can see that the body also forms the mind. It often appears that our emotions are a direct follow on from certain thoughts or actions. Yet at other points emotions seem to be the initiator of thoughts and actions. Depression will lead to negative thoughts and a passive slumped body. Anger and frustration can lead to the physical abuse of those in dependent relationships.

This suggests that the mind, body and emotion all inform each other in a mutual process. However, the relationship is more complicated than this. At one level mind, body and emotion are inseparably enfolded in each other, but at another level they can appear as separate realms which resist the influence of each other or alternately one can appear to dominate the others.

The inseparable connection—Cognitive knowledge is inescapably ‘reinforced by particular bodily and behavioural dispositions’ (Fay, 1987, p. 149) and emotional states. For example, while language acquisition is a conceptual task, it is also a bodily one which requires the correct movements of one’s mouth and other muscles. According to Polanyi all thought has bodily roots (1966, p. 15). Similarly along side any thought or bodily movement in a particular context there will be an associated emotional state (Jagger, 1989). Simply, thought, emotion and behaviour are inseparable, they occur simultaneously and are in constant
interaction. It is impossible not to think, feel and act. We may focus on one but the other two are always implicitly or explicitly present.

*Inseparable but autonomous*—Now this inseparability implies that a change in the one area of thought, feeling or behaviour will inevitably lead to changes in the other areas. However this is clearly not always the case. For example, a person with a phobia can come to have a conscious understanding of the irrationality and dangers of their actions yet their emotions and bodies continue to respond in similar ways. An abusive father may have told himself that hitting was not a good thing and yet in certain situations he continues to act in these ways. A further example is the great disparity that can exist between the espoused theories of professionals (their ideas) and their ‘theories in use’ (behaviour) and the absence of any awareness of this disparity (Argyris & Schon, 1977).

So while inseparably enfolded or connected, it is clear that the knowledges of the body, emotion and mind can be in contradiction or resist each other. The knowledge contained in each is of a very different order. In the mind, knowledge is stored as concepts, ideas, words and images. Muscular knowledge is stored in patterns of muscular co-ordination, and in the very structure of our muscular development and as physical reflexes. Emotional knowledge is stored as feelings which resonate or contrast with other feeling states in us and in others. So while each one can’t exist without the other two, each realm has a certain autonomy. To properly understand this we need to add another dimension to our discussion, that of the context.

**The Context**

*Bodies and the external environment*—From a humanist and idealist perspective we can see ourselves in a position of attempting to master our physical and social environment, and new learning occurs as we try to use our bodies to reshape our environment. The opposite perspective (more common in poststructural and critical thought) is that we are formed by those environments, that ‘our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity’ (Bordo, 1989, p. 14). ‘Civilization carves meanings onto and
out of bodies’ (Grosz, 1993, p. 197). The architecture of buildings affects who we relate to. Manual labour in the service of employers leads to particular muscular and fine motor development. To fit in with our society requires ‘in part becoming a certain sort of body’ (Fay, 1987, p. 148) and adopting certain sorts of emotions.

Both perspectives are partial views which need to be considered together in an interactional way. Bodies and their material or physical environment (including the bodies of others) are in a process of continuous mutual formation. At various points we may give emphasis to the way in which we form our environment and at other times to how the environment is forming us but the reality is both processes are continuous and inescapable. Nurturing a child involves in some way shaping that child through the acts of feeding, cuddling and play. The parent however is shaped by the very same acts. However, as was suggested about the relationship between mind, body and emotions, the relationship between the body and its physical context is also a complex one in which each realm, while inseparable may resist the other, so that changes in one are not immediately or necessarily transmitted to the other. We have then at the same time connected but autonomous and potentially rebellious bodies or contexts.

Knowledge talked about in this way leads to an appreciation of non-conceptual forms of knowledge held in feelings, actions and behaviours rather than the mind. This recognition can be extended to see the potential for knowledge to be contained not just within people but within the social and material context as well. Contexts can be seen to have a ‘memory’ of what has previously occurred which persists through time and can be recovered in the sense that it will lead to the shaping of other bodies in a similar way. Lecture theatres organise the bodies of teachers and students into particular positions where all eye contact is between the teacher and the student with little eye contact possible between students. This sort of architectural arrangement invokes and reinforces certain relationships of power and other expectations which leads students and staff to behave in habitual and historically structured ways. Any attempt to develop a different set of relationships and expectations will actually be resisted by the architecture. The lecture theatre contains a knowledge about
these social arrangements that over the years it impresses on successive groups of students and staff.

Similarly the standard detached three bedroom home in suburbia carries a memory of the appropriateness of a nuclear family structure acting to reinforce and affirm beliefs in this sort of family structure. Thus both the body and the context are sites where knowledge is stored. Bodily knowledge is stored externally in the bricks, cement, and spatial shapes that surround us and internally within our muscles, bones and patterns of movement: knowledge that is transferred from one site to the other without any conscious awareness being required.

*Emotions and the context*—A common sense conception of emotions is that they are an internal, private, individual experience that leads people to respond to their context in particular ways. However, like the body, emotions only exist within a particular social, discursive and material context and so are simultaneously an individual and social experience. We are trained within our families and by our broader culture to adopt and suppress different emotional responses in certain situations. Our emotional knowledge is thus formed by the emotional context around us. Further, our feelings resonate with the experience of others. When some one is sad we can appreciate this indirectly through our previous experience of sadness. This emotional resonance is not just limited to the experiences of others; it can occur with pets and even inanimate objects. For example emotions can be enfolded in and can be unfolded from works of art, literature and music. Thus emotional knowledge is stored internally as memories of feelings and externally in the feeling states of others and in various forms of material culture which can reinvoke these states.

Emotional knowledge reciprocally forms and is formed by the social context. Again, however, resistance is possible. Children may often feel they are to blame for how they are treated by adults, feeling guilty for their own abuse. However, a child may also get angry and challenge adult control. When resistant emotions are shared with others in similar oppressive situations, people gain greater confidence in their own emotional evaluations. The sharing of similar emotional evaluations can be described as an emotional paradigm in much the same way as we talk about
intellectual paradigms. We could further consider the competition between different emotional paradigms. Body knowledge could also potentially be classified into different paradigms, reflecting different competing bodily knowledges.

The epistemology of bodily and emotive knowing

Having established these distinctions and the relationships between different areas, we are now in a position to consider how learning takes place in each site. Learning takes place when there is some difference generated in the interaction between the knowledges of the body, mind or emotion and their context. The difference leads to a transmission of the knowledge from one site to the other.

One way of understanding this learning process is via the concept of co-ordination. To catch a ball requires co-ordination of ones body in relation to the movement of the ball through a particular physical terrain. Errors in catching will lead to refinements and the development of bodily knowledge. Where co-ordination is unsuccessful, frustration develops which may result in a withdrawal from the activity or further learning attempts. Once coordination is achieved, bodily learning ceases until the task varies in some way. This discussion can be seen as a metaphor for the basic principle of learning.

The existence of dis-coordinate knowledge between emotions, bodies, minds and the context will encourage a knowledge change in at least one realm. If an abusive father believes (conceptually) hitting is a bad thing but his body knowledge continues to lash out, learning will lead to either the modification of his ideas or his body. Learning involves the transfer of knowledge from one site to another. The direction of this transfer does not necessarily correspond to its truthfulness or benefit. So in valuing body and emotive knowledge we need also to be aware of its potential capacity to be exploitive in just the same way as conceptual knowledge can be.

Further, both bodily and emotive knowledge are historical and situational. Versions of each could be relevant to the current context and time, while completely out of co-ordination at a different time and situation. Thus, body and emotional knowledge
is not essentially correct or incorrect, rather it can be either co-ordinated with the material, emotional and social context or can be out of step. (By implication cognitive knowledge is in exactly the same position). Use of the strap for discipline in our time is seen as abuse but in earlier history was equated with good parenting.

Being out of step creates the potential for learning (for a new co-ordination), but it also creates the possibility of forced learning (the attempted imposition of knowledge from one area over another). Bodies which are out of step can create tensions, leading to attempts to bring them back into line; to regulate bodies (Grosz, 1995). Domination can occur in mental, physical and emotional ways, while at the same time resistance is possible. This domination can be explained in terms of a network of co-ordinated knowledges which act to reinforce its own legitimacy but then challenges, resists or rejects any marginal rebellious knowledge. For example in the current climate where rationality is valued, any promotion of emotive or bodily knowledge will be resisted. This political process can also be applied within an individual. A small, rogue, sad emotion will be unlikely to have an impact on someone's general happy emotional state. The persistence of dis-co-ordinate knowledge however highlights the potential of the marginal to resist the dominance of this network of co-ordinate knowledge, perhaps even shattering the network (White, 1995).

So while the difference creates the potential for learning, learning is not essential. Huge disjunctures can exist between areas without any learning being attempted. As mentioned, Argyris and Schon (1977) have pointed out the very great differences that can exist between professionals espoused theory and their theory in use. While clearly a limit to our potential learning, it is actually fortunate that we can cope with such disjunctures so there is some limit to the demands upon us to continually learn and change. Given the huge contradictions that exist between our ideas, actions, feelings and those of others, if the differences between them required an immediate direct effect we would have no time to rest, being forced to continuously deal with all the incongruities. We would be left in a constant chaotic state of turmoil and change. A sense of identity relies on holding to some
conceptual, bodily or emotional knowledge despite the discord that exists. Thus the capacity to hold inconsistent knowledges in different realms is essential. It then allows time for parts of the discord to be worked on at a more acceptable pace.

Much work needs to be done to further explore the fuller picture of the process of knowledge development and its implications for different disciplines. At this point it may be useful to tentatively highlight some of the significant implications in the area of critical social work practice so as to encourage further exploration of bodily and emotive knowledge in this area.

**Implications for Critical Social Work**

Missing in critical theories of change, is the importance of bodily and emotive knowledge in developing an understanding the processes of domination and resistance. Believing change can occur simply through a self conscious action is to miss a very large component of the problem being tackled. While the oppressed can gain a new critical insight or consciousness (which is intended to encourage new behaviour) this may actually have little behavioural impact if their old bodily and emotional knowledge continues to implicitly govern their actions. A parent may have decided conceptually to never hit their child again but his body seems to continue to strike out in certain situations. Workers may decide to challenge their employer’s harassment, but emotionally can not find the courage to initiate the action.

How then can we alter people’s bodies and emotions to challenge the processes of domination? Initially three possible directions seem relevant but, as will be explained, are also limited. Firstly, the limits of consciousness raising could be used to support a more dogmatic orientation which seeks to legitimate the imposition of critical theory by force. This could involve military or physical intimidation and control of educational content. However, such an approach fails to take account of the bodily and emotional knowledge that would be learnt by the population through such processes. While people may be educated to believe they have been liberated or empowered, their bodies would have actually learnt greater subservience, an outcome which would be opposite to that actually desired by critical theory.
A second direction given some support by Fay (1987) has a more individual focus and involves various body therapies which use physical manipulation as a way of resolving various problems (Bradford, 1996). The suggestion is that perhaps critical practice may need to incorporate such approaches to assist people in achieving the sort of bodies and emotions necessary for critical practice. Caution is required however, because while many of these approaches recognize bodily and emotive forms of knowing, they are often taken to be the 'truth', missing the contextual and historical specificity of bodily and emotional knowledge emphasised in this paper. These approaches can valorize knowledge of the body over that of the conceptual, a reversal of what is privileged, which simply substitutes one form of dogma with an other.

Third, it could be argued that all that is required is a greater conscious awareness of body and emotional processes. This, however, just reasserts the privileged position of the rational. It limits our understanding of these processes to that which can be conceptually defined, and in so doing transform bodily and emotional knowledge into a conceptual form.

What is required is a new way of extending our awareness, not just conceptually but in an embodied and emotive form. Along side a critical self consciousness, we need a critical bodily awareness and a critical emotional awareness. Just as we seek to develop a greater conceptual analysis of our society, we also need to develop our emotional sensitivity to the emotional processes of domination, and to the dominant and resistant forms of emotional knowledge. We also need a bodily and physical awareness of the material or bodily processes of domination and the resistant and dominant bodily knowledge experienced. This could all be termed as the development of a critical awareness and will involve not only becoming more aware of the knowledge of mind, body and emotion it will also involve an awareness of contradictions between each realm, and the contradictions between these realms and the knowledge of the conceptual, physical and emotional context. This affirms a materialist orientation, but it is a fleshy, emotional materialism rather than a cold, deterministic one.

A critical process of change will not just involve consciousness raising but rather a more holistic process of conceptual, bodily and
emotional development. Holistic in this sense means that each should be seen together (with out valorizing one) so that each realm of knowledge can learn from the other. Holistic also means that body, emotional and conceptual knowledge is recognized as enfolded in the various levels of ones self, the other, and the broader conceptual, physical and emotional context. Constructive change will require change at all levels. Such a view opens up the potential for recognizing new opportunities for change as well as perhaps unacknowledged processes of resistance and change already occurring.

New possibilities may take the form of nondiscursive action which challenge and change the bodily and emotive knowledge of one’s self, others and the societal context. This could involve for example experiments with altering and developing a non-oppressive architecture of homes, industry, schools, waiting rooms and so on, or perhaps encouraging and using different forms of art and music to build a less oppressive emotional context. It may involve adaptations of body therapies to assist people in embracing less subservient and conforming behaviours and more confident, optimistic and courageous emotions. Such action should always be done with an attempt to explain the purpose and rationale of such actions, even though such explanations will be limited and the understanding of such actions can only properly be understood through direct emotional and bodily experience.

Before experimenting with new forms of activist practice, however, it would seem wise to explore the more everyday bodily and emotive practices that are already a part of what we would normally consider good practice, but which have been unacknowledged because of the dominance of rational conceptual approaches. Some recent research by Tennant (1998) and Healy (1996) point to the very important process and relationship activities of women in community work and activist practice which are not recognized and even denigrated as they are based on bodily and emotional knowledges. Further research on the bodily and emotive knowledge of successful activists could reveal a wealth of knowledge for strengthening activist practice.

In a similar way it will also be of enormous value to pay attention to how people in situations of oppression successfully
resist dominatory forces in bodily and emotive ways. Perhaps many current behaviours which are seen as consequences of our oppressive systems could actually be redefined as forms of resistance; mental illness, homelessness, stress leave, voluntary unemployment could be reframed as active forms of bodily and emotional resistance. Jaggar (1989) talks about 'rebellious emotions' and clearly our society requires such actions to be limited and controlled, highlighting the threat they present to the established order. This recognition would not seek to minimize the enormous suffering felt by people involved but it could open up the potential to more actively support and give legitimacy to such acts. This could help to soften the harsh negative nature of the experience and enable recognition perhaps of the ways their bodies have actually taken some action to resist an oppressive context (albeit often in contradiction to their own conceptual wishes).

Interestingly the strong, invulnerable, courageous model of an activist perhaps also blinds activists to the value of timidity and weakness. Radicals may well in effect serve and support the interest of the powerful in labeling these activities as a system failure and in their own actions which provide a bodily and emotional message, that strength, control and power is good. It confirms an achievement, success and ambitious ethic and so at a bodily and emotional level the activist may be reinforcing an emotional context valued by the rulers of capital. The capitalist may challenge the unemployed to get out and find jobs while in perhaps a similar way emotionally the activist implores the unemployed to become committed activists. Both adopt a powerful identity which dialectically relies on others assuming a powerless identity. Recognition of this leads to an exploration of the potential resistance and challenge enfolded in the actions of non-ambitious, fearful, anxious people. Perhaps such attitudes could have a liberatory potential in some sense, which could undermine the emotional character required for capitalist production and competition.

Thus in short I am arguing for greater attention to the bodily and emotive technologies that already are in implicit operation in activist practice and everyday action, before turning to new bodily and emotive action strategies. Once we have a good under-
standing of current bodily and emotive processes it will be clearer as to what new direction is required. The above discussion has not sought to offer a definitive direction but rather simply seeks to open up some possibilities for further exploration.

Conclusion

It is perhaps fitting to end this paper with an acknowledgment of the paradox and contradiction in trying to theorise and write about this topic when it can only really be understood through a bodily and emotive resonance with the examples discussed. Hopefully however the paper has demonstrated the great importance of bodily and emotive knowledge and the need for further understanding in this area. Acknowledgment of the dominance of rational conceptual processes and the suppression of bodily and emotive knowing in critical social theory and the general social work literature opens up and demands a radically new appreciation of social work practice and theories of change. At the same time much of what is said here will not be controversial or unfamiliar to many practitioners. An old piece of social work wisdom is that it is a good idea in any interaction to have touched how the other is thinking, feeling and acting in relation to the issue at hand. This very simple advice has an obvious almost trite ring about it, but when considered in relation to the issues discussed in this paper it takes on a revolutionary quality. It recognizes emotions (feelings) and the body (action) as equally legitimate realms for exploration along side the conceptual (thinking).

Current poststructural conceptions have challenge critical theory and have highlighted the separateness that exists between us at conceptual levels and so doing has encouraged: a more fragmentary view of social life: a greater uncertainty about goals; and a pessimism about the possibilities of change. However, 'while words and concepts distinguish and divide, bodiliness unites and forms the ground of an empathetic, even universal understanding' (Jackson, 1983, p. 341) and so a new base to overcome division. Bodily and emotional knowledge directs us to a new more fleshy and emotive materialism which could provide new understandings, new directions and new possibilities for seeking change to oppressive systems.
References

*I want to acknowledge and thank Maria Tennant for encouraging my interest in these ideas through her Master’s research. Her soon to be completed Master’s thesis will make a very valuable and embodied contribution to our awareness of this whole area."


