

# The Feeling of Being a Social Worker: Including Yoga as an Embodied Practice in Social Work Education

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*As a social work educator and yoga teacher, I have found it curious that the body and embodied knowledge have not been the subject of more debate in the social work literature or focus in professional training. In general where and when the body is mentioned, authors either provide a note of caution warning the practitioner against relying on the body as a source of knowledge and/or a reminder that, as an object, the body has been the cause of much social oppression. Yet, much of social work practice is underpinned by the practitioner's visceral experience. For example, in the process of gathering data to complete a biopsychosocial assessment of a presenting issue that will both inform and guide any intervention strategy, the social worker must navigate both community and clients' physical spaces while negotiating their own somatic maps. Whereas social work education focuses on developing the cognitive and discursive aspects of self-awareness and reflection, recent neuroscientific studies confirm what has long been known in Eastern embodied practices, that the body is the 'main channel for influencing the mind'. Drawing on the literature exploring the mind–body connection interspersed with my own experience using yoga as a reflexive practice, I argue that making the role of the body more visible in the professional discourse and placing a greater emphasis on embodied knowledge in social work education strengthens the reflexive capacity of future practitioners leading to a greater health and well-being of social workers and better outcomes for their clients.*

*Keywords: Reflective Practice; Visceral Experience; Yoga; Mindfulness; Body; Trauma; Well-Being*

## Introduction

... we have to keep in mind that the knowledge about the body is not necessarily embodied and the engagement in bodily practices or promotion of bodily practices does not alone guarantee the construction of an embodied subjectivity. On the contrary, the body is often disciplined to objectify the self under discursive

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construction ... but knowing our bodies can create a more holistic self understanding. (Markula, 2004, pp. 74–75)

Despite a growing awareness of the role of embodied knowledge and the impact of neuroscience in other disciplines [e.g. psychotherapy (Rothschild, 2000), psychology (Goleman, 2006), education (Bresler, 2004) and sociology (Crossley, 2001; Howson and Inglis, 2001)], there is little exploration or research into the body–mind connection in social work theory, how it impacts practice nor how it influences the education process. When exploring the social work literature, it seems that although the body is recognised as an essential component of ‘nonverbal’ communication in micro skill training and/or discussed as a part of the ‘use of self’ when exploring the professional persona, it is rarely mentioned as a source of theorising or explored as an integral component of reflective practice (Saleebey, 1992; Peile, 1998; Tangenberg and Kemp, 2002). While Cameron and McDermott (2007, pp. 13–15) claim that there have been valid reasons for this professional disregard (e.g. that the body itself is difficult to define and much discrimination has occurred on the basis of biological characteristics), the authors also maintain that separating the mind and body veils human lived experience and ignores many of the recent neuroscientific findings that could be useful in addressing practice approaches and client inequities.

Added to emerging neuroscientific findings of how human minds are more than just our brains and that the brain/body can shape as well as be shaped by their interactions with significant others and their environments (van der Kolk, 1994; Damasio, 1999; Siegel, 2010a, 2010b), there has been growing evidence that those who work with clients who have been traumatised are more likely to develop Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and/or Compassion Fatigue than people in the general population (Bride and Figley, 2007; Badger *et al.*, 2008). Not only are human service workers at risk of being physically and verbally abused, social workers are also at risk of being affected vicariously (Stanley and Goddard, 2002; Pryce *et al.*, 2007; Koritsas *et al.*, 2010). Interestingly, while social work students are required to develop a reflexive practice and social workers are encouraged to make use of professional supervision and/or ‘talk therapies’ to review their work practices, there is mounting proof that being comfortable in the body is a necessary precursor for reflection and many problem solving activities. Van der Kolk (1994) explains that memories become stored in the body and that most trauma sensitive people require some sort of body work ‘to regain a sense of safety in their bodies’ before they can engage in verbal reflection. While it is acknowledged that there are no actual mechanisms in the body itself that store experiences, there is evidence of an ongoing dialogue between the body and the brain that creates emotional maps that can either preserve or change specific behavioural patterns (Damasio, 1999).

Eastern embodied practices, of which yoga I am most familiar, have long claimed that the body is the ‘main channel for influencing the mind’ (Pagis, 2009, p. 272). Like the mindfulness practices that have become popular as psychological interventions in the last decade, yoga encourages the individual to break habitual embodied feedback loops through a process of introspection on the human body (Satterfield, 2010;

Stone, 2010). Although postural yoga has not been taken up to the same extent nor is as well researched as mindfulness in the human services sector (Shapiro and Carlson, 2009), there is increasing evidence that yoga has the potential to increase participants' awareness of their bodies, thoughts, emotions and patterns of cognition, as well as calming their central nervous system, reducing anxiety, mental stress and fatigue (Valente and Marotta, 2005). Given the accepted importance of reflection in social work practice and the current understandings emerging from the neuroscientific literature, in this article I draw attention to the emerging presence of the body in the social work literature; explore the importance of the visceral experience of the social work experience; and suggest that embodied practices such as yoga should be incorporated into academic courses to facilitate self-reflective processes in order to better prepare social work students to take care of themselves and assist improved outcomes for their clients.

### **Becoming Aware of the Body in the Social Work Literature**

While you read this paragraph take note of what bodily sensations you are experiencing and any thoughts that may be travelling through your mind. Are you comfortable or is the way you have positioned your body causing tension in your back, neck and jaw? Do you wish you could change your posture, but choose not to because where you are reading this paper means that you are expected to sit in a chair in a particular way that is culturally appropriate? Would you rather lie down, but wonder if you did whether you would be frowned upon or would there be a chance you could fall asleep because this is the third paper you have read today.

As a social worker, academic and yoga teacher, I have always been curious about the body and mind and its link to my own and others' well-being. One area of interest has been how the comfort of my own body can impact on how well I do my work and on how I am able to engage with others—especially when it comes to a lack of food, environmental noise or overpowering perfumes (just ask my students!). However, while this body–mind connection has been the subject of conversations with family and friends or I have joked about it in the workplace, I have never had to account for my body in a formal way in relation to any of the family assessments I have conducted; intervention strategies I have chosen to implement; nor when marking students' presentations in the class room. Indeed, from my own experience and student feedback over the years, the academy and many human service workplaces not only ignore the link between the body and mind in theory, but often disregarded it in practice. As the above body scan illustrates, the task of reading an academic paper can be influenced by more than the skill with which the article was written or the relevance of the conceptual knowledge contained within. While this example of the mind–body connection may have somewhat inconsequential outcomes for you the reader and I as the author of this paper, it does highlight the importance of attending to what Ferguson (2009b, p. 474) describes as 'the visceral experience of doing social work' and 'how the senses and emotions impact on perception and workers' and 'service users' capacity to relate to one another'.

According to the Australian Association of Social Workers' (AASW) Education and Accreditation Standards a key goal of social work education is to provide students with opportunities to develop: (1) reflective and reflexive skills; (2) a sound structural analysis; (3) an ability to think critically; and (4) ethical and professional behaviour (AASW, 2000, p. 6). While there is little doubt that social work programmes indeed provide students with such opportunities, anecdotal evidence suggests that most tend to favour a predominantly discursive approach that meets academic standards rather than explore an embodied representation of what these standards may look like in practice. However, as Ferguson (2009b) so aptly points out, in the doing of social work practitioners enter client spaces that evoke deeply tactile and sensual experiences that can thwart practitioners' capacity to implement the standards specified by professional accrediting organisations. Unfortunately, despite the popularity of the person-in-environment approach and some attention to the role of the brain in social work undergraduate degrees, the biological and sociological experience of the body in human activities tends to be ignored. Even though Saleebey noted in 1992 that the quality of both theory and practice had been compromised as a result of the profession's superficial attention to the body, until recently there has been little change in approach (Shapiro and Applegate, 2000; Tangenberg and Kemp, 2002; Cameron and McDermott, 2007).

Cameron and McDermott (2007) suggest that the lack of acknowledgement of the body in social work can be largely attributed to the profession's origins in the post-Enlightenment period. This, they claim, has resulted in an emphasis on developing theoretical and practical interests in a human being with a separate mind and body where the body has faded into obscurity and is rarely problematised. Saleebey (1992) argued, although some years earlier, that the separation of mind and body not only gave rise to the 'technical/rationalist' professions and gave credence to the hegemony of science, but encouraged social work to distance itself from the body in case it legitimised the dominance of the medical model. Even so, recognising that the medical model was as much a political construction as it is epistemological in nature, Saleebey (1992, p. 112) rallied social workers to develop a frame of reference that included 'biological, sensuous, and orgasmic knowledge' infused throughout social work theory and practice to reflect the realities of the profession. However, noting that social work also evolved out of a Western Christian tradition where the body was considered the site of 'sinful desire and private irrationality', Peile (1998) maintained that a major paradigm shift was required before the body would or could be embraced as a valuable source of understanding.

Philosopher Mark Johnson (2007, p. 1) asserts that what we call body and mind are actually 'aspects of one organic process'. Because this concept is at odds with many of our Western traditional philosophical and religious underpinnings *and* our embodied understandings of the words themselves, Johnson suggests that coming to terms with one's own embodiment is one of the most profound philosophical tasks we could ever face. Nevertheless as many neurobiological findings begin to shed light on the interconnectedness between the body, mind and relationship building approaches (Siegel, 2010a, 2010b), some social work scholars are beginning to draw on these to

reveal the importance of the body to the profession's understandings rather than needing to challenge the existing dominance of the scientific/medical model (e.g. Applegate and Shapiro, 2005; Lee *et al.*, 2009). By way of example, Cameron and McDermott (2007), in their recent book, draw on both emerging developments in the neuroscientific field as well as sociological understandings of the body to justify moving beyond the Cartesian mind–body divide to present a theoretical base for a practice approach they coin the 'body cognizant social worker'. Drawing attention to the 'corporeal capacity' of both client and worker, Cameron and McDermott (2007, p. 88) suggest that social workers need to explore and ask questions about relevant biological underpinnings between the environment, human affect and learning that may be influencing a particular situation as well as investigate what meaning the body may hold for the client, worker and society.

Using a different theoretical justification but arguably adopting the approach of a 'body cognizant social worker' (Cameron and McDermott, 2007), Ferguson (2009b) has begun to write about the lived experience of practitioners in the field. Taking an interest in an emerging sociological theory, the study of 'mobilities' (Urry, 2007), Ferguson invites us as readers to enter the experience of the child protection worker as they endeavour to meet their statutory obligations while walking, driving and also entering a child and their family's space, system and energies. Infusing his accounts with biological and affective descriptions, Ferguson explores the disorientating experiences of entering these 'intimate' spaces and describes how 'creating order, stillness and gathering yourself so as to perform the core task of remaining child-centred requires a highly skilled performance' (Ferguson, 2009a, p. 475). Ferguson illustrates that writing and thinking about practice in terms of the mobile body contributes to a different theoretical understanding of how a social worker interacts with clients, peers and others in community and how they can also become immobilised and fail to identify issues that may contribute to satisfactory outcomes. Like the observations made during the body scan described above, Ferguson draws attention to how the outcomes of an activity may be influenced as much by the person's experience of the body as by the expectations associated with the situation itself.

### **Considering the Body in Social Work Education**

Reflective practice is thought to be central to effective social work practice and necessary for monitoring worker self-care and well-being (Gibbs, 2001; Knott, 2007). However, recent neuroscientific findings reveal that when people have been traumatised their capacity for reflection and for modulating emotion is largely impaired (Shapiro and Applegate, 2000; van der Kolk, 2006; Forester, 2007). Van der Kolk (2006) states that one of the most compelling findings that neuroimaging of traumatised people's brains has revealed is that under stress, the areas of the brain most needed for 'planning for the future, anticipating the consequences of one's actions, and inhibiting inappropriate responses' are relatively inactive. In fact, for activity to return to the frontal cortex, van der Kolk suggests that the traumatised person must first learn to identify, tolerate and modulate bodily feelings and

sensations so as to ‘translate their emotions and sensations into a communicable language—understandable, most of all, to themselves’ (2006, p. 12). While it may be presumptuous to claim that all social workers are or will be traumatised in their work, there is research to suggest that those drawn to the profession have experienced some disturbing events in their past (Kadushin, 1958; Christie and Kruk, 1998; Coombes and Anderson, 2000; Mensinga, 2010) and that current workers are at greater risk of experiencing Secondary Traumatic Stress and/or compassion fatigue (Valente and Marotta, 2005; Bride and Figley, 2007). In the light of such research, the teaching of the processes for developing and engaging in reflective practice may need to be re-examined.

As I moved to join one of the small learning groups in my class, I observe how one member of the group is moving uncomfortably in their seat trying hard to remain quiet while the others are silent and withdrawn, determined to resist the inevitable “must” to fill the looming silence created by the task at hand. I become conscious of my own body and wonder if the students are aware of theirs or whether they are so immersed in the academic culture of “disconnect” that, as they spot me walking towards them, they only anticipate what I will ask them about the content of their discussion.

The students’ bodily dis-ease reminds me of the unsteadiness that many of the participants in my yoga class experience when they are experimenting with a new posture. When I see the students “fighting” with their body to keep steady while balancing in the tree pose, I draw their attention to their mind and ask them to focus on a spot on the floor or wall in front of them while increasing the length of their exhalation. Yoga teaches that there is a connection between the body, mind and breath and I marvel at how quickly the unsteadiness ceases as the students increase their awareness of all three enabling them to balance with little effort. In this class however, I intended to draw the students’ attention to what was happening in their body.

When I enter the group’s space, some of the students begin to scribble on their notepads in front of them while others fidget and smile confidently. Rather than ask them about where they are up to in completing the task, I ask each group member to give me a feeling word about what they are experiencing at the present moment. The first student blurts out “I’m not doing all the work this time”. Rather than take up the issue presented to me I ask once again for a feeling word. The student stops, her eyes roll to the ceiling, and after a deep inhalation she exhales the word “angry”. I nod and shift my gaze to the student next to her and ask him for a feeling word. Looking a bit disarmed, the student seems to hold his breath, fidgets then whispers “confused”. Slowly each student names a feeling and, as they do so, something changes in each of their bodies. I draw the students’ attention to this change and ask them if they had observed the same thing and to offer me a suggestion as to why this may be so. (Mensinga, 2008–2010)

In the classroom example described above, I begin a process of developing simple conscious awareness (Kondrat, 1999) by bringing the students’ attention back into their body in an effort to explore their existing somatic map (Damasio, 1999) and to ponder on how this interacts with their participation in the group exercise. The process of drawing the students’ attention to their feelings not only highlights the importance of paying attention to group processes as well as a task, something that

social workers understand is critical to successful group work (Johnson and Johnson, 2008), but it provides them with the space in which they can explore their emotional and embodied experiences. Pagis (2009) notes that our embodied responses are based on previous experiences and that embodied self-reflexivity is necessary to change many habitual responses. Drawing on the work of the neuroscientist Damasio (1999), Pagis describes how our body through our nervous system continually monitors our environment (both real and imaginary) in an attempt to maintain some stability within our being. Via this monitoring process, the body produces a map based on sensations unconsciously generated by the body in any given situation which is then transmitted by a non-verbal message about the relationship between it and the objects/environment at any subsequent time. In other words our somatic map, comprising of body sensations that carry instilled meanings about sights, smells, noises, touches etc., must always be navigated even when experiencing an event for the first time.

Coupled with Pagis's (2009) observation that embodied self-reflexivity is necessary to change many habitual responses, Siegel (2010a) highlights the importance of interpersonal 'attunement' for a sense of well-being and a growth towards resiliency within the worker. Also drawing on neuroscientific evidence, Siegel cites the work of Iacoboni (2008) and his work on the role of mirror neurones in experiencing empathy, where one becomes aware of and then replicates the internal state of another. 'Attunement', Siegel (2010a, pp. 41–42) states, involves a process where the worker's mind/body first perceives and engages with the signals emitted by another (initial perception), then embeds the information into their own nervous system (a sub-cortical shift) before assessing the changes in the nervous system (interoception) and then attributing these to the other—a process of simulating the internal state of the other. While social workers like other helping professionals have long recognised the importance of an empathic relationship to the helping process (O'Connor *et al.*, 2003; Beddoe and Maidment, 2009), Iacoboni's (2008) research demonstrates the importance for the worker to be able to tune into their own internal state so they can consciously monitor their response in the presence of the other's experiences—i.e. being open and less reactive, but also cognisant of their own well-being. While there may be concerns and misgivings that a focus on the body may bring with it the risk of a more individualised focus than on relational and power structures, it appears that becoming familiar with our own somatic map is a necessary 'tool' that facilitates future practitioners corporeal capacity to both monitor their reactions as they 'do social work' in client's homes (Ferguson, 2009b) so as to be more proactive than reactive in their decision making and to detect any adverse effects on their personal well-being.

### **Why Tie the Body in Knots in Social Work Education**

About a couple of months ago I was sitting in a meeting and I realised that my legs were completely tied up, crossed, underneath the table, like ... unbelievable! I noticed I was feeling very tense and had to remind myself "you're just sitting in a meeting!". I got myself to uncross my legs and put them down on the floor, but 10

minutes later I found myself in exactly the same position. This time I just thought “wow! I do this all the time”. Even though I knew there was no physical danger, my body seemed to be telling me “well yes there is”. It was then that I realised that my mind was coming up with all these ideas like “you know you’re not supported” and “they don’t really want you” and I also found myself becoming all oppositional saying to myself things like “it’s me against them”. It felt like I was living in my own world and I noticed that I wasn’t sure which story was true. Since then I’ve been wondering why am I prone to this, you know, prone to kind of being, hyper vigilant or anxious or whatever?

That’s the question I’ve taken with me on to the yoga mat and in the last month I’ve worked out that “oh of course, if you train yourself like that, this is what the outcome is”. “Ah! OK! That makes sense to me.”

You see I’ve been an athlete for most of my life. I must have started running at about the age of nine. Back then I used a different body to prepare myself for a race. I would purposely turn on my sympathetic nervous system and just “hype! hype! hype! hype! hype!”. I would get myself really nervous, not nervous so that I was out of control, but nervous so that I had this energy, this inner energy that I just had to do something with. I knew when I was ready for the race because I used to get the runs. I’d perfected the technique over the years. As long as I had diarrhoea the day before the race, I knew that I was ready for the race and found that I would do really well. That was great while I was doing athletics and even though I didn’t train as much as anybody else, I seemed to be able to do it, you know, just compete. But it’s been absolutely awful in my job, in my profession, it just doesn’t translate across. I know all about the hyping up and have developed this sympathetic nervous system that works on a hairline trigger but, I don’t get to do the running.

Now when I get in situations and I perceive them as dangerous I know that while my body may experience it as that and that my mind will make up stories to try and make sense of the feeling, I can choose what story I want to run with or whether it would even be helpful to run with any. I guess I just have a bit more choice now. (Sue, social worker interviewed August 2010)

Pagis (2009) and Lee *et al.* (2009) claim that practices such as meditation, yoga and other forms of exercise can facilitate awareness of body sensations and an individual’s relationship to themselves. However, somewhat akin to choosing whether to react to an itch on the skin or not, yoga practitioners understand that the more familiar they are with their own body and embodied responses, the more likely they are to make an informed choice as to how to react in any given situation. While social work as a profession favours language and communication as the means for self-reflexivity, Sue’s description of her body sensations and subsequent understandings illustrates how the body itself can be used as an important anchor for self-knowledge. Sue’s experience as an athlete had already given her considerable insight into how to utilise her body to ensure she could run a good race, but it was not until she explored her somatic map on the yoga mat that Sue realised that her preparation regime was now negatively impacting on her day-to-day experience as a social worker. Once making the link, Sue was better able to decide on how to enlist her body in the workplace rather than remain reactive.

Yoga has gained increasing popularity in the Western world (van der Kolk, 2006; Penman *et al.*, 2008). Although some scholars are questioning the philosophical origins of modern yoga as it is practised today (Alter, 2004; Singleton, 2010), due to its

increasing popularity in the general population it may be timely to include Hatha Yoga as a mindfulness awareness practice to facilitate both embodied reflective practice in social work education and professional practice. Kabat-Zin (2004), the founder of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme, includes yoga as part of the curriculum. He notes that Hatha Yoga can be done as a slow meditative practice as well as a preferred way for those who find sitting and/or meditation difficult. Interestingly, while the practices of Hatha Yoga and meditation tend to be seen as separate today and are typically researched as such, traditionally they have always been linked. In his *Sutras* describing the Eightfold path of Yoga, Patanjali described the postures and meditation as two separate limbs, but noted that they are intertwined. As Faulds (2008, p. 95) so nicely states: ‘Yoga and meditation are complementary practices. Yoga brings you to the meditation cushion relaxed and present. Meditation deepens your capacity for self awareness, making your time on the yoga mat more mindful’.

Mindfulness and its contribution to client and human service workers’ well-being has been explored more extensively in recent years—including in social work practice and education (e.g. Birnbaum, 2008; Lynn, 2009). However, just as the body is veiled in much of the social work literature, few studies explore what yoga can add as a Mindful Awareness Practice (Shapiro and Carlson, 2009). Lynn (2009), drawing on a spiritual paradigm rather than a neurobiological one, notes that mindfulness and mindfulness meditation can be used as effective tools for developing self-observation and awareness in the learning process. Although Lynn identifies scanning body sensations and focusing on the breath as techniques in developing mindfulness, the role of the body is not explored to any great extent. Pagis (2009), by way of contrast, uses neurobiological explanations to discuss the success of body scan techniques to increase embodied self-reflexivity. As was noted previously in this paper, Pagis draws on Damasio (1999) to highlight the effectiveness of the technique to raise awareness of an individual’s somatic map to facilitate new forms of self-anchoring. In keeping with this perspective, yoga teacher and psychotherapist Stone (2010, p. 207) claims that the yoga masters didn’t so much practise yoga as a form of exercise but rather as an opportunity to map the energetic pathways of the body.

Although little research has been done in relation to the health benefits yoga can offer social workers and students alike, from my own personal experience and that of others (for example, Sue, as above), becoming aware of visceral experiences and somatic messages appears to provide much needed information for practice and facilitates greater awareness for personal well-being. In a small study exploring psychotherapists’ (two were social workers) experience of engaging in a regular yoga practice, Valente and Marotta (2005) identified a number of benefits, including:

1. Yoga increased participants’ ‘awareness not only of what their bodies were feeling and communicating but also their thoughts, emotions and patterns of cognition’ (2005, p. 72). They noted that this developing awareness was useful as a technique to develop emotional regulation and helped them gauge their stress levels.
2. Yoga provided participants with the opportunity to achieve better balance in their lives and avoid burnout. They noted that they were better able to ‘calm their central

- nervous system, reduce anxiety, reduce mental stress and fatigue, helped them to relax and gave them overall feelings of being “centred and grounded” (2005, p. 74).
3. Yoga became a ‘way of life’ that helped them become calmer, more mentally and emotionally stable and led to personal growth (2005, p. 77).

Drawing on their experience of running yoga classes for people who have experienced trauma, Emerson *et al.* (2009b) claim that yoga offers the participant an opportunity to notice the body, make friends with it and draw on it as a resource in a relative place of safety. As previously stated, many students need more introductory experiences before critical reflective essays, process recordings and gestalt techniques can be utilised to develop reflective capacity. Moreover, given some of those drawn to social work as a profession have experienced traumatising events in their past and could find reflection a difficult task to engage in, if not re-traumatising, attention to ‘healing’ somatic maps is essential. Although it has been argued that any form of body ‘work out’ can facilitate embodied self-reflexivity (Pegis, 2009), recognition of the mind–body connection is necessary to develop mindful awareness. Yoga and other Eastern embodied practices are predicated on this assumption and because of their increasing acceptance in the general community their accessibility is assured and can be used as an adjunct to social work education. Emerson and his colleagues (Emerson *et al.*, 2009a) note that yoga classes can be especially effective because they are conducted in a group situation and offer participants the chance to practise among other things: being in the present moment; making choices by deciding how to do a particular posture; and taking effective action if and when they experience any discomfort during a class.

## Conclusion

The introduction of embodied practices like yoga will no doubt challenge the mind–body split that is prevalent not only in the profession but also in education institutions today. However, given the importance of reflection and self-awareness in social work and increasing evidence that when the body’s somatic map is ignored or misunderstood it can supersede critical thinking and impede reflective practice (Rothschild, 2000; Ogden *et al.*, 2006; van der Kolk, 2006; Forester, 2007; Siegel, 2010b), it is time for the profession to consider the affective nature of embodied struggles, particularly in the academy. In his book, *Full Catastrophe Living*, Kabat-Zinn expresses surprise at how as a society we can be ‘simultaneously completely preoccupied with the appearance of our own body and at the same time completely out of touch with it’ (2004, p. 75). Of course this phenomenon has been explored and theorised by sociologists and feminists alike who note that the body image ‘is as much a function of the subject’s psychology and sociohistorical context as anatomy’ (Grosz, 1994, p. 79). While Kabat-Zinn expresses his surprise to draw attention to how *experiencing* the body without the overlay of judgement can change an individual’s view of it and enable them to better monitor and deal with stress, pain and illness, the point raised by Grosz (1994) brings our attention back to the call to *reposition* the body within the social work profession (Saleebey, 1992; Peile, 1998; Lee *et al.*, 2009).

While I recognise that including embodied practices in an already overcrowded academic curriculum maybe challenging, I also believe that merely acknowledging the role of the body as an important source of knowledge may begin a process of exploration that currently does not exist. As Cameron and McDermott (2007, p. 92) note, acknowledging the importance of the body in social work theory and practice is necessary not only in relation to client outcomes but is also essential to ensure the well-being of the social worker and to account for themselves ‘as an embodied actor entering and engaging with the client’s world’.

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