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Bodies are not 'Tools':
A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis on Embodiment in Social Work

(Title)

by

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Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting – the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.

—bell hooks, Theory as Liberatory Practice

Abstract.

Social work has historically focused on managing bodies without adequately addressing the implications of the mind/body split. As the social work profession is beginning to embrace embodiment practices, I was interested in learning how social work scholars understand the impacts of mind/body split, what practices are being suggested to re-negotiate this binary, and how certain discourses frame bodies as 'tools' for social work. Drawing from Foucauldian discourse analysis and genealogical methodology, I explore the roots of the mind/body split in white supremacy culture, settler colonialism, and neoliberal capitalism. By pointing to the history of social work's complicity in perpetuating the mind/body split and the need for a shift in theoretical perspectives around embodiment, I propose a critical embodiment theory to challenge existing paradigms and open new avenues for both micro and macro social work. While my research is focused on theory, it holds significant material implications. We stand at a pivotal moment where the integration of embodiment into social work practice could foster decolonial and resistance-oriented approaches, or continue to reinforce the mind/body split through perpetuating white supremacy culture and neoliberal practices.

Land Acknowledgement

I am a white settler of British, Irish, Scottish, French, and German ancestry. As a settler whose family has been living in Canada for at least 3 generations, my identity as Canadian was naturalized, even though my ancestors were uninvited interlopers, whose presence was used to displace Indigenous people from their land, delegitimize their lifeways, and erase communities through assimilation, state control, and violence.

I wrote this paper in Tkaronto, and on York University campus, a region that has been care taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Huron-Wendat. The current treaty holders are the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

I also worked on this paper on the land where I grew up, on the treaty and traditional territory of the Mississauga (Michi Saagiig) Anishnaabeg. This land is the sovereign and rightful home of Curve Lake First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, and the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. These nations have resisted colonial land grab tactics and have been made to fight for their ability to be in relationship with the land and water. The territory is covered by Treaty 20 and the Williams Treaties.

My research has brought me a deeper appreciation of the bodies of land and water that we rely on, the embodied knowledge of Indigenous people, and the interconnection between exploitation of Indigenous bodies and systems of supremacy. As I continue to navigate ways to

be effective and active in critiquing and destabilizing systems of dispossession and abuse, I also interrogate the ways that I have benefited from my whiteness and colonial cultural competency.

Dedication

I want to offer thanks to my incredible wife Sabrina, who has supported me in more ways than I could possibly articulate. Without your care, the ways you nourish and challenge me, and our long chats, I would have been consumed by self-doubt and self-sabotage many times more than I was during this process. Thank you for believing in me when I struggled and dedicating so much love, time, and attentiveness to appreciating what I offer the world. I am in awe of you and how you show up for others.

I am also deeply grateful for Anne O'Connell's supervision, support, and reading recommendations. Your patience and guidance as I navigated this process of actually finishing something that I could have spent my life on has been incredibly impactful. When I think back on this PRP experience, I will think of all of the ways you have broadened my thinking, shown me grace, and encouraged my excitement for this topic. I know I have a different process than most people, and I create complex webs of interconnectivity that have overwhelmed me at times, so your unwavering support has had an immeasurable impact on me and what I see for my future. Thank you so much.

And finally, I am grateful to my dog baby, wonderful friends, broader family, and chosen family for all the ways they have encouraged me and made sure that I remembered to have fun during this process.

A note on spelling

I use both British and American spellings of English words throughout this paper. This is both intentional and arbitrary — the spelling that I like better will appear in this document. The following is my rationale for why:

a) Language evolves - English changes all the time and the 'right' spelling is a social construction. I am not British or American and I have no desire to be 'correct' to either.

b) Language is made up through interactions with others - in contributing to academia, I want to be authentic in how I represent myself. I like the American spellings of some words and the British spellings of others, and rather than contort myself into one system, I am choosing to adhere to my own.

c) The punishment of incorrect spelling is a tool of indoctrinating white supremacy. I grew up being told that I was bad at reading and writing because I struggled with spelling; I was told I was wrong so much that I thought I was stupid and unworthy. In an effort to reauthor this narrative for myself, I want to assert my sense of worth alongside claiming my ability to defy the social constructions of spelling.

d) For the most part, I will use one rule and stick to it. For instance, I like adding the extra 'u' in words like 'behaviour' but will spell 'analyzing' with a 'z'. There are times, however, where I like certain words spelled with an 're' like 'theatre', but others, like 'center' with an 'er'. I am consistent with the spellings that I choose for myself because they are my preference, therefore my preferred spelling becomes the rule that I hold as my standard.

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Chapter 1: What Embodiment Offers Social Work

Introduction

The mind/body split has become so ingrained in EuroWestern colonial culture that we often do not even see the extent of its impacts. Cartesian dualism has been used to justify racial hierarchies, gender hierarchies, cultural hierarchies, even age hierarchies and has provided the rationalization for oppression, domination, and violence through systems of supremacy. If social work aims to decolonize and dismantle white supremacy culture, we will need to challenge the mind/body split. My aim with this project is to develop a critical embodiment theory to bring a deeper analysis of the effects of mind/body split within social work and to build new possibilities for practice. By examining the history of social work interventions, I will trace the 'colonial continuities' (Heron, 2005) that are inherent in discussions about the body, as well as how the mind/body split has become a tool (as well as a symptom) of white supremacy culture. As many scholars have insisted, social work has neglected a crucial aspect of the human experience by overlooking embodied knowledge in both practice and theory (Batacharya & Wong, 2018; Batacharya, 2018; Dee Mucina, 2018; Gardner, Pyles, Mensinga, DeJong Zuverink, & Fizzell, 2021; Mesigna, 2011; Ng, 2018; Saleebey, 1992; Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002; Wong, 2018). Critiques of social work's disembodiment are not new, yet despite this, embodiment's world-building potential has not been integrated into social work more broadly.

As social work begins to embrace embodiment theory and practices, I saw a need for a broad-reaching analysis of the discourse around embodiment and bodies in the social work profession. I became interested in tracing the 'history of the present' (Foucault, 1991) through engaging in a version of a Foucauldian genealogy to examine the history of how social work

understands and manages bodies. Through analyzing the social work textbook *A Violent History of Benevolence* by Chapman and Withers (2021), I was able to begin a genealogical exploration of the history of social work and bodies, however, this will have to be research that I return to in my doctoral studies in order to do the work justice. For this paper, I will present a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of the literature on embodiment in social work and share the critical embodiment theory that I have articulated through my research. The historical analysis that Chapman & Withers (2021) present of white supremacy, settler colonialism, the evolution of the social sciences, and the birth of the social work profession has informed my work and analysis throughout this paper. While they do not focus explicitly on the mind/body split or embodiment, their work is incredibly relevant to understanding the history of EuroWestern treatment of bodies through social working, and as such, their work has informed the critical embodiment theory that I will present here.

Through my literature review and discourse analysis, I was interested in exploring answers to the following questions around social work history and embodiment: how has social work understood bodies?; how has social work managed bodies?; what unique harms are produced by the lack of embodiment theory (recognition of the ontology and epistemology of the body) in social work practice?; and how has social work's 'violent history of benevolence' (Chapman & Withers, 2021) informed current social work practice regarding bodies and our understanding of experiences of embodiment? Through answering these questions, and by layering in a critical embodiment theory, a different dimension of social work practice can be addressed – as well as new possibilities for change making.

Just as is the case with all discourse, there are material implications to the lack of recognition of the embodied dimension of human experience. Furthermore, harm will continue to be perpetuated if social work does not reckon with its past. A critical embodiment theory offers an opportunity for both: to become aware of the material implications of the mind/body split and to see how history has informed our present. What is especially important here is that, as Razack (2002) asserts, "white settler societies can transcend their bloody beginnings and contemporary inequalities by remembering and confronting the racial hierarchies that structure our lives" (p. 5). Recognizing these bloody beginnings and the 'colonial continuities' (Heron, 2005) which persist today is essential for understanding our relationship to our individual embodiment as well as our interrelationship with other beings. An understanding of the past coupled with an integration of knowledge that has been subjugated through settler colonial projects, requires us to ask: whose bodies are considered expendable? Why? How do we see this play out? Whose minds are exalted? Why? How do we see this play out? Whose knowledge is considered legitimate? Why? How do we see this play out? These are some of the questions that drive my passion for this topic. Cartesian dualism has been a justifying force and underlying logic behind the atrocities of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and white supremacy. If it continues to function covertly in the background, meaningful social change will be much more challenging.

More on the Mind/Body Split

As with most binaries, there is an associated 'positive' and 'negative' (Del-Villar, 2021). In the case of the mind/body split, bodies have been constructed as negative because they are messy, unpredictable, and difficult to control (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002) and as Chapman &

Withers (2021) demonstrate, white supremacy culture and colonialism are fixated on control. Moreover, the mind/body split represents an artificial hierarchy whereby "the body's knowledge is both separated from and subjugated to rational knowing. Priority is given to the intellect for its capacity to reason 'truth' in ways more universal than individual experiences" (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002, p. 10-11). This essentially creates a subject/object binary whereby the mind is considered to be a subject and the body an object. The mind/body split is by no means new in EuroWestern culture. Separation of an individual's material body from an individual's intellect extends "from Plato and St. Augustine to the Enlightenment thinking of Descartes and forward into contemporary positivism…the individualistic ethos of the West promotes a view of the self as able to contain and overrule the body and its appetites" (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002, p.11). Desiring to overrule the appetites of the body fit in well with Christian conceptions that the body was inherently sinful and listening to the body would lead to temptations (Batacharya & Wong, 2018; Gardner et al., 2021; Mesigna, 2011; Ng, 2018; Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002). The 'sinfulness' of the body was also discursively connected to hierarchies of race, sexuality, queerness, and femaleness, which then justified fear, control, and domination of bodies deemed non-normative or other (Tanenberg & Kemp, 2002; Haines, 2019).

Chapman and Withers (2021) discuss 'moral economies' at length in *A Violent History of Benevolence,* explaining how white supremacy creates, maintains, and relies on hierarchies of unequal worth which were justified through equating Christianity with morality. Structures, institutions, and the profession of social work were created by European and settler colonial states to manage those deemed 'other' and in need of morally superior white helpers and guides (Chapman & Withers, 2021; Jeffrey, 2002; Razak, 2004). Colonial narratives around 'civilizing'

racialized bodies, ‘regulating’ women’s bodies, and ‘hiding’ disabled bodies has been a large part of the social work project of managing the other (Badwall, 2015; Chapman & Withers, 2021; Jeffery, 2002; Razak, 2014; Rice, 2018). As Chapman and Withers (2021) emphasize, the ways that white people have attempted to ‘guide’ people through ‘correcting, ‘rehabilitating’ or ‘helping’ has been violent and harmful. Moral economies continue to operate covertly in social work interventions and practices today about who is in need of help / guidance – and subsequently sustain the mind/body split. Ultimately, the mind/body split becomes a tool of white supremacy culture by denying the body’s ontology and epistemology, while exalting the mind and ‘rationality’ of white systems and institutions. Attempting to integrate embodiment without considering how moral economies of worth have been justified through the mind/body split means that the full impacts of white supremacy remain obscured. As such, my project is concerned with mapping how this epistemological and ontological split shows up in social work embodiment literature, both instructing on and obscuring its values.

Reason, truth, and the pursuit of a universal experience were positioned in opposition to the knowledge of the body in wider systems of knowledge, and social work followed suit (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002). These Enlightenment-era pursuits for essentialization, universalization, and categorization of those who represent the ‘norm’ (Christian, cis, white, heterosexual, abled, upper-class young men) and those who represented the ‘other’ (Indigenous, racialized, queerness, female, disabled, older, poor people) became project for and technology of control for settler colonialism. Rigid taxonomies of difference in medical sciences and social sciences have been used to justify these projects (Chapman & Withers, 2021). Yet the medical field is beginning to attend to the embodied experience, particularly through the lens of the

impacts of embodied trauma and experiences of oppression (Haines, 2021; Maté, 2020; van der Kolk, 2015). This has led to a shift in the social sciences, especially in social work discourse around the legitimacy of the body's knowledge. Seemingly, with the 'permission' of the medical field to begin to attend to the knowledge of bodies (even though they have always intervened through and with bodies), social work has begun to attend to the knowledge of the body (even though we have always intervened through and with bodies). While social work is now moving towards integrating an embodied dimension to practice, I will argue that not all social work that seeks to integrate embodiment practices actually challenges the mind/body split. While this sounds paradoxical, I will demonstrate how embodiment practices actually *require* a recognition of colonial violence, without which, embodied experience is truncated from the source of harm.

As the discourse shifts towards recognizing embodied knowledge, social work has the opportunity to make more large-scale change. Until this point, the social work profession has been more committed to "ameliorating the impacts of racism rather than abolishing behaviors, practices, policies, and structures that propagate racist harm" (Cosby, 2021, p. ii). Resisting the notion of decontextualized, passive, objectivized bodies allows us to recontextualize ourselves inside the power structures that shaped us. If we recognize that our bodies inform our experience with the world and our experience of the world is informed by our bodies (Fuches, 2017), we can recontextualize and de-objectify ourselves as a form of resistance to settler colonial and white supremacy logics. Batacharya and Wong (2018) explain embodied decolonization as "not some sort of abstract freedom from oppression but a liberation specifically from the material consequences of colonial configurations of power, consequences that are, in some measure, present in our bodies" (p. 16). Thus, integrating an analysis of the impacts of the mind/body split

opens up further pathways for decolonization as well as building new configurations of our body/mind connection on an individual level as well as more broadly for social interventions and social working.

More on Embodiment

Embodiment philosophy shifts away from viewing the body as an object/physical entity that passively receives the world around us (Fuches, 2017; van Rhyn, Barwick, & Donelly, 2021). The work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) is regarded as the first contributor to Western literature who explored the concept of the 'body-subject'; he wrote about how embodiment allows for the body to be "no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it." (p.106). Through the lens of exploring embodied experiences, one can view bodies as "active and engaged entities" (Krieger, 2005, p.351) within the world, recognizing the need to explore "the social, cultural, and psychological dimensions of bodily experience" (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002, p.12). In this way, we are impacted by our bodily experience and our bodily experience impacts us. Batacharya and Wong (2018) call this recognition of the wisdom of the "epistemology of the body—that is, to sources of information that are not mediated exclusively by our intellect" (p.12). This recognition that the body is also a *subject* allows for us to readjust our relationship to the mind/body subject/object divide.

In micro social work practice, embodiment involves noticing one's embodied state, attuning to the embodied state of the person you are working with, and then recognizing the shared space of intercorporeal exchange (McCormick, 2011). At the macro level, embodiment can be a recognition of what Vick (2012) describes as 'embodied politics', whereby oppressive

social structures, discourses, and policies are understood to impact our lived realities, ways of being in the world, and how we experience our body. Furthermore, Vick (2012) explains that "an embodied politics implies that people cannot be compartmentalized into 'all or nothing' categories but instead inhabit diverse and often fluid subjectivities across multidimensional spectrums" (p.54), therefore recognizing the complex interlocking nature of oppressive forces while also attending to their impact on the embodied experience. She speaks of this specifically in relation to disability (how it is constructed in our ableist society and how that construction impacts the embodiment of people living with disabilities), however, I will apply the concept of 'embodied politics' more broadly to encompass interlocking forms of oppression. Nixon and MacDonald (2018) also highlight the power of integrating an embodiment analysis in their paper *Being Moved to Action: Micropolitics, Affect, and Embodied Understanding* which interrogates white saviorism in the relationship between the Global North and the Global South. These scholars demonstrate how embodiment principles deepen our analysis of the impacts of interlocking systems of oppression at the macro level. I use the term 'embodied politics' throughout this paper to refer to how embodiment is in relationship with macro systems.

Social work can benefit greatly from integrating an embodiment theory because "people's lived realities in their human bodies, particularly their somatic and felt experiences, are intricately connected to their social location, the larger political economy, and aspects of identity that are entangled with systems of structural oppression" (Mensinga & Pyles, 2021, p.132). Many scholars who are interested in integrating embodiment recognize how experiences are embedded in the body, on a physiological level and energetic level (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002). Recognizing the impacts of oppressive power relations and embodied experiences is an inherent

aspect of social work practice, yet social work does not yet have a unifying theory on embodiment to embed embodiment analysis into our work (Gardner et al., 2021), nor is there wide-spread integration of embodiment theories in social work education, practice, or institutions. As Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) explain, the lack of embodiment theory in social work is surprising, given social work's role in society:

> The "care and control" of client bodies, particularly disenfranchised bodies, lies at the heart of social work's disciplinary activities. In everyday practice, social workers routinely are involved with clients whose lives are profoundly influenced by traumatic, painful, or degrading bodily experiences, such as poverty, violence, addiction, chronic illness, or child maltreatment. Given this sustained, intimate connection with the body and its many and varied conditions, it is surprising that in its theoretical and practice frameworks social work pays relatively little attention to the body. This lack of conceptual development is mirrored in social work practice, where although client bodies are an integral part of daily practice, social work efforts are directed mostly to their surface attributes or to managing the consequences of bodily conditions, such as addiction or violence. (p. 6)

This represents a limitation for social work practice and analysis, as well as a missed opportunity for employing actionable steps for addressing the source of bodily harms, namely white supremacy, racial capitalism, and colonialism. According to Roxanna Ng (2018), "integrating body, mind, and spirit not only is disruptive to established educational conventions in North America but is a method of decolonizing—undoing—ways in which we have come to be in the world" (p.45). Part of this undoing requires social work to recognize subjugated knowledge that has been devalued through colonialism and white supremacy culture. Another part is becoming more aware of the pervasiveness of the role of the mind/body split in white supremacy culture in order to interrupt the pattern of harm rather than providing bandaids to symptoms.

Mainstream social work has been oriented towards positivism, evidence-based practice, and professionalism in order to seek legitimacy as a social science. Despite scholars pointing out that "integrating embodiment into social work is both a discursive and a material process, and offers both discursive and material additions" (Batacharya & Wong, 2018), social work has been slow to integrate an analysis of embodiment (discursive) or embodiment practices (material). In contrast to EuroWestern culture, many cultures around the world have developed embodiment practices such as storytelling, (Dee Mucina, 2018), art, dance, drumming (Young Leon & Nadeau, 2018), yoga (Batacharya, 2018; Brunette-Debassige, 2018), Tai Chi, meditation practices (Grossman, 2015; Wong, 2018), and martial arts and movement practices such as Qigong (Ng, 2018), but social work has historically been resistant to including these practices (Mensinga & Pyles, 2021). This reluctance has been linked to a constellation of compounding influences: the pervasiveness of the medical model in social sciences, early social work and the connection to Christianity which conceived of the body being 'sinful', and Abrahem Flexner's speech in 1915 that critiqued social work for not being rigorous enough to be a profession (Batacharya & Wong, 2018; Gardner et al., 2021; Messignia & Pyles, 2021; Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002); and of course, settler colonialism and white supremacy.

Settler colonial and capitalist imperialism around the globe has attempted to eradicate cultural embodiment practices because they represented deviation from the exalted white 'norms'. To name a few examples, yoga practices and Ayurveda were criminalized during British imperial rule of India (Barkataki, 2020); Indigenous practices were criminalized in Canada through the Indian Act, which made it illegal for Indigenous people to practice traditional ceremonies (Blackdeer & Ocampo, 2022; Chapman & Withers, 2021); people across the globe

who were not Christian were forcibly converted according to religious degrees (Chapman & Withers, 2021). These examples of violence towards cultural practices through British legislation began when Britain banned Scottish cultural language, symbols, and practices in order to enforce Christianity (Chapman & Withers, 2021). The fact that embodiment practices remain today is a testament to the resistance of people who kept the knowledge alive despite the violent erasure tactics that have been enacted on people and their customs (Blackdeer & Ocampo, 2022; Chapman & Withers, 2021; Coulthard, 2014).

Not all embodiment practices are oriented towards decolonial practice, however. There are many scholars who focus on the ways that embodiment practices can offer a stop-gap opportunity for burnout reduction or a useful method for an individual worker's self-care (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Newsome, Waldo, & Gruszka, 2012; Strauss, & Northcut, 2014). This limits the impact of embodiment in social work practice and disconnects the discourse from the reality that addressing bodies and embodiment is political in white supremacy culture; nobody and no body is neutral. By individualizing experiences of embodied oppression, there is a lack of the 'embodied politics' that Vicks (2012) advocates for. Not only does this individualization serve white supremacy culture, it also fits in well with neoliberal influences on social work. The current political climate of neoliberalism "forces social work programs to prioritize the creation of a one-size-fits-all model rooted in transactional services" (Del-Villar, 2021, p.636). Framing embodiment practice as a one-size-fits-all solution actually goes against the knowledge that our embodiment is deeply impacted by social forces, personal experiences, and subjectivity — simultaneously unique yet also impacted by broader systems. Not only does this cause a dilution of the transformative potential of embodiment

practice, but it actively reinscribes white supremacy hierarchies of what bodies and minds *should* be like, what *should* work for them, and who is *'normal'*.

The reality that there is infinite complexity in embodied experience is incompatible for neoliberal systems. Asserting that everyone should 'do some yoga' so that they can have more empathy ignores how South Asian or other racialized people might experience a yoga class taught by a white teacher that does not recognize the harms of cultural appropriation, or a person who needs modifications might feel if they are being told that they are not doing a pose/shape correctly unless it looks a certain way from the outside, or how queer and trans people could feel if a teacher uses gendered and heteronormative language, or how someone who has experienced physical or sexual violence could feel if a teacher makes a physical adjustment to their bodies without their consent. There are many factors that go into creating space for embodied practice that are left out of neoliberal approaches and frameworks for understanding. I am wary of the literature that frames embodiment practices (yoga in particular) as an opportunity for individual workers to 'keep up with their self care', supposedly providing a quick-fix solution for burnout and 'compassion fatigue' because not only does this ignore how not all experiences of yoga will be pleasant or nourishing, it also places the responsibility of dealing with the impacts of oppressive systems solely on individuals.

Embodiment practices are also being taken up in social work in ways that are decontextualized from colonial history, without recognition of the 'colonial continuities' (Heron, 2005) in the present. Dislocating embodiment practices from their traditional and cultural roots obscures the impacts of settler colonialism and imperialism, which in turn reinscribes white

supremacy logics and the mind/body split. This process is particularly egregious in the case of yoga in the west, whereby ancient practices and systems of knowledge are rebranded to fit into the marketing products that support capitalism (Barkataki, 2020). Yoga teachers who are teaching this white-washed version of yoga are passively implicated in white supremacy's long history of extracting culture from around the world while simultaneously disparaging those who practice customs that do not fit into the straight, white, Christian, social mores. Yet it is common for the studies focusing on yoga as a tool for burnout reduction to not mention the impacts of cultural appropriation of yoga or integrate any analysis of the harms that the yoga industrial complex has enacted on South Asian and Desi people. Rather than taking up embodiment practices as a way to bypass ongoing colonial harm, a critical embodiment theory for social work requires challenging cultural appropriation and recontextualizing systems of knowledge within the contexts that allowed them to emerge.

More on White Supremacy Culture

White Supremacy Culture is the process by which whiteness is constructed as "normal and everything else is other and less than" (Beck, 2019, p.395). Believing whiteness to be superior impacts the relationships that we have with our bodies— all of us—and how we relate to our world. The exaltation of whiteness, white bodies, minds, institutions, practices, and social mores was used to justify the denigration of people who were not proximate to the cis, hetero, white, upper-class, male, abled 'norm' which was constructed as not only the ideal, but also the rightful superior over others (Chapman & Withers, 20121). As Alannah Young Leon and Denise Nadeau, (2018) so eloquently say, "whiteness constructs the autonomous self around hierarchies

of comparison as opposed to a relational interconnected self" (p. 75). In this way, white supremacy, with its concern with separation, requires and reasserts dualistic perspectives on life.

Rather than seeing the interconnection of all beings, all bodies — including the bodies of otherthanhuman beings, bodies of water, and bodies of land—white supremacy positions the life of people who are proximate to the idealized norms (white-cis-hetero-abled-men) as inherently superior to other all other life. As scholars from the Black Radical Tradition have long pointed out, invariable, enduring, and consistent 'human-ness' is seen as contingent on proximity to whiteness. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020) writes "Eurocentric humanism needs blackness as a prop in order to erect whiteness: to define its own limits and to designate humanity as an *achievement* as well as to give form to the category of 'the animal'" (emphasis added, p. 4). I am interested in integrating and analysis of the morethanhuman dimension into my doctoral studies to elaborate on and expand my framework for explaining the impacts of the mind/body split in social work. I see it as necessary to include the human/nature divide because it is an extension of and deeply intertwined with the technologies of power that I am seeking to challenge with this work.

Focusing on the taken-for-granted logics of white supremacy has been integral to this project. In order to engage with a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, I have found it necessary to have a genealogical foundation as a way to pull at the interlocking web of threads of white supremacy and colonialism. In his genealogical work, Foucault (1980, 1982, 1988, 1991) traced technologies of power/knowledge through examining how individuation, domination, and subjugation depend on different configurations of surveillance for the purpose of control; control

for the purpose of separation, separation for the purposes of categorization, categorization for the purposes of hierarchies, hierarchies for the purpose of knowledge creation, and knowledge creation for the purposes of legislating, enforcing, and maintaining power. As the work of Chapman & Withers (2021) demonstrates, social work is deeply implicated in all of these processes. Understanding social work history means understanding its roots in white supremacy and settler colonial culture. That, hopefully, will not be the future for the profession, however relationships of power need to be reconfigured before there can be change.

When certain norms are exalted, there are others that are denigrated. We have constructed the concept of the 'Other' through normalizing a differentiation between common and uncommon; different and familiar; safe and unsafe; inside and outside (Ahmed, 2000). Social work is concerned with managing the 'other' as defined by colonial, white supremacy mentality (Jeffery, 2002). Much of the ways that norms are understood rely on pathologizing/devaluing ideas, people, institutions, practices, and lifeways that are non-normative to white supremacy (Chapman & Withers, 2021). Put another way, there is a desire to "collapse difference and absorb it into the self" (Rice, 2018, p. 156) through controlling those who represent the 'Other' and demanding assimilation according to normative standards. In fact, social interventions in white supremacy culture have a long history of seeing the relentless act of attempting to change people, places, and other beings to conform to the desires of white people not as an act of violence, but as an act of benevolence. This is a large focus of the historical analysis Chapman & Withers (2021). Rossiter (2001) also discusses the way social work identifies as morally good as a "flight towards innocence" (p.2). I will be using both Rossiter's (2001) language of 'innocence' and

Chapman and Withers' (2021) focus on 'benevolence' in my description of how social work has constructed the identity of itself as a 'helping' profession.

My Why

Before social work, I pursued a career in acting. In my teenage years, I threw myself into every opportunity I could to learn more about performance. My passion landed me a place at an intensive theatre academy, The National Theatre School in Montreal, where I studied for three years with my 10 other classmates six days a week, sometimes for 12 hours a day. My training included working extensively with my voice, my breath, and of course, my body. Even though I participated in daily movement classes, voice classes, and countless exercises that were geared towards embodiment, I was being taught how to *control* my body, to use my body as my 'tool' for my work. I cannot recall how many times I was told that my body was my *instrument.* I believe that being taught to see my body as an 'instrument' entrenched the Cartesean mind/body split and normalized an objectified mindset. Seeing my body as an object impacted my sense of self-worth: I existed to please others. I existed to perform, to be critiqued, to become a product consumed by an audience. This complicated my experiences of sexual assault, abuse, and exploitation in the world of acting—some of which happened in classes geared towards 'embodiment'. It kept me performing heterosexuality, performing colonial civility, performing roles that were set out for me.

Looking back now, I see how acting offered me an outlet at a time when I just wanted to know I was doing the 'right' thing, that I was 'good enough' and that I was 'seen' – things that I did not always feel in my family, school, or social life. Performing gave me the person I needed

to be (the character), the words I needed to say (the script), what I needed to wear (the costume), where I needed to stand (the blocking), and what I needed to do and feel (the story). Every choice was made for me, every last facial expression or fluctuation in my voice was meant to be controlled, practiced, perfected. The positive side of acting was that it gave me the opportunity to focus on the present moment, engage in play, be a part of a community, and attune to my body. However, the simultaneous experience of giving up your body to be controlled by directors to please audiences becomes a dangerous configuration of power-over, especially in a world dominated by patriarchal and exploitative ideas about women's bodies. I share this to emphasize that discourse and practices around embodiment can cause harm when we re-objectify ourselves as more 'useful' objects in the service of others. Feminists have long taken up the subject of the body and how objectification has impacted women's experience of the world (Ahmed, 2000). The medicine of embodiment is in its potential to challenge the mind/body split, not force or contort ourselves into a more ideal form.

All of the embodiment work that I did throughout my time in theatre, all the ways that I learned to regulate my breath, tune into my body, be aware of my emotions, ultimately resulted in colonial holds over my idea of right and wrong, good and bad to be further cemented in my mind-body-spirit rather than offering practices that lead to me shedding those patterns. I am not saying that acting is inherently colonial or that theatre practices always reinscribe the mind/body split. Many people talk about the benefits of theatre, such as Brunette-Debassige (2018) and Young and Nadeau (2018) who explore the power of theatre practices for Indigenous people reclaiming their body, voice, and stories. I recognize the therapeutic benefits of theatre— for

myself included, even though these benefits became overshadowed by the harm over time. Brunette-Debassige (2018) discuss how she has:

> …attended many different classes that involve movement (including yoga classes) in which teachers approach the body from the outside, as an object that students learn to manipulate, while also encouraging a competitive atmosphere among the students. Such an orientation is antithetical to both the spirit and the goals of embodied learning and, from that perspective, tends to produce counterproductive results. (p. 222)

Unfortunately, the outside-in approach dominated my education and thus informed my sense of objectification, outward appearance, and desirability to others. This manifested in disordered eating, and struggles with my sense of wellbeing, self-worth, and an obsession with external validation.

I left acting to get myself out of the toxic pattern that I had created for myself. I turned to yoga practices as an opportunity to invite in a new relationship to embodiment: no longer as a way to abandon myself to become a character but instead as a way to witness and reintegrate myself. I pursued yoga training and learned from incredible teachers, like Susana Barkataki (2020), who is committed to challenging the Western yoga industrial complex through her work. What I found shocked me. Now that I was no longer performing, no longer hyper aware of how I was being perceived by audiences, directors, and all forms of outside eyes, I was able to actually come home to my body and appreciate the knowledge that my body holds. I reflected deeply on how my experience of objectification from the hetero-male gaze, as well as settler colonial ideals of perfectibility, mastery, and control informed my experience in the world of acting. I have invested in my embodiment practices and now have a much more integrated sense of myself beyond being an object existing to please others, or a vessel holding my brain.

My history as an actor has taught me about the dangers of seeing the body as a tool - one of which is that when we see our bodies as objects, we are less likely to attend to their aliveness, the wisdom that is stored in the tissues, the ways that our bodies are the medium for our emotional experience, and interlocking systems of oppression inform our bodily experience. I will draw parallels to my experience in acting when I critique the literature on embodiment in social work because I have identified how literature focused on embodiment as a social work competency echoes the discourse that is pervasive in acting, whereby our bodies are seen as 'tools'. More on this topic will be included in the findings section.

Chapter 2: How Social Work Takes Up Embodiment Practices

Literature Review

The literature on embodiment in social work is growing, and over the last 10 years, there has been an uptick in people focusing on researching embodiment practices in social work (Gardner et al., 2021). I have observed that there is a bifurcation in the discourse, with one stream of the literature highlighting the decolonial potential of integrating embodiment practices as an opportunity to center subjugated knowledges and the other stream focusing on how embodiment practices can improve social worker's productivity, capacity for empathy, and resistance to burnout. These two streams can be broadly categorized as being 'decolonial' on the one hand and 'neoliberal' on the other. I have observed that when there is a focus on embodiment practices for the purposes of self-care or burnout resistance, recognition of the constructed nature of social problems or the need for material, structural change is generally left out. Moreover, in this branch of the literature, there is little analysis of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or any other dimension of oppression and how that has impacted people's experience with their

bodies. I am wary of only brief mention of oppression impacting the body because as Ahmed (2000) asserts, "*appeals* to difference do not always involve an *analysis* of difference" (p.41) and if the analysis is not oriented towards exploring the potentials for embodiment as a decolonial, disruptive, resistance practice, it can naturalize the myth of a universal/homogeneous experience and downplay the impacts of systemic oppression. Through this literature review, I will identify the trends in the literature, outline social work's engagement with embodiment practices, and point to the gaps. I will finish this section with an explanation of the theoretical frameworks that underpin this research, including my articulation of a critical embodiment theory.

Overview of the Literature

The key contributors to the discourse around social work and embodiment are Batacharya and Wong (2018), Mesegnia and Pyles (2011), Tanenberg and Kempt (2002), as well as Cameron and McDermott (2007) who published the book *Social Work and the Body* detailing how embodiment is a useful skill for social workers. Batacharya and Wong (2018) edited the book *Sharing Breath,* which includes 14 chapters of decolonial embodiment pedagogy through embodiment practices and embodied politics. Also of note is a special edition of the Australian Social Work journal dedicated to embodiment, which was published in 2021 and focused on the importance of embodiment for social work practitioners and clients. As the research grows, I was interested in understanding: how does the literature on social work embodiment reinforce white supremacy logics? How does the literature open possibilities for decolonization? I used these questions to guide my review. In order to identify the trends in the literature, I will present social

work's current integration of embodiment practices and distill the literature's attention to decoloniality, power, and neoliberalism.

Gardner et al. (2021) performed a scoping review of the literature on embodiment literature in social work which tracked the emerging trends between 2000 and 2019 by focusing on how many articles were published, on what topics, from what countries, and in what journals. Their results point to an increasing number of publications focusing on embodiment, with a particular jump from 2010 and onwards; the top three journals were *Social Science & Medicine* (UK and US), *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (US) and *Ageing & Society* (UK); and the UK was the location with the leading number of articles published, coming in at 28, US authors accounted for 19, Canadians for 15, Europe for 8 and Australia for 6 (Gardner et al., 2021). The areas of study which were the most popular were gender, aging, and ability/disability since 2000. Child welfare, clinical practices, mental health, physical health, reproductive health, and trauma have grown in popularity since 2010 (Gardner et al., 2021). Clinical practice, or the ways that social work develops practice methods to understand itself became the focus for my research. Garner et al. (2021) note that only two articles studied racial and cultural inequity, which points to the profound impacts of white supremacy in social work. Their results confirmed my desire to interrogate how white supremacy culture has informed social work's understanding of embodiment. Moreover, Gardner et al. (2021) assert that the relatively small number (89) of published articles over a 20 year period suggests that while social work is interested in embodiment, it has not actually *adopted* embodiment principles and practices. They link this to the continued influence of positivism and medicalization in social work.

Decolonial Focus

An excellent example of literature that has a decolonial focus comes from *Sharing Breath* edited by Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Reneta Wong (2018). I will give an overview of the embodiment practices that they cover to demonstrate the range of possibilities that they share. This publication focuses on centering knowledge that has been subjugated through colonialism and advocates for a reintegration of these practices in the classroom. While social work is discussed in various chapters, colonization in the education system is this book's focus and each contributor seeks to integrate embodiment pedagogy in their own unique way. Ng (2018) discusses her work with Qigong in social work classrooms; Young-Leon and Nadeau (2018) integrate Indigenous embodiment practices like dance, drumming, and art when they host community events; Dee Mucina (2018) discusses the embodied knowledge conveyed through storytelling; Rice (2018) integrates Crip theatre as embodied expression; Batachara (2018) focuses on yoga and yogic principles; Brunette-Debassige (2018) integrates yoga with Indigenous knowledge; Wong (2018) articulates how she incorporates mindfulness practices from the Buddhist Tradition into the social work classroom; and Steward (2018) and Ferguson (2018) talk about embodied poetry and the power of writing as an embodied experience.

Power Focus

Tangenberg and Kemp's (2002) widely cited work incorporates a Foucauldian analysis of power, which brings important observations about how bodies are both a site of control and resistance, and how power operates through the medium of bodies. While they do not explicitly critique colonization or white supremacy culture, their analysis does critique both systems of

domination and hierarchy which are inherent structures of white supremacy and colonization. Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) explain that mind/body split has influenced the guiding assumption "that people *should* be able to control their bodies, that the rational self can act as a brake on the body, and that the helping professions can assist in the process of getting the body back in line by providing education, skills training, and positive social support" (emphasis added, p. 11). This was a key takeaway of their critique which helped my analysis of Chapman and Withers (2021), who discuss at length the impacts of rehabilitation discourse in social work and broader cultural assumptions about how people ought to be changed if they are non-normative by white supremacy standards. While the body is a site of control "the body is equally central to processes of resistance and rebellion" (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002, p. 14), which speaks to its relevance for the social work profession if conditions of domination and subjugation are to be eradicated.

Neoliberal Focus

Currently, there is a concern across the profession about burnout. Scholars interested in embodiment recognize the burden of the mind/body split as a driving factor of this (Mesignya & Pyles, 2021). Embodiment practices are being proven through evidence-based studies to be effective at ameliorating the symptoms of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Martin, Myers, & Brickman 2023; Newsome et al., 2012; Strauss, & Northcut, 2014). Therefore, there is likely to be a growing literature and a continued interest in building embodiment practices into social work. However, I argue that it is essential that social work ensures the narrative of embodiment is not truncated

from the history of the profession and critical theory more broadly. It is common in this branch of the literature to see scholars referring to bodies as ‘tools’, a trend which recruits us into believing that our bodies are objects that need to be honed for optimal output. Neoliberalism in social work has led to the bureaucratization of the profession with the aim of workers being able to meet targets quickly (Del-Villar, 2021). Seeing bodies as a resource to be extracted for the purposes of productivity, efficiency, and effective optimization to meet predetermined targets has a quality that mirrors or mimics capital economic relations. Becoming wary of neoliberal demands of the social work profession is actually a way to become more in touch with our bodies. Mesinga and Pyles (2021) point to this when they wrote that they have come to see the current conditions of social work as having

> perpetuated a kind of violence and marginalisation of my body, whether through sheer neglect, overriding my needs, or exhausting myself. Certainly, the research on compassion fatigue, burnout, and social worker wellbeing and resilience echoes my experience. But these terms fall short of capturing the moral, spiritual, emotional, and somatic injuries that disembodiment causes and fail to bring attention to the social structures, narratives, and practices that perpetuate a disembodied social work. (131)

While I can appreciate the contributions to the literature around embodied strategies to burnout, I agree with Mesinga and Pyles (2021) that without integrating a systemic analysis, this literature actually supports neoliberalist configurations that created the burnout in the first place.

Gaps in the Literature

I have not come across embodiment literature that presents a critical history of social work’s understanding of bodies or embodiment, nor have I found a discourse analysis of embodiment literature in social work, hence the focus for my research. As Gardner et al. (2023) point out, there is a global momentum on this topic, and yet, social work does not have a

unifying theory on embodiment that combines the dimension of social justice and social change with the "inner world/felt sense of one's somatic experience" (p.12). As Foucault's (1977, 1980, 1982, 1988, 1991) work demonstrates, it is vital to understand the history of the present and trace how an answer became *the* answer. My research is concerned with understanding how we got to this moment in time where embodiment is being seen as an opportunity to, once again, individualize the devastating effects of advanced neoliberal capitalism, despite embodiment being incompatible (or compatible in some cases) with neoliberalism. It is my hope that the critical embodiment theory that I propose can not only bring attention to this paradoxical moment, but also provide an analysis of how to avoid a pull towards making bodies more agreeable and exploitable for capitalist and white supremacy systems of domination.

Another gap that I have observed is the lack of critique of embodiment practices being used for the purposes of self-care without a focus on structural change. Martin et al. (2023) have contributed compelling research to social work literature on embodiment as a strategy of self care, but this analysis stops at workers being better equipped to handle stress, not an upstream recognition of the sources. Neoliberal mechanisms of recentering whiteness and perpetuating white supremacy logics will be seductive to get recognition in the growing niche of legitimizing embodiment practices, however there is a need to ensure that mind/body split is not reinscribed through adhering to white supremacy worldsenses. Moreover, there is a general lack of recognition that engaging with what Ng (2018) describes as "the risks of engaging the body in the learning process" (p. 47) which require thoughtful attention to how painful experiences may arise when attempting to engage en embodiment work when one comes from a culture that has inculcated a mind/body split. For me, recognizing the sensitivity of working with the body is not

only an ethical necessity but a prerequisite. Once again, I think back to my experiences in acting where embodiment practices were used in ways that were not always ethical, and would definitely not be considered trauma-informed by today's standards.

Theoretical Frameworks

The following are the theoretical frameworks that have guided my research for my literature review and the genealogical account of social work history of understanding bodies. Before I present my proposed critical embodiment theory, I will first differentiate between neoliberal embodiment discourse and decolonial embodiment discourse in how they articulate their theoretical underpinnings. The following section will describe: a) Mainstream Embodiment Theory; b) Embodiment Pedagogy; and c) a Proposed critical embodiment theory. I included Embodiment Pedagogy because in the book *Sharing Breath*, most of the contributors use the work of Roxanna Ng (2018) to describe how they apply embodiment to their work, and credit her concept of embodiment pedagogy as their entry point to theoretical analysis without explicitly stating that they were using an 'embodiment theory'.

Neoliberal Embodiment Theory

Neoliberal contributions to social work literature on embodiment use what I call a Mainstream Embodiment Theory. These articles most often are concerned with either articulating embodiment as a social work competency or building the evidence-based nature of embodiment as a kind of downstream 'quick-fix' without recognition of the upstream source of harm. I argue that their application of 'embodiment theory' simply means that they are advocating for a recognition of the dimension of the body without additional analysis of systemic oppression

which results in an overreliance on neoliberal conception of individualism. Applied on its own, (without a complimentary critical lens) this theory produces research that lacks an adequate theoretical framework for critical social work practice. Put another way, mainstream embodiment presents one-size-fits-all solutions to social work that are decontextualized from critiques of white supremacy culture or settler colonialism. After all, if a three week yoga and mindfulness course improves worker 'satisfaction' with their job (Gregory, 2015) or help workers resist burnout, prevent compassion fatigue, or lessen vicarious trauma (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Newsome et al., 2012; Strauss, & Northcut, 2014), it is in an agency's best interest to provide such support in order to ensure continued productivity, efficiency, and continuation of the status quo. Yet the power relations that created these conditions remain untouched and uncriticized. Ultimately, the profession reinscribes the mind/body split through practices, institutions, and policies that drive the stress, inadequate support, and lack of resources. But if embodiment is classified as a competency or a self-care practice, then individual social workers are to blame for their lack of embodiment 'skills', rather than the profession for its lack of embodied analysis, theory, and practice. Furthermore, focus on short-term, evidence-based, quick-fix, 'solutions' to compassion fatigue that fit well into neoliberalist answers to the social work profession continue to obscure the historical impact of continued, ongoing colonial harm.

A striking example of the result of this lack of additional theoretical analysis can be found in Gregory's (2015) study exploring the benefits of a three week yoga and mindfulness program offered to social workers once a week. In this study, part of what was explored was how

mindfulness and yoga practices would impact worker's responses to "difficult clients" (p. 382). One of the questions posed in the questionnaire asked workers:

> 'What is your perception to why this client is difficult to work with?' with the following major themes in responses: client is the issue, social worker is the issue, and the agency is the issue. For their perception of what would make it easier to work with this client, the respondent's major themes mirrored the question before by stating the issue could be changed by the client, the social worker, or agency controlled issues. (p.382-383)

I am struck by this question because there is no recognition of broader systemic forces that are impacting the client. The locus of the perceived issue and the locus of potential change protect systems of power and do not open up inquiry into what this 'difficult client' is experiencing with regard to systemic oppression, or what legislative/funding/resource constraints the agency is dealing with as a result of how systems are constructed. This is a perfect example of how social work that serves the status quo often keeps existing power structures protected from critique and resistance action.

I will argue that mainstream embodiment theory or mind/body theory is not (in and of itself) a holistic social work framework if it is not embedded in the history of colonial violence that reinforced the Cartesian mind/body split, the exploitation of racialized bodies, the objectification of women, the criminalization of queer people, and the rejection of people with disabilities. For instance, when burnout is described as "one of the elements of compassion fatigue… associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or in doing your job effectively... They can reflect the feeling that your efforts make no difference, or they can be associated with a very high workload or a non supportive work environment" (Gregory, 2015, p. 379) yet it does not include how white supremacy and neoliberal capitalism

drives all the conditions which cause burnout, then the actual causes for the mind/body split are not being challenged. Research contributing to social work literature, I believe, has an obligation to orient from a critical framework or else it perpetuates the very harms that have created the need for reintegrating embodiment practices in the first place. Without maintaining the connection between the macro and the micro, Mainstream Embodiment Theory individualizes and diminishes the impacts of systemic oppression, which limits its relevance for social work.

Embodiment Pedagogy

In the 1990's Roxanna Ng began developing principles for Embodiment Pedagogy, which are aimed at recentering subjugated knowledges of the body to disrupt the continuation of the mind/body split in social work education (Ng, 1993c, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2005, 2011, as cited in Batacharya & Wong, 2018). This approach to teaching recognises how our emotional and physical beings are conditioned through hegemonic ideas, thus, our behaviour, bodily experience, and social relationships are patterned by hegemonic discourse which then informs how we intervene in the social world around us (Ng, 2018). The hegemonic ideas of the mind/body split inform who's problems we see as a 'problem', what we are going to do about it, how we will enforce our response, and ultimately, who lives and who dies. In this way, the 'difficult client' is unpacked and problematized as a technique that categorizes people in unjust ways. Ng's (2018) Embodiment Pedagogy involves: learning new ways to conceptualize the body beyond the Cartesian mind/body split by engaging in practices that facilitate deeper awareness of the body's experience and engaging in personal reflection (through journaling). According to the authors included in *Sharing Breath*, personal reflection and collective collaboration are equally

important for embodiment theory, because embodiment can involve a recognition of the interconnectivity of all bodies, not just inside one individual, but between bodies of otherthanhuman life, bodies of land, and bodies of water (Batacharya & Wong, 2018).

Proposed Critical Embodiment Theory

A fundamental component of a critical embodiment theory for social work recognizes that embodiment practices are not in and of themselves decolonial or critical. I have interwoven poststructural and interlocking oppressions theories into this proposed critical embodiment theory to imbed an analysis of power relations, including a recognition of the ways that power and knowledge have been exerted through the medium of bodies (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2012) and how these systems of oppression interlock and rely on each other for their continuance (Fellows & Razak, 1998). This requires us to be critical of the ways that white supremacy and colonial norms have dictated who is acceptable/exalted/deserving and who is unacceptable/ denigrated/undeserving. Bodies that have been targeted have been Indigenous, racialized, disabled, Queer, Trans, female, mad, poor, elderly, or otherwise considered in some way 'non-normative' and 'deviant'—and we all may hold intersecting identities at different times which make it impossible to view any of these bodies, identities, or systems of oppression in isolation from each other. I have dedicated the next section to going into more detail about interlocking oppressions theory for further context.

Critical embodiment theory recognizes that practices and analysis that challenge the mind/body split can hold important additions to social work and offer opportunities to build alternatives to white supremacy and settler colonial power relations. By recognizing that there is

an ontology and epistemology of the body (Batarachya & Wong, 2018), a critical embodiment theory generates the potential for practical, accessible, bottom-up power reconfigurations that can subvert the status-quo of the colonizing mind/body split.

I am locating a critical embodiment theory under the poststructural branch of theoretical frameworks. While critiques have been leveled at poststructural theories for their lack of consideration for material conditions (Howarth, 2013), engaging with embodiment requires us to remain deeply intertwined with and dependent on an analysis of material conditions. In fact, it can facilitate our ability to "address both socially constructed and materially embodied experiences in terms of power relations" (Ng, 2011 as cited in Batacharya & Wong, 2018, p.11). The work of poststructuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (1977) is "particularly useful for understanding the body as an object and site of power relations" (Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002, p.14) through his analysis of biopower. As summarized by Tangenberg and Kemp (2002), "biopower has two primary forms: (1) disciplinary power, which operates at the level of the individual body; and (2) regulatory power, which operates at the level of the population (or 'species body') through policies and social regulations" (p.14). By focusing on how power and control function through the medium of the body, we are left with a more fulsome and nuanced account of embodiment than if we simply see bodies as individual, separated entities that lack relationships with systemic oppression.

An essential component of this theory is the recognition that the body holds knowledge. Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) articulate this process as the information that is gathered both from direct and indirect experience "through actual physical processes and social and cultural

messages about appropriate behavior, ability, or appearance" (p.10). Understanding the body therefore requires attention to the material and the discursive; our bodies are shaped by the societies that we live in and subject to governance through normalization process, *and* bodies are the medium that we feel the impacts of governance through. Thus, our bodily experiences are mediated by the cultural conditions that we are embedded within. We cannot dislocate our experience of our bodies from history and context because our experience is embedded in the particularities of our time, place, culture, communities, our individual experience. According to Ahmed (2000), "a philosophy that refuses to privilege mind over body, and that assumes that the body cannot be transcended as such, is a philosophy which emphasizes contingency, locatedness, the irreducibility of difference, and the worldliness of being" (p.41). I understand Ahmed's (2000) assertion as being key to a critical embodiment theory for social work. Recognizing that the particular historic moment has shaped us (Ng, 2011) also means that we are recognizing our capacity to shape change.

Understanding the wisdom of the body is not a new concept. Recognition of how embodiment has been central to Indigenous practices and knowledge around the world leads us to see how if the mind/body split had not been so engrained through settler colonialism, we would not be having to reintegrate ourselves now. Understanding the mind/body split on the societal level reveals how dividing the mind from the body is a practice that was key to colonial land theft, assimilation tactics, and social control. Rather than decontextualizing our bodies (Ahmed, 2000; Krieger, 2005; Ng, 2011), embodiment teaches us how to recontextualize ourselves inside the power structures that shaped us, to fully acknowledge history, and to be attuned to the present. In this way, embodiment represents a form of resistance to settler colonial

and white supremacy logics whereby we are continually decontextualized (from legacies of colonial violence and racial capitalism) and objectified (as commodities and entities useful for our productivity/consumption).

As Batacharya and Wong (2018) say so eloquently "calling for action is not equivalent to taking action" (p.14). Utilizing embodiment as a framework for mobilizing social justice action offers an opportunity to walk the talk, as the common saying goes. In this way, embodiment with a critical and political focus can be seen as a way to integrate resistance action into practice, at both a personal and collective level. Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) stress the importance of understanding the body is a "site of power and [a] locus of agency, struggle, and resistance" (p.14) which echoes Foucault's (1982) assertion that "where there is power, there is resistance" (p. 794). Through an analysis of biopower, we are also recognizing the world-building potential of embodiment to change us at a micro and macro level. A critical embodiment theory offers opportunities for power relationships to be reconfigured which simultaneously acknowledge the profound impacts of history and interlocking oppressions while also constructing new possibilities and relationships for individuals, communities, and larger populations.

Additional Theoretical Foundations

An integration of Interlocking oppressions theory highlights the ways that knowledge, power and domination are exerted through dimensions of oppression which are interlocked with one another. According to Fellows and Razak (1998) an interlocking oppressions theory recognizes how all oppressions rely on each other for their maintenance, so any analysis of one dimension of oppression cannot be truly understood without examining all dimensions of

oppression: “class exploitation could not be accomplished without gender and racial hierarchies; imperialism could not function without class exploitation, sexism, heterosexism, and so on” (p. 335). In an effort to avoid the dangers of single-issue politics which serve to benefit only the most privileged and least marginalized (Spade, 2007), I will attempt to include an analysis of interlocking oppressions. Thus, I hope to recontextualize forms of oppression as being intrinsic to systems of white supremacy.

Of course, my research on embodiment in social work discourse would not be possible were it not for feminist theoretical perspectives. Feminists have long been concerned with addressing the mind/body split because EuroWestern thought has constructed an association “between masculinity and reason and femininity and the body” (Ahmed, 2000, p.41) that has stemmed from Christian notions of the body being sinful (Gardner et al., 2021; Haines, 2019; Ng, 2018). In response to this, Feminist theory has focused on valuing subjectivity and embodiment (Gardner et al, 2023). Ahmed (2000) highlights how bodies have become a central focus for feminist thought, but points out that feminist analysis does not always incorporate other dimensions of oppression, stating that:

> ... *appeals* to difference do not always involve an *analysis* of difference (those moments where, often in brackets, a theorist will add–and also, race, class, disability, etc.). But the appeal to the differentiated body as a rhetorical ploy that does not operate beyond that level has structural implications for the bodies that are discussed and reinscribed in feminist discourse. (p. 41)

The use of a feminist framework therefore necessitates an interlocking oppression theory addition. Otherwise, it is in danger of reproducing whiteness through essentializing the experience of all women as the experience of white women (Jeyapal & Grigg, 2020; Spade, 2007).

Critical Disability Studies adds a layer of analysis which focuses on the ways that our social norms conspire to create the conception of the 'beautiful body' and the 'abject body'. According to Rice (2018),

> We experience the abject when we encounter bodily fluids, open wounds, diseased or dying bodies, corpses, and other evidence of the unwanted aspects of our embodiment. People whose bodies remind us of the unknowability and uncountability of our own bodies, of our vulnerability to injury and disease, and of the certainty of our death are therefore rejected—jettisoned from the social body (p.136).

Understanding the ways that the physical, material body is conceived as not only a complex, messy liability is essential for understanding the fear and disgust that is also layered into the ways that the mind/body spit is reproduced in dominant settler colonial culture. By layering in an interlocking oppression framework here also, it is clear that:

> …race- and class-based oppressions that impair bodies (among them unregulated global capitalism, colonial histories, and legacies that have rendered some groups more vulnerable to impairment) intersect the oppression of disabled bodies (through high unemployment or by being seen as frightening and "other" or as childlike and expendable, to name a few forms of disability oppression), resulting in the production of disability as a problem (Rice, 2018, p.138).

Critical disability theory is also used throughout *A Violent History of Benevolence.* Chapman and Withers (2021) emphasize the ways that disability has been constructed overtime and how the 'problem' has been naturalized. They also point out how disability discourse evolved alongside colonialism, both of which have had a profound impact on Indigenous people in what is colonially known as Canada.

Focusing on the potentials for decolonial work and embodiment practices, Batacharya and Wong (2018) springboard off the work of Tuck and Yang (2012), explaining "decolonizing the body…is not a metaphor: it is a material entry point to the dislodging of colonial power,

which has been imprinted not merely on minds but on the body-spirit that is inseparable from the lands we are dependent on for life" (p. 16). Colonial violence has been and continues to be enacted through the mind/body/spirit split. In their work, Tuck and Yang (2012) caution against applying Paulo Freire's understanding of colonization because he "situates the work of liberation in the minds of the oppressed" (19), which focuses on mental aspects of colonization and disregards the dimension of the embodied, felt sense of violence, domination, and harm. Batacharya and Wong (2018) and the other scholars that contributed to *Sharing Breath* highlight the decolonial potential of embodiment practices by attending to the ways that centering subjugated knowledge can challenge the mind/body split.

Chapter 3: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Research Design

From reading the literature on embodiment in social work, I noticed that the history of social work's management of bodies was being left out of the discourse. I saw a need for a critical account of social work history of the mind/body split in order to present a discourse analysis focused on how Cartesian dualism continues to limit and shape the possibilities we see for the profession. As I began this work, I found that the amount of ground that I would have to cover in order to present a fulsome genealogical analysis was more than this practice research paper would hold, so I have chosen to revisit it for my doctoral studies. However, the genealogical work I started has been integral to my process overall and can be found integrated through both my data analysis as well as in my articulation of a critical embodiment theory for social work. The research that I have chosen to present here is focused on providing an analysis of how social work has taken up embodiment in the literature, specifically regarding how social

work understands potentials for embodiment in social work practice. Even while social work begins to embrace embodiment, the colonial mind/body split is still informing the discourse. I have chosen to take the literature that I used for my literature review as the data for a Foucauldian discourse analysis on how social work is taking up and understanding embodiment.

Part of a Foucaudian discourse analysis involves recognizing that one must understand the historical context of our taken-for-granted social interventions through tracing them to their discursive formation (Foucault, 1972). I therefore felt it necessary to explore how social work understands itself through reading *A Violent History of Benevolence,* a critical account of social work history. Chris Chapman and A.J. Withers (2021) start before the Crusades and work their way up to contemporary social work practice. They explain social work from a Canadian context, yet integrate history from Europe and the United States where applicable to give context to the social and cultural influences across time and place. Through discussing the ways that social work has been informed by colonial and white supremacy narratives, they focus on discourse surrounding the professionalization of social work, the ways that bodies have been dominated and controlled, assimilation tactics, normalization, taxonomies of difference, moral economies, and institutional practices. They draw attention to the ways that moral economies operate to position white people as superior, while also connecting this process to the power of normalization more broadly, whereby those who exist in ways that are non-normative (through their gender, race, sexual orientation, abilities, or beliefs) are marked as in need of 'help', 'reform', and 'improvement' which is related to bringing people into closer proximity to exalted norms. Chapman & Withers (2021) trace this history through the creation of institutionalized responses to social issues, rehabilitation/eugenics discourse, the assimilation and ongoing

genocide of Indigeous people, and the charity model of social work. They pay particular attention to tracing the histories of disability discourse through legislative changes and institutional practices. Throughout the text book, there is also mention of the world-building potential for social work practices that open up possibilities beyond the confines of what neoliberal social work has become today.

By engaging in a critical reading of *A Violent History of Benevolence* and conducting a Foucauldian discourse analysis on the literature on embodiment in social work through applying a critical embodiment theory, I was able to present an analysis of how social work is understanding embodiment. Through this research, I focused on how the mind/body split has impacted interpersonal interactions (i.e. the worker and the people we work with) as well as the systems that we work within (i.e. our organizations, the profession, the state, and settler colonial culture as a whole). I focused on the following questions to guide my research: How does social work understand bodies?; How does social work manage bodies?; How does the mind/body split show up in social work practice and theory?; What unique harms are produced by the lack of embodiment theory (recognition of the ontology and epistemology of the body) in practice?; How has social work's 'violent history of benevolence' (Chapman & Withers, 2021) informed current social work practice regarding bodies and our understanding of experiences of embodiment? Bringing this analysis of the discourse around the embodiment and mind/body split offers important critiques of how social work understands and manages bodies.

Methodology

My methodology for conducting my discourse analysis has focused on Foucauldian understandings of the mechanisms of power such as productive, regulatory, diffuse, and disciplinary power as well as biopower and governmentality. This aligns with my application of the critical embodiment theory that I have articulated, which integrates poststructural and interlocking oppression theories. Through this process, I have attempted to reveal the "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18) that inform social work's understanding of embodiment interventions at this point in time.

Diaz-Bone, Bührmann, Rodríguez, Schneider, Kendall, and Tirado (2008) explain that "'discourse' is not simply dialogue or philosophical monologue" (p.9), it is alive in a way that is played out in the institutions that we create, the authority that we recognize (or do not recognize), and is in conversation with other narratives that either support or contest a particular discourse. Jean Carabine (2001) describes how discourse can be fluid, opportunistic, and able to 'hook into' normative assumptions, "drawing upon existing discourse about an issue whilst utilizing, interacting with, and being mediated by, other dominant discourses" (p. 269). Nothing is created out of a vacuum, and value-laden assumptions have been made about bodies that have been informed by discourse about race, gender, disability, moral economies of worth, Christian ideas of superiority, white saviorism, and many others which have had material impacts on all of our lives. While social work is focused on material impacts, there is often a disregard of how conditions have been formed, what they obscure, and who they serve. A Foucauldian discourse analysis creates an opportunity to focus on the ways that social conditions have been constructed overtime to produce our current reality.

According to Riley, Robson, and Evans (2012), a Foucaultian discourse analysis will explore “governmentality and the management of conduct through psychology and desires to be normal or meet culturally valued ideals” (p. 293). I think this is particularly important for understanding how social workers are expected to surveil themselves to remain productive workers for capitalism through the neoliberal stream of the literature. Yet culturally valued ideals of what it looks like to be critical of colonialism impact the decolonial stream of the discourse. Recognizing how governmentality directs and shapes how we practice is vital for mapping how the literature presents embodiment and how the bifurcation in the literature functions to create both the neoliberal and decolonial branches.

I also integrated elements of Foucaultian genealogical methods, which allow a researcher to investigate concepts that "we tend to feel [are] without history" (Foucault, 1980, p. 139). Concerned with how knowledge is produced through shifting discourses, genealogies trace the ways that power is deployed to address something that has been identified as a problem, rather than focusing on the ‘problem’ itself (O’Connell, 2009). Riley et al. (2012) describe how genealogies explore how ideas develop. Recognising that ideas are contingent on how concepts are constructed at particular times in history is a key aspect of what Foucault focused on in his work (Chambon, 1999). In order to investigate the ways that embodiment is understood at this point in time, it has been helpful to ask “what version of reality is being produced and what discourses enable this sense-making, including both ‘commonsense’ everyday discourses and those more obviously connected to institutions” (Riley et al., 2012, p. 293). Diaz-Bone et al. (2008) argue that a Foucauldian discourse analysis must be understood as a way to also engage in a socio-historical analysis, by way of considering methodologies such as genealogy.

Data and data gathering methods

For my data collection, I chose to analyze literature that I found when I searched with search criteria related to: social work and embodiment practices and the mind/body split in social work in social work research databases. For my background knowledge, I also read articles that related to white supremacy in social work and the embodied experiences of racialization. To investigate answers to my research questions, I began with multiple readings of each piece of data and pulling out guiding themes that pointed to the discursive positioning of the different authors, their theoretical perspectives, and . I chose to use five examples from the neoliberal stream of embodiment literature (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gregory, 2015; Newsome et al. 2012; Strauss, & Northcut, 2014), five examples from the third-space where decolonization was not their stated aim but also worker productivity was not the primary focus (Cameron & McDermott, 2007; Gardner et al, 2023; Mensinga & Pyles, 2021; Tangenberg & Kemp, 2002; van Rhyn et al., 2021) and the book *Sharing Breath* edited by Batacharya & Wong (2018) for the decolonial stream. I decided to use all of the chapters from *Sharing Breath* because I thought it was important to integrate the wide variety of perspectives, methodologies, cultural contexts, and embodiment practices rooted in subjugated knowledges that they brought forward as a way to push back against the idea that embodiment is in some way a flashy new idea.

For the genealogical background work, I chose to perform a critical reading of the textbook *A Violent History of Benevolence* by Chris Chapman and A.J. Withers (2021) to map out the history of how social work has understood the body. My data gathering method for this historical contextualization was to search *A Violent History of Benevolence* by for keywords that

related to my research questions. I decided on 22 keywords to search and of those, 10 keywords retrieved results. The results were as follows: **Embody** (2); **Embodiment** (5); **Embodied** (1); **Embodies** (1); **Embodying** (6); **Embodiments** (3); Disembody (0); Disembodiment (0); Disembodied (0); Disembodies (0); Disembodying (0); **Body** (44); **Bodies** (61); **Bodily** (4); **Bodied** (5); Bodiless (0); Burnout (0); Selfcare (0); Soma (0); Descartes (0); Cartesian (0); Mind/ body (0); Mind-Body (0).

Data coding and analysis methods.

My analysis methods involved me asking a series of different questions of my data. Through multiple readings of each of my data sources, I identified themes in the discourse around embodiment literature in social work: embodiment practices in social work, empathy, competency, ethics, white supremacy/colonization, and self-care. The themes that I identified for *A Violent History of Benevolence* were based on the main points of analysis used by Chapman and Withers (2021), which focused on: professionalization of social work/ identity making projects; moral economies/ white saviours; norms vs. taxonomies of difference; domination and control; reform/ rehabilitation; and assimilation. Through this process, I was able to hone my analysis of the ways that the body has been implicated in social work theory and practice, as well as the ways that embodiment has presented a challenge to social work. I then brought these themes to the themes from the embodiment literature, so that I would be able to pull out how professionalization of social work/ identity making projects; moral economies/ white saviours; norms vs. taxonomies of difference; domination and control; reform/ rehabilitation; and assimilation impacted the ways that the social work literature on embodiment took up

embodiment practices in social work, empathy, competency, ethics, white supremacy/ colonization, and self-care.

Recognizing that "there is no set procedure for Foucauldian Informed discourse analysis, nor a set of confirmed analytics to use" (Riley et al., 2012, p. 293), it was useful for me to draw from the work of other scholars who have created questioning frameworks for discourse analysis and genealogical inquiries. I read through my data with these additional frameworks in mind. It was helpful to interrogate the data through the following questions: "according to what logic the terminology is constructed?" and "which strategic goals are being pursued in the discourse" (Diaz-Bone et al., 2008, p. 11). I also found it helpful to apply a discourse analysis framework that Rossiter (2005) proposed for analyzing case studies because it provided me with a strategy to tease apart the specifics of discourses around bodies. Rossiter's framework is as follows: "1) Identification of "ruling" discourses…; 2) the oppositions and contradictions between discourses; and 3) positions for 'actors'' created by discourses which in turn shape perspectives and actions" (Rossiter, 2005, p. 9). My findings demonstrate the importance of understanding the mind/body split in social work to challenge the subject/object binary that is created between social workers (as subjects/minds) and clients (as objects/bodies).

Ethical considerations

As I engaged in this research, there were a few ethical considerations that emerged. Throughout the process, I attempted to be mindful of how I aimed to critique white supremacy discourse and neoliberal values, yet I, as a white person, have been not only indoctrinated into white supremacy culture, but I also have benefited materially from these systems of oppression. I am likely to have missed dimensions of analysis because of my whiteness, no matter how much

I commit myself to unraveling white supremacy in myself and in my worldsense. I was trained to be a 'good colonial girl', and I have experienced my own disembodiment due to this indoctrination. My experience as a white person will always be one that is proximate to normative ideals and positions of power, therefore, my experience of disembodiment will always be marked with privilege, even though I also hold identities of being a woman, being queer, and having experienced sexual assault.

Moreover, I am biased in how I am perceiving the two separate streams of embodiment discourse. I will need to be conscious of what Rossiter (2005) describes as the activist hero versus orthodox social worker binary. As Riley et al. (2012) explain, "Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis is not the search for 'good' and 'bad' discourses, but the exploration of what a discourse makes possible (and by implication what possibilities are limited)" (p.293). Recognising my bias towards seeing the decolonial perspective on embodiment as 'good' and the neoliberal perspective as 'bad', I am excited to explore the third space that exists between all binaries (including this one).

I am also conscious of the general lack of recognition of what Ng (2018) describes as "the risks of engaging the body in the learning process" (p. 47) and the particular ethical considerations that social workers must be sensitive to when exploring embodiment or unlocking disembodied holding patterns. For me, recognizing the sensitivity of working with the body is not only ethically necessary but must be a prerequisite for social work education to engage in this work. I absolutely believe that there are ways to engage in embodiment exploration that are supported, nurturing, and have the potential to make meaningful change. My bias here is that I believe the body-as-an-instrument-for-social-work mentality is out of alignment with intentional

practice (the term I like instead of 'best practice') for embodiment. My history as an actor has taught me of the dangers of seeing the body as a tool — one of which is that when we see our bodies as objects, we are less likely to attend to the aliveness, political insights, and personal wisdom that bodies can hold. I now have an allergy to referring to the body as a 'tool' or an 'instrument', and while this is a bias that I have because of my personal experience of harm, it has, I believe, actually enhanced my analysis of embodiment practices because I bring with me lived experience of my own embodied journey to this research.

Chapter 4: How Social Work Understands Embodiment

Findings

Through analyzing the literature on applying embodiment to social work practice, I observed the following central themes: embodiment practices in social work, empathy, competency, ethics, white supremacy/colonization, and self-care. I will provide a brief overview of the ways that each theme was taken up, beginning with the recognition that across both sides of the bifurcation, these themes were either addressed or remained unaddressed. I will point to the ways that this speaks to the differing theoretical perspectives and focuses of each stream of the literature, as well as illuminates the ways that power/knowledge function to either bring our attention towards or shift our attention away from particular ways of thinking.

Embodiment in Social work

All of the data discusses the application of embodiment for social work with a focus on legitimizing embodiment practices and their potential benefits. What is interesting here is how the discourse also covertly tells us who can be embodied/what ways of relating to bodies are

acceptable, as well as how bodies are understood through the methodologies that researchers and scholars choose. In the following section, I will break down the ways that the literature understands who can be embodied and bodies are understood.

Who can be embodied?

The focus of the studies and papers that I found were either on social workers themselves (usually in clinical practice) or the people we work with (usually with a population-specific focus). I chose to focus on embodiment for social workers because I was interested in exploring how power/knowledge is constructed around how social work understands itself. Yet, I have still included a brief analysis of the literature that I came across around population specific applications of embodiment because I think it is useful to contrast the ways that embodiment is understood for social workers and differently for people we work with. I see this as significant because it points to the discourse that social workers are neutral but that the people we work with can only be understood based on their 'population' aka their 'problem' or 'non-normativity'. For example, embodiment for people with eating disorders reinforces the idea that a) all people with eating disorders share a similar experience of embodiment; b) categorization and taxonomies of difference have some inherent 'truth' to them; and c) that social workers are separate from this as neutral people who can just be 'embodied'. From a poststructural perspective, the issue here is that people are positioned as the problem, rather than the larger discursive forces, such as the mind/body split, which have shaped people's experience of eating, body image, and self worth. Moreover, these discourses are naturalized through positioning systems of oppression as fixed and immovable.

Beyond the fact that mainstream social work perceives itself to be neutral, white, and inherently good (Badwall, 2016), I believe that the focus on embodiment for social workers themselves could be due in part to the ways that social work understands itself as a profession that is simultaneously victimized by the people we are trying to 'help'; for instance, the ways that burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, moral injury, and secondary traumatic stress recenter social worker identity making projects of being benevolent, self-less, and 'good' confirm the innocent, martyr identity of social worker which Rossiter (2001) problematizes. Looking back over that list, the language that we use paints a very clear picture: we are burned, fatigued, traumatized, injured, and stressed by the people we work with. Discourses around vicarious trauma have also been critiqued by Razack (2014) for the ways that it can reinforce colonial, white, and Global North superiority, as well as by others, including Marecek (1999) for creating discourse where systemic violence is individualized into 'trauma', which truncates the connection to interlocking oppressions, which are the true cause of violence.

Going back to the point that social workers are seen as neutral and white from a mainstream social work perspective (Badwall, 2016), we must also interrogate how race informs who is and who is not allowed to be embodied, and how embodiment is understood. If we view racism as an embodied experience, both for the person holding racist beliefs and for the receiver of the racist comment/thought/behavior, we can integrate the body as an important dimension of our analysis. Yet there is a dismissal of the embodied experience of race because of the mind/body split. This is perpetuated through the lack of acknowledgement of the history of colonialism, in addition to the lack of recognition of the ways that social work reinscribes whiteness (BlackDeer & Ocampo, 2022). For white workers, there is also a lack of recognition of

the embodied experience of white guilt. Rajan-Rankin (2015) describes this as "a kind of 'squirming in my seat' discomfort, of being pinned down" (p.213) when white people are talking about racism, or the invisibility of whiteness. For racialized workers, there is a reluctance to disclose racism they experience for fear of being seen as unprofessional. Badwall (2015, 2016) and Rajan-Rankin (2015) both link the experience denying race and racism to neoliberal ideas of professionalism through the construction of the social worker as a white subject. Racialized social workers are often dismissed when they put forward their concerns, if they even put them forward at all. Rajan-Rankin (2015) discusses how race is an embodied identity that is "worn on the skin" (p.211). Understanding the ways that the skin has become a marker of the boundary between the inside and the outside has been linked to how racism and white supremacy controls Black bodies. Ahmed (2000) brings together the work of Fanon (1974) and Lorde (1984), to explore how race was used as a tool for domination of non-white bodies through being marked by difference, inferiority, and dirtiness, while white bodies are seen as familiar, touchable, and admissible. Ahmed (2000) also reinforces that bodies are marked by difference through the relationship between bodies, the process of separating one person's body from another's, but also stresses that the skin being understood as a border between the self and the other is also a "border that feels" (p. 45). It is clear that race impacts the ways that social work understands embodiment, yet many scholars fail to include any analysis of race.

Methodological Orientations in the Literature

How is social work researching the importance of embodiment? How is knowledge being created to support the integration of embodiment practices? Commonly, the decolonial stream of

the literature will use methodologies that are concerned with capturing the qualitative experience of the participant's embodied experience. Many of these studies involve in-depth interviews, ranging from an hour to two hours (Rajan-Rankin, 2015; Rice, 2018; Wong, 2018). Ng (2018) did not conduct interviews, however, included reflective papers that her students had written in order to include the voices of participants of her Qigong-informed social work class. Research on embodiment can also involve exploration of media, art, or cultural productions such as storytelling, documentaries, or life performance art. Nixon & MacDonald, (2018) do a deep dive into the discourse around the embodiment of difference in the documentary *Kolby 2018*, discussing the ways that the Global North positions itself as superior to the 'savage' Global South in ways that reinforce taken-for-granted assumptions of 'helping' and 'benevolence.' Dee Mucina (2018) explores the power learning Ubuntu teachings through oral storytelling, and provides insight into the ways that embodied storytelling "promotes active, co-created learning rather than passive reception" (p. 85). Rice (2018) incorporates analysis of work done by the performance art of the theatre group Sins Invalid, who focus on the embodied experience of disability justice.

The neoliberal stream focuses more on improving the evidence-based reputation of embodiment, utilizing questionnaires, control groups, and short interviews (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gregory, 2015; Newsome, Waldo, & Gruszka, 2012; Strauss, & Northcut, 2014). These studies use scales to measure and quantify things like 'compassion satisfaction', 'compassion fatigue', 'burnout', and 'secondary traumatic stress'. The scales that Gregory (2015) use give a good idea of how is understood and measured. Compassion satisfaction: "pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well. Higher scores on this

scale represent a greater satisfaction related to your ability to be an effective caregiver in your job" (Gregory, 2015, p. 379). Secondary Traumatic Stress: "the second component of compassion fatigue. It is work-related, secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events. Higher scores on this scale indicate that a social worker may want to re-evaluate their work and/or work environment" (Gregory, 2015, p. 379).

Comparing these different methodologies of creating knowledge illuminates how social work is researching embodiment in ways that can be either a practice that involves the practitioner bringing themselves and their own bodies to the research, or a search for 'proof' that embodiment practices 'work'. I will go into further detail about researcher positionality and bringing oneself to the research in the White Supremacy/Colonization section. Here, I wish to present a critique of the idea that embodiment practices can be 'proven' to 'work' reinscribes the mind/body split. The binary of mind versus body is discursive continued through the belief that using embodiment practices will increase a social worker's capacity for continuing to do their work. For example, the scales that are used to measure someone's experience of embodiment and satisfaction/burnout in a job result in the body being positioned as a tool for the mind. The objectification of the body is foundational to this perspective, which maintains the conditions of the mind/body split.

Empathy

As embodiment discourse begins to circulate in social work literature, some scholars are arguing that embodiment offers much to the social work profession as a process of understanding empathy and how emotions are processed through the body. As Jeyapal and Grigg (2020)

discuss, emotions arise as a process of learning to disrupt and unsettle our experiences of power and oppression. Van Rhyn et al. (2021) make the connection to embodiment and empathy, arguing that attuning to the body "may be a missed opportunity for social workers to move beyond a purely cognitive approach to empathizing and unlock the body's potential as a powerful *instrument* for empathy" (emphasis added, p.146). After all, our bodies do more than store our brains (Ng, 2018), they hold our emotional experiences and those experiences live in the tissues (Haines, 2019; Mate, 2022; van Der Kolk, 2015). Fuchs (2017) writes extensively on the embodied process of affect and emotions, explaining the concept of embodied interaffectivity as a circular relationship between an embodied subject and a situation. Our emotions always elicit even subtle sensations in the body; we are always surrounded by the charge of affective qualities, so rather than seeing sensations in the body as 'by-products' of emotions or 'add-ons', these bodily sensations are the medium of emotions (Fuchs, 2017). Put another way, there is no way to extricate our emotions from our body or vice versa because they both rely on the other. These scholars argue that phenomenological perspectives provide important insight into social work (van Rhyn et al., 2021; Zahavi, 2010). As social workers, we are not trained in the ways that emotions impact our embodiment or the ways that our emotional reactions are exactly that: our reactions.

Also included in this theme is the belief that embodiment will increase a worker's capacity for compassion satisfaction (Gregory, 2015) or a worker's ability to empathize with their clients (Newsome et al., 2012). This ties into the discourse around self-care (which will be detailed in the Self-Care section of the findings) as well as embodiment as a Competency for good social work practice (the focus of the next section). After all, mainstream social work

understands itself as benevolent (Chapman & Withers, 2021) and innocent (Rossiter, 2001), therefore empathy is considered a competency (Badwall, 2016). What is important to note here is that anything that promotes and maintains empathy fits in well with social work's identity making projects and therefore will likely gain a significant amount of attention/funding/ legitimacy. While these neoliberal, evidence-based studies are likely to continue to emerge in the literature, I argue that they serve to co-opt embodiment practices in ways that actually maintain the discursive mind/body split and further cement white supremacy and colonial notions into our social work practice.

Competency

I have noticed a concerning pattern in the emerging literature around social work embodiment that focuses on seeing the body as an 'instrument' or 'tool' for social workers, a competency for social work practice, a tool for our toolkit. In my perception, training our bodies as instruments is a rebranding of the mind/body split hierarchy: train your body to serve your mind; train your body to serve your work. This presents embodiment as an opportunity to hone your awareness of your body to better serve capitalism. While I understand the metaphor of learning how to use one's body as a 'tool' for understanding the world differently, it discursively runs the risk of reinforcing the mind/body split in a new way —even if the work is intended to promote embodiment—because it reinforces the age-old objecthood of the body and the subjecthood of the mind. For instance, van Rhyn et al. (2021) call for embodiment practices as a way to "unlock the body's potential as a powerful instrument for empathy" (p.146). Cameron and McDermott (2007), in their book *Social Work and the Body,* focus on the body as a 'tool' for

what they call ‘the body cognizant social worker’. I argue that through this process of defining bodies as tools, scholars inadvertently re-objectify bodies as needing to be more ‘useful’ objects.

Social workers are increasingly expected to become neutral, compassionate, blank slates, which leaves no room for their own embodiment of experiences of oppression or the legacies of harm that have disproportionately affected targeted communities that they themselves may be a part of (Badwall, 2016). I believe that the idea of ‘the body cognizant social worker’ that Cameron and McDermott (2007) coined creates a social work competency. The ‘body cognizant social worker’ is attentive to and seeking to know/observe/qualify the embodied experience of their clients while also attempting to minimize the impact of a worker’s body on the people they work with (Cameron & McDermott, 2007). I believe that it assumes whiteness in the worker, or at the very least has limited recognition of a racialized social worker's embodiment or the politics embedded in seeking to erase one’s body to make others comfortable. Badwall (2016) levels a critique at social work competency practices like critical self-reflection because of how it can assume the worker is white, be used to reinscribe innocence, dismiss the embodied experience of racialized workers, and simultaneously silence their ability to speak out against the racism they experience—explaining that racially motivated abuse and violence is dismissed by redirecting the blame onto the worker for not being client-centered/compassionate/professional enough.

I am therefore wary of embodiment being framed as another competency because it is not another social work competency to be commercialized, marketed, or added to the toolkit in order to redirect blame to workers for their practice skills and away from systemic factors. Not only does this reduce embodiment to the newest brand of bandaids to ‘keep up with your self-care’, it

also misses the decolonial potential of embodiment practices and reinforces white supremacy culture and neoliberal values. Considering the pervasiveness of pursuing 'knowability' and 'perfectibility' in modernity, I believe it is important for social workers to be wary of embodiment discourses that trend towards embodiment competencies. While integrating embodiment practices does offer ways to address the unsustainability of the profession (i.e. worker burnout or compassion fatigue), it must be done with the orientation of systemic change.

White Supremacy/Colonization

Analysis of white supremacy and colonization was not present in the neoliberal stream of the discourse, whereas it was obviously a central focus for the decolonial stream. Nowhere was this more apparent than in how researcher positionality was addressed or how social justice was taken up.

Researcher Positionality

Most of the researchers and writers on the topic of embodiment bring in their own experiences into their work. I believe this is vital to the process of research on embodiment because embodiment requires us to recognize the ways that our bodies have moved through the world—differently, yet everyone is implicated and impacted by interlocking systems of oppression. This is more than simply a 'social location'; it is an ever-evolving interplay between ourselves, the world that we live in, the structures that impact us, and the culmination of what has led us to this moment. In this way, embodiment requires us to bring ourselves into the work with a different quality of mind/body/spirit from what white supremacy culture has dictated

necessary for research, practice, or education. Ng (2018) eloquently wrote about this interplay in the following:

> Each time I stand in front of a classroom, I embody the historical sexualization and racialization of an Asian female, who is thought to be docile, subservient, and sexually compliant, even as my class privilege, formal authority, and academic qualifications ameliorate some of the effects of this stereotype. My presence is a moment in the crystallization of the historical and contemporary contestation of ideas and practices that are constantly changing. (p.36)

There is also a deep connection to somatic practices that comes through in the writings of researchers who recognize their positionality. For Mesignia (2011), Batachara (2018), and Steward (2018), their connection to embodiment came through their personal yoga practices. For Brunette-Debassige (2018) her yoga practice fostered a reconnection to her own ancestral Indigenous knowledge. Ng (2018) draws on her connection to Qigong as a form of meditative embodiment practice. For Wong (2018), mindfulness from the Buddhist Tradition is her way into the pedagogy of embodiment. For Adefarakan (2018), the Yoruba concept of ori provides teachings on connecting to culture and embodiment. Young-Leon and Nadeau (2018) discuss their connection to their Indigenous communities, the teachings that they have received, and how this has informed their focus for their work as they integrate "Indigenous knowledge systems and, where appropriate, combine these with dance, somatic education, and expressive art practices." (p. 55). For Dee Mucina (2018), writing about embodiment is also connecting him to his ancestral African heritage through the embodiment of storytelling. These scholars also write about their personal lived experience of their embodiment journeys. For example, Rice (2018) discussed her relationship to the fatphobia she used to experience before she lost weight and how understanding her lived experience informed her relationship to her research. In the realm of

research into white supremacy culture in social work, researchers will also include their lived experience. For Badwall (2015, 2016), it was her own experience of racism in social work practice that spurred her desire to research how racialized social workers are treated when they experience racism. Rajan-Rankin (2015) similarly explains that she experienced discrimination and wanted to learn more about the nature of racial embodiment in social work. Embodiment of race, culture, and spiritual practices challenge dualism and separation due to white supremacy culture.

In contrast, there are articles (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gregory, 2015; Newsome et al., 2012; Strauss & Northcut, 2013) that do not mention the researcher's positionality. In the case of Strauss and Northcut (2013) who wrote about the benefits of yoga for people with cancer diagnoses, there was no mention of the ancient origins of yoga, nor the violence of cultural appropriation of yoga. This is in stark contrast to Batacharya (2018) who locates yoga practice in the context of colonial resistance and problematizes the elements of yoga that can be used to justify casteist and nationalistic discourse. Combining the truncated narrative of yoga with the lack of recognition of the researcher's positionality, Strauss and Northcut (2013) inadvertently reproduce white supremacy culture. Wong & Batacharya (2018) caution against "settler forms of 'spiritual bypass'—that is, appropriating Indigenous spiritual practices as a way to avoid acknowledging one's complicity in dispossession" (p.18). This is of particular concern in the context of integrating embodiment practices like yoga into mainstream social work. The harm that this has caused South Asian and Desi folks is profound; and when aspects of spirituality are integrated, Western yoga culture is unlikely to attend to the

original integrity of the practices, respect for deities, or source culture (Barkataki, 2020; Haines, 2019).

As social workers, I believe it is essential that these histories of violence are not glossed over in the name of trauma healing, because by denying history, more harm is created. Recognizing the teachers and students who resisted colonial violence and the attempted erasure of yogic knowledge is essential in order to embody yoga's transformative potential (Barkataki, 2020). This requires a theoretical shift in social work practice. Rather than passively trusting that all social work is 'doing good', we have the opportunity to recontextualize ourselves inside the systems that shaped us through understanding our embodied relationship with our positionality.

Embodiment of Social Justice

Recognizing embodiment is a social justice issue (Krieger, 2005). Tangenberg & Kemp (2002) point out the importance of recognizing the bodily experiences of social work clients because very often, their visceral experiences are categorized and classified by social workers—this not only impacts the services that they receive, but also informs the professional and social expectations, which have material implications for the lives of the people we work with. Tangenberg & Kemp (2002) explain that this is a direct result of the functions of power and how certain bodies

> …are inscribed with greater and lesser degrees of perceived power on the basis of race and ethnicity, age, gender, and (dis)ability, so the value of knowledge from the body reflects the social power associated with the individual: more powerful individuals define what knowledge is accepted and embodied by social institutions." p.15

In fact, scholars argue that power is inscribed in social work through the construction of the social worker as subject and the client as object (Badwall, 2015; Heron, 2005; Jeffery, 2002). In this process, social work practices enforce the mind/body split and categorize those deemed to be in need of 'help' as an object, a body that does not have the knowledge that the 'expert' social workers have. Moreover our bodies have been "politically organized according to truths (given by God and/or experts) that have been absorbed into our embodied and emotional habits" (Nixon & MacDonald, 2018, p. 121). Part of what makes the "epistemology of the body" (Batatcharya & Wong, 2018) a vital dimension of analysis for social work practice is that "while the body can be viewed as a site of oppression and suffering, it is also a place for knowing, healing, restoration and liberation" (Gardner et al, 2023, p.12). By validating the lived experience of people's bodies, there is an opportunity to practice values as embodied actions, rather than getting 'stuck' in the sense of powerlessness in the face of immovable systems.

Unsurprisingly, there is little integration or exploration of the social justice potential of embodiment in the neoliberal stream, beyond the assertion that embodiment practices help social workers do their jobs better, which has broader benefits to their clients and their work environments because they are able to show up with more patience and capacity for compassion (Christopher & Maris, 2010; Dorian & Killebrew, 2014; Gregory, 2015; Newsome, Waldo, & Gruszka, 2012; Strauss, & Northcut, 2014).

Self-Care

Being able to take action at an individual level can offer an opportunity to restore one's authority and agency. Embodiment practices are a fruitful site of self-care practice from this

orientation. In its original use, Audre Lorde (1988) presented self-care as an act of personal and collective resistance against systems that were intentionally and systemically harming Black people when she asserted that caring for oneself is an act of political warfare because self-preservation is resistance. Reconnecting to our bodies is both a personal practice and a relational practice: how does injustice and oppression feel in our body?; how does it feel to hold privilege?; how does it feel to be held accountable?; how does it feel to be wronged? We can therefore see embodiment practices as an opportunity to ask ourselves difficult but transformative questions about how to be accountable and how to make repairs with others (Haines, 2019). Embodiment practices can offer [re]joining, [re]integrating, and [re]membering through the materiality of the body, the felt sense of the body, and the epistemology of the body, all of which has been denied through settler colonial, capitalist, and white supremacy systems (Haines, 2019). What is key here is that embodiment is not understood *solely* as an individual self-care practice. There must also be an integration of 'embodiment politics' (Vick, 2012) and of an understanding that our embodied experience has been shaped with and through relationships with others (Haines, 2019). This then allows us to be attentive to the neoliberal co-option and capitalist exploitation of 'self-care' through our analysis while remaining connected to Lorde's (1988) original use of the term.

Self-care has been discursively and materially positioned as the antidote to burnout. Of course this antidote individualizes a worker's experience of struggling to support people within systems that were not designed to be supportive of anyone that exists outside of the ruling class norms (Chapman & Withers, 2021). As Mesignia and Pyles (2021) point out, there is structural and institutional strain put on social workers which is the source of the burnout. In no way am I seeking to diminish these realities, and, from my own front-line work experience in group homes

and harm reduction outreach, I know that this experience of being burned out by systems is very real. The issue that I have with the majority of the trend in this discourse is that the analysis just stops at 'burnout' and does not then turn to the source of the harm. I was not burnt out from the youth I worked with or from delivering harm reduction supplies, I was burnt out from knowing that the only support I was able to give was limited, the resources I was able to provide were insufficient, the connections I was able to make, while meaningful, were not likely to be transformative, and that the discursive and legislative reasons for people's struggles remained safely protected behind the assumption that 'it's just how it is'.

How does Social Work Understand Bodies?

An analysis of social work history reveals that social work understands bodies through hierarchies of value, domination or paternalistic power-over, and productivity as equating to a person's value. Hierarchies of value are constructed through social workers positioned above 'the other' and apart from 'the other' (Chapman & Withers, 2021). White supremacy discourse denigrates racialized bodies, capacities, value/worth, intelligence, competence, and legitimacy while simultaneously using their bodies for labour. This has roots in white supremacy culture and moral economies which conceive of white people as being morally superior to people from other cultures, thus discursively transforming missionary conversions, surveillance, means-testing, and into benevolence (Chapman & Withers, 2021). The earliest beginnings of the social work profession involved surveilling girls who's morals seemed 'questionable' and reporting them for further investigation so that they could potentially be involuntarily institutionalized (rehabilitation through institutionalization) (Chapman & Withers, 2021). Furthermore, the beginnings of professionalized social working also added to eugenics discourse and reinforced

ideas of taxonomies of difference that categorized people with various disabilities or struggles as being in need of interventions that were ascribed by social work 'experts' (Chapman & Withers, 2021). Bodies have been thought of as useful for productive labour, yet inconveniently bound up with minds that would present problems to those who want to extract their labour. Therefore, minds are blamed, pathologized, and intervened upon to ensure

Discussion

Social work has been implicated in practices of reform and domination since the profession was created. Managing bodies through institutions, surveillance, and documentation has been a central practice of social work designing and controlling bodies that are deemed 'other' or in need of correction (Chapman & Withers, 2021). The history of social work also has a consistent practice of blaming individuals for their individual 'fault' of not conforming to the standardized norm, rather than understanding difference and diversity or recognizing the social construction of exalted norms to begin with. Unfortunately, 'helping' interventions have been centered around changing bodies or parts/aspects of bodies that are non-normative and therefore understood to be in need of correction, reform, and improvement (Chapman & Withers, 2021). Bringing people into closer proximity to exalted norms is achieved through **rehabilitation** and control, and is primarily concerned with restoring or reinforcing productivity in a capitalist system (Chapman & Withers, 2021). Moreover, the interventions are individual corrective practices, rather than recognizing systemic influences as well as valuing diversity and difference in experience. It is common for non-normative experiences to be pathologized rather than celebrated. This also impacts the ways that social work as a profession orients itself: the current status quo of the inherently superior expert (aka social workers) over inherently needy/debilitated

'others' (aka the people we work with) (Chapman & Withers, 2021). Bodies are therefore discursively and materially trapped in the patterns of oppression/ degradation or exaltation if we continue to reinforce the mind/body split. White supremacy relies on bodies as separate — separate from minds/spirits, separate from other bodies, separate from interconnection with all life— decontextualized, and ahistoric. White supremacy is fearful of bodies because they are irrational and unpredictable; they cannot be categorized, standardized, universalized, or ultimately *known*. And white supremacy relies on understanding bodies as hierarchical, placing the value of white bodies over racialized bodies (Chapman & Withers, 2021; Jackson, 2020). The mind/body split has become the ultimate way to discursive and materially divide and conquer.

I am interested in dedicating further research to these issues in my doctoral studies. Harm is created when social work speaks of embodiment yet stands firmly rooted in white supremacy. Mainstream social work uses mechanisms of power and technologies of control that are embedded in settler colonial and capitalist projects that deny the embodied experience of people and our interconnection with the natural environment, therefore speaking of embodiment *requires* the aligning embodied politics that critique these systems of violence. When we continue to circulate the mind/body split, we limit social work's capacity for social change.

Conclusion

This research presents a Foucauldian discourse analysis on the current embodiment discourse in social work and points out the ways that social work is deeply invested in the mind/ body split even while purporting the benefits of embodiment practices. Turning social workers into more 'useful' tools is part of a long history of seeing bodies as objects— resources to be

exploited for the benefit of maintaining power. Neoliberal discourse promotes ideas of self-improvement, perfectibility, and the need to develop further competencies for practice. There are also powerful contributions being made to the literature which emphasize the decolonial potential of embodiment practices. These contributors center subjugated knowledges, integrate critiques of white supremacy, and imagine alternatives to our present struggle with the harms created by the mind/body split. Rather than continuing to see bodies as in need of correction, rehabilitation, and normalization, the decolonial potential of embodiment practices offers a powerful avenue for world-building opportunities that challenge white supremacy relationships of separation and reclaim interconnectivity and connection. The discourse around embodiment and the mind/body split in social work offers important reflections on the profession and our contribution to social change.

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