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## Embodied Learning Processes in Activism

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# EMBODIED LEARNING PROCESSES IN ACTIVISM

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## Abstract

*In this paper I employ a narrative method to explore the learning processes of adult activists engaged in activism. Drawing on the story of one animal activist, I explain the embodied learning processes in a direct action environment. I explore how emotions and the body interplay with learning, which moves beyond a purely cognitive or rational lens of learning that privileges the mind. Importantly, I show the ways in which affect, emotions, and the body are saturated and situated in direct action learning spaces. These emotions and sensory and kinaesthetic bodily dynamics encourage a reconsideration of learning processes that are generally conceptualized as head-based or disembodied. It is argued that embodiment implicates a see-feel-learn sequence rather than a rational process of analyse-think-change, encouraging us to rethink the nature of learning processes in direct action activism.*

## Résumé

*Dans cet article, je me sers de la méthode narrative pour explorer les processus d'apprentissage des activistes adultes engagés dans l'activisme. À la lumière de l'histoire d'une activiste des droits des animaux, j'explique les processus de l'apprentissage incarné (embodied learning) dans un environnement d'action directe. J'explore comment les émotions et le corps interagissent avec l'apprentissage, ce qui va au-delà d'une optique purement cognitive ou rationnelle de l'apprentissage, optique qui privilégie l'esprit. Je montre surtout les manières dont l'affect, les sentiments, les émotions et le corps s'unissent et se situent dans les espaces et les lieux de l'apprentissage d'action directe. Ces émotions ainsi que le dynamisme sensoriel et kinesthésique du corps nous encouragent à repenser les processus d'apprentissage qui sont généralement conceptualisés soit à partir de la tête soit comme étant dissociés du corps. L'incarnation (embodiment) implique en fait une séquence de « voir-sentir-apprendre » au lieu d'un processus rationnel d'« analyser-penser-changer », ce qui nous encourage à repenser la nature des processus d'apprentissage dans l'activisme d'action directe.*

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## Introduction

As exploitation across the globe escalates, social movements develop and more activists seek to create change. The animal liberation movement is a growing social movement of important ethical and political significance (Nocella, Sorenson, Socha, & Matsuoka, 2014). Consequently, animal activists are frequently confronting governments and political structures through direct forms of activism. Direct action challenges government, business, and organizations through protest, civil disobedience, and other non-parliamentary roots (Graeber, 2009). Direct action can be seen as cultural performances that communicate political messages and typically provoke confrontation to an audience (Juris, 2008). Often multi-layered in approach, these spaces are not discrete but intersect with other forms of activism (Brown & Pickerill, 2009).

Having an understanding of activist learning processes in direct action spaces is vital given that learning processes direct or underpin activist practices. Foley (1999) reminded us that activists learn as they act, inherently making social movements central sites of learning that mobilize change. Further, direct action plays an essential role in social movements, contributing to knowledge-building and change in multiple and important ways. Inherent in these direct action spaces is the role of embodied learning and its inseparable relationship to activist learning processes. This work is of particular importance to activists and educators who recognize the value of direct action activism as a tool for social justice work.

In this paper, embodied learning is conceptualized as learning processes that involve affect, emotions, and the body. At one level, the role of the emotions and the body in learning is obvious: one needs a body to experience the world, and it is our emotions that mediate our experiences (Barnacle, 2009). However, relatively little is known about the role of the body and emotions in the learning processes in a direct action environment, especially within an animal liberation movement context. In fact, learning is often conceptualized as a disembodied or purely cognitive process, undermining the importance of embodiment. The role of the body is treated as a place for housing the brain and mind, reinforcing a mind–body split (Barnacle). Yet our experiences are always embodied and always situated by context, which includes feelings and physical processes (Freiler, 2008).

To explore embodied learning, I first review the relevant literature, drawing on pertinent adult education research in conjunction with feminist theory and illustrating what is missing in adult education research. Following that, I explain the narrative method and analysis processes used within the research itself. Using a storytelling approach, I then provide a glimpse of one animal liberation activist known as Olivia as a way of giving voice to and making sense of mind–emotions–body in activist learning. The vignette explores direct action work in the 12-week Victorian duck-shooting season in Australia. For over 20 years animal activists have been working to ban recreational shooting of native waterbirds in Australia. By examining her direct action work, I unpack Olivia's core learning processes using literature relevant to embodied and situated learning. In doing so I bridge embodied, situated learning, feminist literature, and social movement literature to show how learning occurs within spaces of direct action work. This story reorients the way in which learning can be understood, challenging the rational educational discourse that privileges the mind as the sole source of learning. With Olivia's story it becomes apparent how emotion and sensory and kinaesthetic bodily processes are dominant in the incitement of activist learning processes.

### Learning and Activism

Within adult education research on activists and social change work, increasing attention is given to the learning of activists. Within Australia, Foley (1991, 1999) and Branagan and Boughton (2003) brought attention to the instrumental and critical thinking skills learned through direct engagement in campaign work. Newman (2006) discussed the instrumental, interpretive, and critical learning domains of activist learning, and Whelan's (2002) research explored the pedagogical practices of environmental activists in environmental advocacy work. Elsewhere, Hall, Clover, Crowther, and Scandrett (2012) built upon formal and informal knowledge-making situated within social movements, drawing on creativity and the ways in which social movements actively create new knowledge. In particular, Hall (2012) examined the radical pedagogies of the Occupy Wall Street direct action movement.

In relation to animal liberation, there is a vast array of research that explores the importance of humane education, ecopedagogy, and critical animal pedagogy (see Bell & Russell, 2000; Corman & Vandrovcová, 2014; Kahn, 2010; Nocella et al., 2014; Pederson, 2009). However, very little research exists in relation to the informal learning of animal activists who engage in direct action work. Nocella (2007) and Corman and Vandrovcová began to touch on animal activists and direct action work. Nocella (2007) examined a Freirean-informed critical pedagogy approach by linking this with the direct action of the Animal Liberation Front. He explored how the act of freeing and liberating animals is an emotional and holistic changing process. Corman (2011) shifted in another direction, challenging the human-centred view of learning entrenched in Freire's work. Corman discussed how Freire failed to recognize the role that other animals play within spaces of learning, placing animals outside the capacity for dialogue as Others. Corman and Vandrovcová discussed how pedagogy can include other animals, challenging the human-centric way of viewing learning. This will be examined further along.

Similarly, Ollis's (2010, 2012) work specifically moved away from cognitive ways of knowing in the learning of activists and explored the embodied learning of activists from diverse social movements in Australia. Ollis showed how activists learn through the mind, emotions, and the body, which plays a core role in motivating their desire to act. In other words, Ollis's research pushed beyond a cognitive "only" focus by specifically acknowledging the dominant role of emotions and the body within activist spaces. Social movement theorists have also recognized the importance of emotions and the body within activist work (see Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Collins, 2001; Crossley, 2002; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001; Juris, 2008; Maddison & Scalmer, 2006). Additionally, the role of affect, emotion, and the body in learning is also starting to emerge in other contexts of adult education research and scholarship (see Beckett & Morris, 2004; Collins, 2014; Cranton, 2006; Dirx, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Lawrence, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Ollis, 2010, 2012; O'Loughlin, 2006; Tennant, 1997).

The status of emotions and the body has often been marginalized in the Western intellectual tradition. Feminists in particular have argued that the post-Cartesian modernist period is marked by a rejection of emotion-body as a barrier to pure rational thought (Price & Shildrick, 1999). Rational thought is associated with masculinity and involves privileging maleness over femaleness. Maleness is seen as privileging the mind over the body or the rational over the affective. These male ways of being and knowing are naturalized and exclude other ways of knowing associated with the feminine (Grosz, 1994). Conceivably,

the cultural favouring of rationalism has influenced how learning is conceptualized. What has mattered most to feminism is analyzing and countering the cultural take-up of the mind–body split, which I seek to do within the context of learning. Otherwise we risk complicit ideological reinforcement of rationality and masculinity, the very things one hopes to challenge to address holistic social change.

At present much of the research on activist learning has a cognitive focus, even with a feminist history of challenging rationalism. Studies have considered how activists acquire knowledge and learn to take action effectively. For example, common elements researched are collective thinking, listening, communication, organization skills, ideology, and thinking analytically and strategically. Tellingly, the research is mostly focused on the work of the mind rather than the work of the emotions–body. Learning based on cognitive ways of knowing offers important insight, particularly for strategies of social change. However, research that is solely based on cognitive activity with an emphasis on the rational mind remains problematic (Brookfield, 1987; Lawrence, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Ollis, 2010, 2012; O’Loughlin, 2006). An emphasis on cognition privileges thoughts and the mind over emotions and the body. The mind–body dualism is merely discussed as a means to achieve a higher intellectual goal (Collins, 2014). This rational lens of leaning views the subject as disembodied by way of operating and learning through pure mind alone (Price & Shildrick, 1999).

Learning is typically viewed as the life of the mind rather than the life of the emotions and body. Affect, emotion, and the body are in a symbiotic relationship with cognition processes in learning. Conscientization, critical learning, or creative domains, for example, rely significantly on the work of mind–emotions–body. Physical sensing, intense emotionality, and memory and the mind all contribute to learning. However, learning is still mostly interpreted or discussed in ways that rely on cognition, a mind–body split. I will bring attention to mind–emotions–body as interconnected processes in spaces of learning.

### **Methodology: A Narrative Lens on Learning**

The six activists chosen in my research illustrate the contemporary animal liberation direct action culture in Australia. The activists involved in the broader doctoral research participate in an assortment of actions. These range from investigations and rescue actions that are either overt in operation (through open rescue) or covert in approach (hiding of identity) to expose violence toward animals. Demonstrations, sit-ins, and blockades are common, including methods of sabotage—for example, the sabotage of routine kangaroo culls and duck hunts. The actions of the activists are mostly founded in values of political liberation, which directly challenge violence toward animals and unjust laws. The emerging demographic picture of activists in the animal liberation movement tends to be disproportionately female (70% to 80%) (Galvin, 1992; Guither, 1998; Jasper & Nelkin, 1992; Munro, 2001, Pivetti, 2005; Socha, 2011); given this, four females and two males were selected. Two activists between the ages of 20 and 30, two between 40 and 50, and two in their early 60s participated. To provide information-rich cases, experienced activists were selected with reliance on my networks as an established animal activist in the Australian community.

A narrative method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through story and dialogue was used to work through and explain the embodied learning processes. Stories provide a space and

avenue for social and political expression, motivating in-depth description with attention to details and complexity. Each story gives not only insight into one person's perception of social practice, but also perspective to a wider network of social relations given that narratives are always culturally situated (Pamphilon, 1999). Stories have the potential to bring out each person's sense-making not only within the world of others but also within the many levels and complexities of the self, which is crucial for social justice work.

Because I was an animal liberation activist myself, I chose to engage in a series of informal dialogical conversations rather than conventional one-way interviews. Stories were shared and triggered (both ways), which led to a process of co-construction. This dialogical method offered access to the personal insights of the activists in their own words. The initial conversations were transcribed and sent to each activist via mail to review. A series of follow-up conversations continued in which themes that came out of the stories were identified and critically discussed together. I also discussed with each activist the overarching narrative themes that arose collectively. Once the conversations were complete I constructed a biographical narrative about each activist that was then checked by that person.

The narrative and dialogical approach was important given my own position as an activist–researcher. The activists and I shared a number of similar positions, but there were many positions we did not share—for example, age, gender, and types of activism we each engaged in, including our ideological positions of social change. By maintaining a reflexive stance, I became aware that my positionalities were fluid and that I could be both an insider and outsider in the dialogical space (Rubin, 2012). Mutual and co-learning were still encouraged with use of a dialogical approach. The dialogue allowed conversations to be developed together as we both sought to explore the topic, facilitating a joint construction of social knowledge. As Freire (1975) would contend, the ability to name, to identify and voice concerns collectively, is fundamental for learning.

The analytic route in the research used some of McCormack's (2000, 2004) and Pamphilon's (1999) narrative framework. I examined the major events and wider cultural and social factors discussed in relation to learning. In using Pamphilon's zoom model I interrogated the data by zooming in and out at a range of levels in the analysis process. The zoom model incorporates analysis on four levels: the macro, the meso, the micro, and the interactional (Pamphilon). The macro locates the narratives in their cultural time and place. The meso reveals the personal elements showing individual positions. The micro focuses on the details of telling a story, such as emotions and voice. And the interactional zoom shows how the narratives are a product of the relationship between the researcher and the narrator (Pamphilon). When looking at each story, I examined the links between the individual and society, recognizing the relationship between these two factors as intricately linked (Pamphilon). To allow for an in-depth examination of embodied learning, this paper now zooms in on the narrative of one activist known as Olivia.

### **Olivia's Vignette**

Olivia described herself as always being radical and passionate about social change. Her experience of coming out as a lesbian shaped her consciousness and she became more politically active on a range of issues. Olivia's experience of homophobia and being in a marginalized community changed her and opened her to what it feels like to face injustice:

I'm a white gendered woman and I live in Australia. I don't experience huge-scale oppression, but the feeling of being in a marginalized community, it changes you in ways that you may never even realize. For me it really opened me up to what it feels like to face injustice.

Olivia became involved in a range of activism, starting with feminist activism and community empowerment projects with street kids. Her love for animals interlinked with her lifelong interest in feminism. Also, her personal experience of marginalization combined with an interest in an array of social justice issues, spurring on her activism in the area of animal liberation. Over time Olivia became motivated to engage in direct action for animal liberation:

A key reason for participating in direct action is not wanting to be sitting around comfortably while there are animals suffering. Physically you are doing more action with your body. It is driven by a sense of urgency... there are so few other tactics that work.

Her reason for direct action is also driven by anarchist values that seek to challenge the law and the system using direct action:

I'm most closely aligned with anarchism. Sometimes you have to engage in direct action. I mean, what else can you do? It is like you are left with no other choice. Why would you obey laws that are repressing you or your family or animals? Using my body to stop exploitation is such a small price to pay.

Olivia painted a picture of her experience in a direct action campaign during the three-month Victorian duck-shooting season:

You are out in the water at 4:30 in the morning and you are in freezing-cold water slushing through mud. The sun starts coming up, it is all pink, ducks begin to make noises, talking to each other, it is beautiful. You take a moment to just be in it. Then the shooters start shooting, birds start falling from the sky, all you can hear is shooting.

She says that the activists move swiftly through the water to rescue birds. Alongside the rescue, the activists' loud empathetic voices of dissent protest the shooting.

Olivia described an adrenaline-fuelled practice, making obvious the physical process characteristic in direct action:

Your adrenaline kicks in when you are out there among the shooting and you just go into survival mode. During the action you are so alert and you are watching everything. There are times you have to make a decision where you'll save one bird over another. There are times where you can't move because you might flush birds up...One weekend me and another person got lost from our initial team. We hid in the bushes until two officers had gone...There were shooters all around us...So we had to adapt and make decisions together. You have no choice but to act on your feet and hope that you make the right decision in the moment. You can learn information about duck rescue but then you get there and it is nothing what you expected...once immersed in it you learn quickly.



Olivia described the adrenaline response as triggering a bodily alertness, aiding her ability to respond proactively to the action at hand.

Olivia detailed the physical process of direct action while describing the catharsis and emotionality:

Part of it is also cathartic in the sense that it is traumatic. I also hate it, picking up dead and wounded birds that die in your arms, but it is also feeling like I am actually physically rescuing and helping animals...in trying to be anti-capitalist alongside animal liberationist, our bodies and minds are our main weapons. [When I see the birds] I'm just like, let's get out and rescue these animals...I don't have respect for the law so I don't care about breaking it...I get there and I'm like, I don't care, let's move.

Olivia further highlighted the meaning of the body in activism and the importance of being present. "You are seeing, you are witnessing. You can't forget seeing and feeling. Your body doesn't forget it, our body knows and feels it."

Olivia elaborated on the emotional dimensions felt in a direct action context. "Aside from all the horrible things, when you are doing something that is illegal, and you're passionate about it, it is like a melting pot of emotions." She conversed on the complexities of high-intensity action, saying that the emotional dimensions on the job are unpredictable:

You can't be prepared for the fact that you've been up since 4 a.m., you've been running around, you've got a dead bird in your arms and another one dying or the cops yelling at you. The first time that I saw a bird fall from the sky, it was so hard, every time after it never gets easy. By the time you get home you are exhausted. When you are trying to sleep all you can see is birds falling around you...or the birds that you had to leave...or the sounds of gun shots.

She explained that the emotional experience has changed her, solidifying her passion. "You can't be out there and doing that and not be changed and not solidify your passion." Olivia spoke of the suffering witnessed, but she named it as an asset rather than a barrier.

Olivia attempts to make sense of and learn about her emotions through dialogue with other activists:

Being honest about your emotions is really important. I do try to be like that as much as possible, and we offer each other support. We try to have debriefs afterwards. We discuss what happened, talk about it both strategically and personally...You may not be able to talk [during the action] because you have to whisper. Though where possible I do try to reflect afterwards.

Olivia views reflection as an important way of learning from others. "In terms of learning, when you come to reflect and hear what other people's experiences are, how they were feeling, that is invaluable. You are able to see how different people respond to these situations and learn from that."

***Examining Mind–Body–Emotions in Learning***

How, then, does Olivia’s story show the role of the mind–body–emotion dynamics in her learning process? According to the rational discourse of adult education, what happened is as follows. Olivia’s reflections after the action enabled her to consciously name her learning and experience more complexly. She replayed the action in her thoughts after the event, allowing a conscious conceptualization of the experience. Through debriefs with other activists about her personal experience, the meaning of her emotions and understandings were cognitively clarified. She gained further understanding by hearing of other activists’ emotional experiences and by learning what other activists did practically within the action. According to the rational discourse, Olivia’s learning came about through the use of cognitive and analytical skills and a recollection of her emotional–bodily response. This recollection came about by reflecting on this individually and with others from a more distanced perspective (after the action).

There are, however, other ways to understand the learning process within Olivia’s story. Olivia’s initial learning was emergent in her emotional and physical response *during* the action, not afterwards in isolation during the reflection and debrief session. Learning first occurred at the moment of feeling emotions and bodily sensations during the experience (Lawrence, 2012c; Michelson, 1998). It is apparent that in Olivia’s experience a heightened emotional–bodily reaction was fuelled as a result of seeing ducks killed. The emotions and bodily sensations of an experience clue us in to our cognitive state (Lawrence, 2012c). Olivia’s body became tense when her feelings were amplified, and this was cognitively registered as anxiety. While Olivia may have named and conceptualized her experience during a debrief process, it was not a cognitive flash of new learning at this point. It was simply the moment in which her mental processes caught up with what her body already knew (Michelson, 1998).

Olivia’s emotional and bodily responses are core domains of learning, acting as producers of new knowledge based on events happening in the moment (Michelson, 1998). The learning process begins with an emotional and physical response to direct immersion in experience, not a moment of dispassionate self-reflection (Michelson). Aligning with the situative perspective of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the body learns through experiencing in context, in relationship to everything else, and it is our emotions that mediate that context (Hannaford, 2007; Wilson, 2002). Olivia’s narrative exposes the ways in which the body and emotions are profoundly entangled in the learning process, showing that affective ways of knowing often precede cognition.

***The Body and Physicality in Learning***

How else, then, does Olivia’s story place the emotion-laden body as a site of learning process in direct action? Her story further depicts the ways in which the body is used as a political tool of resistance. Her body, for example, was positioned in the lake for the purposes of rescue and protest against shooting. Activists will often use the physical and symbolic power of their bodies for direct action (Ollis, 2012; Pylvänäinen, 2010). Further, through immersion in action and through muscle and memory processes—for example, running from authority or picking up an injured bird on a repeated basis—Olivia’s body learned and remembered. Olivia remarked, “Once you are immersed in it you learn quickly.” As Howden (2012) confirmed, since thinking one’s way through obstacles often promotes

anxiety, one learns to rely on one's body over time. Olivia emphasized, "Your adrenaline kicks in when you are among the shooting...you go into survival mode...you act on your feet." Olivia's physiological and emotional reactions were heightened as her adrenaline response intensified. Olivia described this as her body tapping into a survival-mode process, becoming ultra-alert and being prompted to make decisions in the heat of the moment.

Kinaesthetic and bodily knowledge involves body memory or kinaesthetic memory processes. Olivia's story shows how there is a reliance on the skilful use of the body aided by an adrenaline response in the midst of action. The bodily kinaesthetic process entails the use of one's body to solve problems. Physically, Olivia learned to catch injured birds, run from authority, and avoid shooters while also aiding and assisting other activists at a physical and emotional level. New knowledge or understanding developed via the kinaesthetic memory. Understanding stems from body movement in the midst of action experientially. This account shows that knowledge is produced through the body and physicality of action (Price & Shildrick, 1999). This kinaesthetic and bodily knowledge is thus gained and applied in action each time Olivia engages in direct action.

Olivia's story further illustrates how the body plays an intricate role when learning with others. Duck rescue requires activists to be placed in teams spread out in different parts of the lake. The teams of activists predominantly rely on each other to ensure a smooth process of rescuing, collecting, and photographing or filming injured birds and communicating through radio with other teams. This involves a process of what Freiler (2008) called "collective body placed relations" (p.41). Activist teams will rely on each other through a sense of being oriented to one another. This experiential bodily knowledge is learned on the go. As Olivia stated, "We had lost our team at one point...we hid in the bushes...there were shooters all around us...so we had to adapt and make decisions together." While the bodily process is primarily individual, there is also an elevated sense of teamwork and trust when activists depend on each other in action. This depicts both an individual and collective process of learning with and through the body.

### *Emotions, Catharsis, and Learning*

Olivia's narrative shows the interplay of emotions in learning, again challenging the way learning is conventionally understood. Olivia defined her experience as a "melting pot of emotions," voicing the feelings felt in direct action. Managing injured and dying animals, on-the-job conflict, and the personal risk and danger (being assaulted or shot) in direct action perpetuates emotionality. Olivia stated, "You are up at 4 a.m., you've been running around, you've got a dead bird in your arms, the cops yelling at you...when you get home you think of the birds you had to leave." Jones (2007) confirmed that the nature of such work is emotionally demanding and traumatic. Olivia said she experienced feelings of catharsis due to the physicality of directly acting, but the catharsis was combined with distress. As Olivia noted, "It is cathartic in the sense that it is traumatic. I also hate it...but it is also feeling like I am physically rescuing and helping." Acting directly often arises from a sense of personal altruism (Opp, 2009) and directly taps into a sense of making a difference both politically and for the life of the animal. Olivia's empathy for animals and altruism motivated her activism, leading her to set aside her personal distress in the service of others (Jones).

Not only did Olivia experience catharsis at an individual level through the act of rescue, but her catharsis was spurred on through the act of rebellion. Best and Nocella (2006) argued

that direct action activists use tactics as a way to empower themselves against corporate-based structures, something that is impossible to achieve through pre-approved political channels. Olivia's story implies that rebellion through action encourages empowerment because it allowed her to physically act to challenge unjust laws, particularly, as she said, "physically you are doing more action with your body...there are so few other tactics that work...What else can you do?...In trying to be anti-capitalist alongside animal liberationist, our bodies and our minds are our main weapons." The expression of opposition through protest by acting with one's body enables activists to intensely feel and express their protest, perhaps more powerfully than institutional types of activism (Brown & Pickerill, 2009). Direct action has also been found to give one a licence to scream, shout, laugh, and get up to mischief (Brown & Pickerill). Olivia's story confirms that direct action is a cathartic process spurred on through acts of rebellion (Best & Nocella, 2006). As Olivia recounted, "You can't be out there and doing that and not be changed and not solidify your passion."

The emotional energy in action is paramount, as activists can become pumped with enthusiasm (Collins, 2001), and the intense feelings generated prepare activists' bodies for action (Goodwin et al., 2001). Olivia's account confirms this, showing that her emotional experience, such as anger, passion, or trauma, came from bearing witness. This emotional experience was entwined with the physiology of adrenaline propelling her to act, aiding her learning. Direct action is a combination of praxis and catharsis, where one is literally putting their values into practice, embodying their feelings and performing their politics (Juris, 2008) and leading to shifts in thinking and other changes.

Olivia's vignette also shows the shared feelings in a social space and reveals a collective learning process. Engaging in debrief sessions with other activists to name and to make sense of her emotions is captured in her account. Olivia stated, "We try to have debriefs afterwards...being honest about your emotions is important...in terms of learning, when you come to reflect and hear what other people's experiences are, how they were feeling, that is invaluable." The very sharing of emotions that brings individuals to collective action gives rise to distinctive collective emotions, the shared feelings of solidarity and enthusiasm in activist communities (Collins, 2001; Ollis, 2012). To some extent, the shared feelings of catharsis initiate emotions. While these collective feelings are unpleasant and painful, the collective feelings ease the unpleasantness or difficulties experienced (Collins, 2001). Olivia's vignette shows how activists rarely take action without others, as they need other activists to learn from and learn with. Yet again the situative perspective of learning comes to the surface, where activists engage in a collaborative process that is inherently social. In similar ways to the collective body work, the shared emotion in the social-collaborative space sustains individual and collective resistance.

### ***Emotions, the Body, and Animals in Learning***

Olivia's vignette challenges the rational discourses of learning in which the voice of the animal is traditionally marginalized or invisible (Corman, 2011). Olivia's story encapsulates how other animals feature within learning, linking to concepts of embodiment. As Freiler (2008) argued, embodiment is inherently contextually based and involves social processes and relationships. These relationships extend beyond human relationships. Many animal activists hold an essential unity with other animals. In Olivia's narrative this is portrayed

in her relationship with the ducks. Olivia's recollections were communicated in ways that show her emotional–bodily response *with* the animals *in the moment*.

Olivia's learning was grounded in an empathetic connection with other animals. Empathy is an ecological consciousness that includes seeing little distinction between oneself and the natural world. She captured the beauty of the lake during the sunrise as she witnessed the ducks awaking: "The sun starts coming up, it is all pink, ducks begin to make noises, talking to each other, it is beautiful... Then the shooters start shooting, birds start falling from the sky." When shooting commenced, her feelings were intensified due to her presence with the ducks. Her empathy was augmented by the vicarious connection to the experience of the ducks. By truly empathizing, we become that being and suffer with them (Costello as cited in Coetzee, 2003). Thus, Olivia's feelings were moved and so, literally, was her body. Olivia was in a place of presence, of paying attention and of embodied listening. It was a face-to-face relationship with other animals in the actual space. These feelings became acts or movements of resistance of speaking from the heart.

The place of Olivia's body, and the bodies of the ducks, is of significance. Being *with* the bodies of dying or dead ducks came with a sense of vulnerability and mortality, prompting bodily reactions of resistance. "[When I see the ducks] I'm just like, let's get out and rescue these animals... I don't have respect for the law so I don't care about breaking it... I get there and I'm like, I don't care, let's move." Olivia's body was also in a position of vulnerability given she had a physical presence around shooters with guns. Guns are powerful symbols of mortality that reinforce bodily feelings of vulnerability. This is present in Olivia's account of the reoccurrence of the gun: "You can't prepare someone for guns being shot near them... all you can hear is shooting... the sounds of gun shots stay with you." As Butler (2004) reminded us, the body is "symbolic of mortality, vulnerability and agency" (p. 28). So Olivia's body, the bodies of shooters (with guns), and the bodies of the ducks are again emotionally and physically moving symbols. The vulnerability and mortality prompted bodily reactions of resistance. The bodily responses of resistance were also heightened by being present with the dead bodies and guns during the protest action. So the bodily relation with other animals is an important source of social knowledge within direct action spaces.

Through the presence of other animals, Olivia's learning was influenced. The agency and pedagogical capacity that animals have within a learning context influence the learning of activists (Corman & Vandrovcová, 2014). Olivia's narrative shows how her heightened emotions based on the physical relationship with the ducks in the context (through rescue and bearing witness) *moved* her—physically and emotionally—to act more. Olivia's story shows how other animals feature within the learning context or the ways in which they display pedagogical capacity. Embodiment is contextually based and involves social relationships. These social relationships extend beyond the human. The relationship is a multi-species process and not an exclusively human-centric process in direct action environments of learning.

### ***Emotions, Ethics, and Learning***

Olivia's story further illustrates the ethical dilemmas embodied in the process of direct action, reiterating the emotional dimensions at work. Olivia was confronted with a range of ethical dilemmas—for example, "dealing with the police and possible arrest"—and was always critically questioning why she should "obey laws when they are repressing you,

your family or animals.” While Olivia questioned and resisted the law, like it or not she is embedded within a culture that inculcates the belief that breaking the law is ethically wrong and demonizes and silences those who do. Ideology about the law, such as what is right and wrong, is entrenched at a socio-cultural level. These beliefs about the law are also internalized within the individual (Shantz, 2011). Individuals are socio-culturally shaped (Beckett & Hager, 2002) and consequently we are constrained and determined by wider economic, political, and cultural forces (Foley, 2001), making the ethical illegalities an intrinsic aspect of the learning process. Such ethical dilemmas also heighten the emotionality felt. Again, this is evident in Olivia’s story when she remarked, “when you are doing something illegal... it is like a melting pot of emotions,” and recounted the intensity of “the cops yelling at you.”

When Olivia challenged the law and legal system, a deeper critique of broader structures and systems at a socio-cultural level was facilitated. Challenging the law through acts of resistance contributes to a deeper meaning-making process. In other words, the confrontation of ethical dilemmas featured in Olivia’s story can bring to light the authoritarian and oppressive societal values that one is indoctrinated with. For example, when Olivia engaged in direct action she was confronted with symbols of authority such as the police, the government, and the law. Consequently, she was challenged by a moral dilemma that demanded to be worked through. While Olivia was confident about her ethical justifications, her repeated confrontation of the moral dilemma (dealing with the police or possible arrest) enabled her to develop a broader and holistic ethical insight over time. Newman’s (2012) moral domain of learning provides a good fit. He stated, “It is about coming to know what is right and wrong, good and bad, and wise and unwise...it involves an ongoing debate with ourselves and with others, in which we tease out the convictions that inform the judgements we make” (p. 52). This ethical insight is reiterated and also shifting over time through repeated experiential action.

When activists break or challenge the law, their socio-cultural identity is challenged. In other words, a sense of who you are or where you fit socio-culturally is challenged, hence potentially stirring learning. Activists are typically labelled deviant or othered when challenging social and political norms (Nocella, 2011). When resisting authority (through protest), where you fit in the system or society is challenged and threatened. Although not experienced by Olivia, being othered or labelled deviant can produce feelings of shame, hence intensifying emotions (Jones, 2007). Perhaps this occurs even when one views what one is doing as morally right or justified. Like it or not, social norms, conventions, and beliefs are always present (Haluza-DeLay, 2006), impacting one’s identity. As a result, there is an inherent moral conflict between what the activist thinks is right and what society thinks is right. Again, in using a wider macro lens this is evident in Olivia’s narrative when she was inherently in a situated space of moral conflict between her activist self, the shooters, and the police. The moral conflict enforced a reshaping of the self and wider society, inciting a continual process of learning. The impact of moral dilemmas encourages activists to engage in an ongoing debate of their judgments, convictions, and ethical decisions (Newman, 2012). As activists resist, they challenge the dominant deep-seated beliefs both internally and externally, and over time their political identity changes and reshapes.

While such learning clearly lies within the critical learning or emancipatory domains (Branagan & Boughton, 2003; Foley, 1999; Jesson & Newman, 2004), it is the emotions and ethics that instigate a critical learning process. Feelings of anger, disgust, or compassion are the basis of ethical decisions and dilemmas. For example, when Olivia witnessed the ducks

being killed she was angered and compelled into the Victorian lake to disrupt the shooting through a heart-based emotive response because it felt right. So ethical and moral positions are not always formed merely from a critical thinking process. In other words, these ethical positions are not developed by simply using cognition or calculative decision making, initially. An empathetic activist may feel an emotional response or vicarious connection to pain, making the ethical decision making (within a dilemma) a heart-driven process. Still, cognition and reason come into play, sometimes requiring time and distance to work through a dilemma (as seen in Olivia's debrief sessions).

### ***Embodied and Situated Learning: Revealing the See-Feel-Learn Process***

Olivia's story is one example of how activists learn through mind-body-emotion processes in direct action activism. Formations of learning that construct learning as solely cognitive or head-based are critiqued and challenged throughout. These rationalistic conceptions tend to be underpinned by behaviouristic elements that suggest that learning is simply a change as a result of experience (Jarvis, 2012)—something ticked off as an outcome. This conforms to an analyze-think-change dynamic that assumes learning commences solely in the activity of the head and transitions to a change of behaviour of sorts. Instead, learning is vastly complex, with no unity or exact science as the foundation for understanding it (Dyke & Bryant, 2012). Dyke and Bryant explained, "No one subject (whether sociology, psychology, history and philosophy) can place learning or education as its explanatory subject" (p. 361). Learning is not a singular phenomenon, as it involves various practices, processes, meanings, and values (Dyke & Bryant). While there are various ways to understand learning, Olivia's story redirects the analyze-think-change way of constructing learning, showing a see-feel-learn process grounded in the notion of embodiment and situated context.

Seeing-feeling processes are based essentially on the body being in the world. By reestablishing learning as essential to the ontological status of being in the world or the practice of being (rather than relying on a number of conditions present for learning to occur), we can begin to see the significance of emotions-body to learning. A see-feel dynamic is fundamental given that the body is constantly seeing-feeling in the midst of chaotic action that is confrontational, emotional, and traumatic or shocking. The use of the body by activists in the midst of action is a social and strategic aspect of activists' pedagogy (Ollis, 2010). While the body is immersed in action it evokes a range of emotions, from the experience of a high or laughter (a sense of relief/catharsis), to other feelings such as anger, frustration, disgust, and guilt. While immersed in action these feelings and bodily responses are constantly shifting and influencing learning. Through direct experience there is a process of sensing-feeling, both physically and emotionally. This learning is immediate and situated within the present moment, for as McCarthy (1996) said, we sense and feel newness, it is immediate. In Olivia's story, the immediacy of the moment through seeing-feeling instigated learning.

The typical physical space of animal liberationist direct action contexts makes seeing-feeling core to learning processes. It is not just the individual or environment influencing learning but aspects of a situation in which subjects, action, and agency are all part of the process (Elkjaer, 2012; Haluza-Delay, 2006). The interaction with other activists and other animals plus settings and spaces of direct action influence an array of learning

processes occupied fundamentally by seeing–feeling. As direct action is physical and active, permeated by an affective emotional tone, the see–feel dynamic is highly relevant. This type of learning arises more contingently and opportunistically as events unfold within a particular environment (Hager, 2012). Learning processes emerge from the context in sometimes unpredictable ways and can be changed by the context. As direct action contexts are essentially physical, active, and emotional, a see–feel–learn process is dominant. As such, our experience is always embodied and always situated (Freiler, 2008), influenced by the social, psychological, and material environment (Boud, 1994). So the place of direct action intensifies the emotional and bodily processes. This makes the see–feel process relevant to the learning process of animal activists and direct action work.

There are, however, individual elements of learning that impact the activist learning process. McCarthy (1996) showed how some people favour a sensing–feeling way of perceiving than the thinking way (analyze–think–change). Seeing–feeling is obvious in Olivia’s narrative as she was comfortable with this way of perceiving and processing her experience. However, learning processes are diverse and often dependent on the individual’s background, values, and personality. Generally, given their connectedness with animals and their pain, direct action activists may more frequently align with the sensing–feeling way of processing and learning; however, this proposition deserves its own extensive analysis.

Although a see–feel learning process is dominant, cognition learning processes interplay with a see–feel dynamic. The cognitive (analyze–think) process works in a symbiotic relationship with the emotion–body, showing the work of cognition in learning. There is an array of moments in the emergence of the activist learning process, including the naming and conceptualizing process (evident in Olivia’s debrief sessions). The intellect mediates and shifts past the sensing–feeling in order to name and classify an experience consciously to understand and anchor these experiences into consciousness (McCarthy, 1996). “It is the act of moving from our feelings to our thoughts that gets us from *being in* our perceptions to being able to *see the perceptions* themselves” (McCarthy, 1996, p. 10). To learn from experience, sensing–feeling acts of the heart are important, including the conceptualized words. So bodily movement and kinaesthetic processes, including emotions, play a central role for cognition-based learning (Pylvänäinen, 2010). A memory is often recounted involving a process of reliving, with all visual, kinaesthetic, and spatial impressions embedded (Wilson, 2002). So the initial knowledge through the emotion–body clues us into conceptualization and cognition processes (Lawrence, 2012c) working in a symbiotic relationship. Perhaps authentic learning is achieved through the balance of the two.

If we want to challenge rationalism in learning, then a see–feel–learn process provides an opening for another way learning can be understood. A see–feel process redirects learning to the status of being in the world rather than merely relying on rationalistic head-based conditions present for learning to be of value. Importantly, it gives voice to a marginalized position of learning, and importantly it also gives voice to the feminist position that challenges rationality, such as masculinist ways of viewing knowledge that discount the emotion and the body. As Lawrence (2012a) confirmed, embodied knowledge is foundational. Our earliest forms of knowledge through being in the world are pre-verbal and accessed through the body (Lawrence, 2012a). Meaning first emerges from embodied interactions before it begins to manifest itself in language. Naming this process is important if we wish to free the body from subordination to the mind (Grosz, 1994). Otherwise we come to recognize and privilege only certain types of knowledge that are deemed rational.



### Conclusion

Through Olivia's story this paper shows the role of the mind, body, and emotions in direct action work coalescing as anti-oppressive forces for social change. The context and analysis of Olivia's story reorients the way in which learning can be understood by discounting the mind as the sole source of learning (Barnacle, 2009; Lawrence, 2012b). I have argued that the interplay of emotion and sensory and kinaesthetic bodily processes in a direct action environment is fundamentally entwined in the learning process. Olivia's story is underpinned by a situative and collective explanation of learning, showing how context and interaction through experiential engagement with mind-body-emotion co-produce knowledge and fuel activist learning. Olivia's account shows learning as a process that embodies an array of moments in its emergence. There are moments of physical sensing, perception, intense emotionality, memory and mind, and conceptual understanding, all of which contribute to the learning process. I acknowledge in any learning process there can be strong bodily felt or cognitive flashes, and that these are significant moments within a learning process. However, if we want to challenge rationalism in learning as the only way learning occurs, then a body engaged with the world offers a better model than a conception of mind dominated by a calculating brain (Barnacle, 2009).

Understanding activist learning processes is becoming more and more urgent in the current economic, social, and political context (Hall et al., 2012). Looking at the learning of activists may facilitate the conditions for improving and supporting activist learning. Awareness of the learning process has the potential to inform the methods activists use within the community to influence the momentum of change on behalf of other animals. Importantly, to further mobilize activism and social change, it is paramount to understand the role of the body and emotions in meaning-making processes. If we wish to disrupt the ideological reinforcement of rationality and masculinity, we must understand the embodied learning process in spaces of social justice work.

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