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Kinesthetic and Cognitive Determinants of Emotional State: An Investigation of the Alexander Technique

*A Dissertation submitted by Richard Alvin Brown for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, Tufts University, April 1977*

Reviewed by Michael Gelb

Purpose

Richard Brown's doctoral thesis *Kinesthetic and Cognitive Determinants of Emotional State: An Investigation of the Alexander Technique* is an attempt to replicate and extend the research of his mentor, Dr. F. P. Jones. Jones' pioneering experiments showed that the alteration of head balance achieved through the Alexander Technique resulted in reliable positive changes in movement pattern, neck muscle tension, postural sets, and in individual description of kinesthetic experience.

Brown's experiments were designed to discern the role of suggestion or expectancy in the production of these results and to investigate the claim, previously suggested by testimonial evidence, that the Alexander Technique results in improvements in the general emotional state. Brown also attempted to extend Jones' work by refining the recording of subjects' description of kinesthetic experience and by using a control group who received instruction opposite to the ones used in Jones' original work.

Method

Brown screened 52 potential subjects for this experiment and after eliminating those with previous knowledge of the Alexander Technique he was left with a group of 48. This group was divided into four equal groups (A, B, C, and D) for purposes of comparison.

Groups A and B were given approximately 15 minutes of instruction in the Alexander Technique while they performed simple movements such as getting in and out of a chair, walking, and climbing stairs. Groups C and D were given approximately 15 minutes of instruction in what Brown termed the "negative Alexander Technique." This procedure involved assisting the subject in retroflexing the head and holding it there throughout the experiment.

Groups A and C were given positive expectancy instructions prior to the experiment. The subjects in these groups were led to believe that previous experiments had shown that subjects reported the experimental movements as being lighter and easier than normal with improvements in general alertness and sense of well-being. The current experiment, it was suggested, was an opportunity to confirm these findings.

Groups B and D were given ambiguous expectancy instructions. The subjects were told that some subjects felt lighter, easier, and more alert after the experiment; others felt heavier, jerkier, and less comfortable; and still others reported no change in kinesthetic experience or state of consciousness. The four groups, in summary, were as follows:

- (A) Alexander Technique plus positive expectancy instructions;
- (B) Alexander Technique plus ambiguous expectancy instructions;
- (C) Negative Alexander Technique plus positive expectancy instructions;
- (D) Negative Alexander Technique plus ambiguous expectancy instructions.

The tools used to compare the groups included:

(1) an extended version of the kinesthetic description scale (KDS). The KDS requires subjects to rate themselves on a scale of 0=Not at All to 4=Extremely on their experience of the experimental movement (the Alexander Technique or the negative Alexander Technique) compared to the experience of their ordinary movement. Jones' original KDS included 18 descriptive words such as "faster," "heavier," "softer," and "smoother." Brown extended the scale to include references to elements such as well-being, coordination, and breathing.

(2) the state of consciousness inventory (SCI). The SCI is an inventory of states of consciousness and emotion which has been widely used in studies of meditation and biofeedback. Subjects rate themselves from 0=Not at All to 4=Extremely on 49 statements such as "I'm excited in a calm way," "I'm wound up inside," "I feel wide awake," and "I'm really functioning as a unit."

(3) trajectory ratio. Trajectory ratio is the measurement of the angle of ascent from the seated to standing postures. In previous studies Jones found that increase in trajectory ratio was significantly and positively related to better coordination, freedom from fatigue, and freedom from neurological disease.

(4) free response data. Subjects were asked to describe in their own words the feelings, sensations, and states of consciousness which they associated with the experimental movements. These data were evaluated by a panel of three judges to determine if they could distinguish between those subjects who had exposure to the Alexander Technique and those who were exposed to the alternate procedure.

Brown hypothesized 1) that the Alexander Technique relative to the negative Alexander Technique would result in significantly higher scores on the positive dimensions of the KDS (e.g. lighter, smoother, and more free breathing) and the SCI (e.g. more alert, alive and integrated), 2) that the free response data scored blindly by judges would distinguish the Alexander Technique from the negative Alexander Technique, 3) that trajectory ratio would be increased by the Alexander Technique and decreased by the negative Alexander Technique, and 4) that the positive expectancy condition would raise scores on the KDS and the SCI relative to the ambiguous expectancy condition and that these increases would be greater for the non-specific factors such as "mood" or "feeling tone" compared to items that reflected specific kinesthetic sensations such as "steadier" or "more free breathing."

Brown designed the experiment in such a way that the effects of the Alexander Technique were distinguishable from those effects which could be attributed to suggestion or expectancy.

Results

As hypothesized, Brown discovered that 1) the Alexander Technique did result in significantly higher scores on the positive dimensions of the KDS and the SCI than the negative Alexander Technique,

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Some Impressions of Marjorie Barstow's Teaching

by Robert M. Rickover

I should like to share a little of what I have gained from working with Marjorie Barstow. This is a personal account and is most definitely not an attempt to present Marj's ideas about the Alexander Technique; as anyone who knows her can testify, she is quite capable of doing that herself!

Marj was the first person to enroll in F. M. Alexander's first training course in 1931 and she has been teaching ever since, mostly in Lincoln, Nebraska where she lives. In recent years, she has devoted herself primarily to working with groups and she now travels a lot, giving workshops around the country.

I should perhaps mention that when I first took part in one of her workshops in Lincoln, I was just over half way through my training at the School of Alexander Studies in London. My second was a year later and, after several months of teaching experience, I recently attended Marj's first Canadian workshop in Toronto.

The most important things I have learned from working with Marj can be summed up in three words: responsibility, simplicity, and positivity.

Responsibility: Taking charge of ourselves is something we all talk about in the Alexander world; we preach it to our pupils and it usually figures prominently in our attempts to explain the Technique to outsiders. But in my own case, at least, exposure to Marj's teaching made me painfully aware that I preferred talking and thinking about this more than actually doing it. Well into my training course, I was still holding onto the idea that a lesson with a good teacher would, by itself, serve to better my use. Of course, I would never have admitted this (even to myself), but I tended to regard lessons as a sort of Alexander "fix" and I would get quite anxious if I did not receive my daily quota of work at school.

The notion that we can assume responsibility for ourselves (and that we **must** do so if we are to accomplish anything) is continuously reinforced by Marj's teaching style. She frequently asks you to consider what **you** have done to get into your present state and what **you** can do to get out of it. A great emphasis is placed on paying attention to your own habits and to those of the rest of the group. Marj uses her hands very sparingly; once she has shown you that an improved style of movement is possible, and how you can get it for yourself, it is left to you to make use of this information.

Simplicity: One of the most refreshing aspects of Marj's teaching is a complete avoidance of technical jargon (or "Alexandres"), abstractions, imagery, and the like. Nor does she use any of the traditional Alexander teaching paraphernalia—there are no tables or specially selected chairs. From the start, Marj encourages pupils to apply what they learn to their everyday activities: dancers dance, musicians play, carpenters saw and secretaries type. Only the Alexander teachers in the group find this a little frustrating at times—some seem not to be able to do anything except teach.

Marj uses language of a clarity that can be understood by everybody. This of course is necessary in working with large and diverse groups. But more important, I found her straightforward down-to-earth approach actually widened my understanding and appreciation of the Technique. Stripping away all which is unnecessary, she focused my attention on the most basic concepts and enabled me to understand them on a more profound level. I am now in a better position to expand and elaborate on them, particularly when teaching.

Positivity: I think Marj finds it frustrating, if a bit amusing, that the first response of pupils to a good kinesthetic experience is often the assertion that they cannot possibly get it again on their own. Sometimes they blame the chairs they have to sit on, sometimes the pressure of work, but never themselves. Marj refuses to get drawn into that line of negative thinking for it leads nowhere, serving only as a justification for giving up.

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Reflections on Experiencing Change During the Alexander Teacher-Training

by Anne Marie Roth

Coming to the Alexander Technique late in life as a physical therapist with an interest in Jungian psychology, I have finally found what I have always been searching for—a technique with a sound physiological and anatomical basis that effects change on a physical as well as psychological level and which in its approach always emphasizes the psycho-physical unity.

Change, like growth, is a gradual ongoing process that vacillates between progressive and regressive phases. The many factors entering into this process have interested me especially, and the following are some thoughts and dreams about Change as I experienced it during my training in the Alexander Technique.

In the beginning of the training I believed that I was ready and open for change and thought that change would come quickly and easily. Actually just recognizing and becoming more aware of habits such as forward neck and compressed spine, habits in movement and posture as well as habits of thought, took a long time.

Some attitudes and defenses manifest in certain areas of the body as tightness or blocking and these cannot be changed mechanically as separate parts. Change takes place in the organism as a whole, in the psycho-physical unity. It seems that a central place or point of balance has to be contacted from which one can experience wholeness. C. G. Jung's concept of the "Self" describes such a central place and in explaining the idea of the "Self" Erich Neumann writes:

All the various partial systems, from the ultra-microscopic processes in the individual cell to major systems such as the circulation of the blood or the reactions of the nervous system, work together in a coordinated fashion and are attuned to each other in a symphony of mutual interdependence.

These processes together constitute a unity, the virtual center of which is the Self.

... The Self as the center of all things psychic, which also includes within itself the processes of the unconscious, is at the same time identical with the totality of the body, since, as we have to assume, and to some extent can already demonstrate, all psychic processes have, at the least, their physical correlates.¹

If there is a willingness to change, the process is supported by spontaneous activity of the unconscious through dreams which depict the situation symbolically. One of my first dreams showed that it can be frightening to let go of habitual reactions and that I needed to find a central permanent place while things were changing all around me. In the dream there was a hurricane and while things were blowing around I tried to stand as close as possible to the trunk of a very tall evergreen, so as to be almost part of it.

As the teacher's hands guide one into the experience of a new direction and freedom through a different relationship between head, neck and torso, it gradually becomes easier to withhold consent to automatic reactions. This teaching takes place on a sensory level and involves learning the meaning of active non-doing or giving thought direction without actual "doing."

While trying to sort all this out, I had another dream: I drove my car onto a lawn and disturbed the ground with big tire tracks. The owner was very upset. I offered to rake it over, but the disturbance extended into the house and the floor coverings (various sheets and carpets) did not fit anymore. I desperately tried to fix it so they would fit together but could not and finally decided to send all the floor coverings to the cleaner while in the meantime I would just enjoy Alexander lessons right there. When the coverings finally came back, they still would not fit, but among them was a small oriental carpet. Somebody mentioned that since this carpet was there, everything would be all right because it was extremely precious and made by a famous Indian who was both American Indian and eastern Indian.

The dream showed that my approach was rather clumsy and that I cannot fix these disturbances by physical doing or as Alexander called

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Research Opportunities With the Alexander Technique

by Roger Tengwall, Ph.D.

This has been a hobby—almost compulsion—of mine for over 25 years, ever since my first lessons and conversations with Marjorie Barstow. Frankly, I would rather design experiments than do them, although I do get high satisfaction from seeing the results in print. And I believe that it advances 'the work' if only in a small and somewhat eccentric way.

To me every Alexander lesson received or given is among other things a research opportunity. It is an experience of discovery and testing and experimentation by both the student and the teacher. However, science as we know it in our time has certain protocols.

It is my firm conviction that any field of study can be illuminated by insights derived from Alexander's discoveries. Of course, the methodology must be rigorous and appropriate to the journal or professors who are your 'market.' I have been published for work in history and art history, the dance, athletic performance, psychometrics and anthropometrics, social psychology, psychotherapy, anthropology, and am now working on a paper solicited by *Engineering in Medicine*, an English international journal.

It is also helpful to be wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove. Since I am neither, I have created problems for myself which I hope that you can avoid. For instance, it is usually easier and more politic to develop an hypothesis or theme in the language of current issues in your field of choice. Very few academics or scientists will tolerate a frontal approach especially when you are a student. Frequently, the Alexander Technique can be introduced as a control.

Another start would be to replicate one of the experiments published by Frank Pierce Jones. I have been told that only 6% of the published experiments in psychology have been replicated. I suspect that most professors would tolerate your presenting a published paper with the proposal to re-do the experiment. It might be advisable to add some of your professor's pet methodologies and find some supportive quotations from his favorite authors. Just using a larger number of subjects than Jones was able to use would be a good idea for statistical reasons. It is also more fashionable nowadays to construct a matrix with more than one variable and to have some kind of control or controls.¹ For me, scientific research includes the following:

- 1.0 Survey of the literature
- 2.0 Statement of the hypothesis (with rationale)
- 3.0 Methodology
 - 3.1 Subjects and situation
 - 3.2 Materials & instruments used
 - 3.3 Metrology—error analysis, etc.
 - 3.4 Statistical treatment
- 4.0 Results
- 5.0 Discussion
 - 5.1 Meanings
 - 5.2 Critique
 - 5.3 Evaluation
 - 5.4 Further directions for research
- 6.0 Writing, graphs, tables, and illustrations
- 7.0 Publication
- 8.0 Defense and replication

Steps 1.0-5.0 also constitute an outline for the scientific paper. If the writing begins as the experiment is planned, step 6.0 is not a major chore but rather a matter of assembling and editing.

No research is complete until it is published, and it is not established until it has been defended and replicated.

This procedure is the same for a short paper or a master's thesis or a doctoral dissertation or a monograph. Only the length and thoroughness are changed.

As we all know, life is much bigger than science. So that one of the difficulties is that we try to do too much and to say too much. Pick an hypothesis that you can handle and consider all 8 steps before you start. Not least of these steps is publication. Personally, I would not now start an experiment until I had selected the journal for publication. The paper may end up in a different journal, but this gives me models for my start.

If this sounds like a lot of work, it is. But it can also be a lot of fun. My motto is "If a job is really worth doing, it is worth doing poorly." The overriding imperative is to start it and to do it. It can always be redone to satisfy an editor or a professor. In the doing is the joy and the learning.

Another suggestion which comes out of my own difficulties is to ask for help. In the definition of your problem may come insight; and we all need the social support of other people. In fact, that is my personal reason for investing time and energy and money in this little paper.

It took me several years of graduate study to overcome my inhibitions derived from the writings of F. M. Alexander and from people in the 'Alexander culture,' inhibitions against using the word 'posture.' For me now, 'posture' is a neutral word which is the best available in the American language for referring to the dynamic relation of body parts in a living animal. For me, it does not refer to the effortful holding of a position, the dysponetic bracing to which Alexander and others refer. (Posture can be lengthening with the head forward and up or constricting with the head down and back.) This neutral and general usage seems more in accord with our common tongue and with the scientific literature. I elaborate this point so that readers with possible reservations about the term may understand my usage in the following paragraph which is a list of possible research topics.

Posture and the Vital Signs; Ideation; Peripheral Circulation; Dental Occlusion; any kind of performance; Breathing patterns with special consideration of emphysema; The Postures of the Emotions; Pain in different postures; Postural Patterns in different cultures and sub-cultures; Art; Literature; Attitude surveys; Marketing Research for Alexander organizations.

Of course, essential to any study is a working understanding of the Alexander process itself. The researcher must be able to recognize it and document it. The researcher must not be fooled by manipulative positioning. There must be systemic lengthening and widening with the head leading.

Our own experience of receiving and giving Alexander lessons is a continuing source of insights into distorted as well as integrated movements and postures and their corresponding effects. We learn as we watch and think and listen and move. I would be happy to correspond (c/o School of Social Sciences, U.C.I., Irvine, CA 92717) with anyone interested in research along these lines—let's have fun with it.

¹As in Brown's research, for example, reviewed in this issue.—Ed.

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2) the judges were able to distinguish the responses of the Alexander Technique subjects from the negative Alexander Technique subjects through the free response data, and 3) the trajectory ratio scores distinguished the Alexander Technique from the negative Alexander Technique.

Generally speaking, Brown discovered that the major effects brought about in his subjects during the course of the study were created primarily by the "postural treatment" (i.e. Alexander Technique or negative Alexander Technique) and that the effects of suggestion were never as powerful as the postural treatment effects. He did discover positive suggestion or expectancy tended to increase scores in certain aspects of the subjects' response such as the element of "ease," "coordination," "comfort," and "alertness." Brown concluded that his study "clearly replicated Jones' earlier findings" and adds that "these results clearly confirm the picture of the Alexander Technique as bringing a state of kinesthetic lightness and smoothness and add some new dimensions . . . The effects on alertness, fatigue, breathing, and sense of well-being suggest that kinesthesia contributes to the feeling tone of emotional states." Brown points out that the effects of the Alexander Technique are not just kinesthetic but also result in positive alteration of consciousness; and he emphasizes the importance of these findings not only for the light they shed on the Alexander Technique but for their importance in understanding the nature of emotion in general. Brown's last point takes on much greater power because he was able to show that the effects of the Alexander Technique were independent of suggestion.

Having illuminated the relationship of kinesthesia to emotion in this experiment Brown recommended that the Alexander Technique be used as a non-pharmacologic means in the treatment of depression, alcoholism, and drug-abuse. He also points out that studies could be done on a similar model comparing the Alexander Technique with other mind/body disciplines such as rolfing or acupuncture. Brown also suggests that continued refinements in Jones' measurement techniques may result in the possibility of gauging with relative impartiality the skill of individual Alexander teachers.

Critique

The major weak point of Brown's work is the confusing way in which it is presented. He fails to clearly state the goals of his research and whether or not they were achieved. He states his research goals in different ways at least four times. The flow of writing tended to be a bit "jerky" and "uncoordinated" as opposed to "lighter," "smoother," and "easier."

Apart from Brown's presentation style, it may be difficult for some Alexander practitioners to read Brown's work without experiencing a sense of discomfort. The comparison of the Alexander Technique with the negative Alexander Technique may seem gross. The assessment based on an analysis of subjects' feelings may seem antithetical to Alexander's repeated exhortations concerning the "untrustworthiness of feeling" and "debauched kinesthesia." The experimental methodology itself may seem artificial and overly analytical.

Nevertheless, Brown is to be commended for his work. It is essential for the Alexander Technique to be scientifically investigated. Brown's experiments will lead to greater interest in the scientific community which is an important key to the introduction and acceptance of the Alexander Technique by educational and medical institutions. Our culture is currently beginning a major paradigm shift. It is moving increasingly towards seeing and appreciating "wholes"—witness Bohm's work in physics; Sperry, Pribram, and Buzan on the brain; Prigogine in chemistry; and Fuller's work on "Space Ship Earth." Alexander is one of the great unrecognized heroes of this shift and Brown's work is a step towards the appreciation and further exploration of his contribution.

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Marj quietly, but determinedly, radiates positivity and a good deal of this rubs off on her pupils. Hers is definitely not the simplistic "power of positive thinking" variety. Like the rest of her teaching, it reflects her own personality and is firmly grounded in practical considerations. For example, I have come to realize that finding myself slumping back into my old habit patterns need not be a cause of gloom and despair. Instead, I can be thankful that I have been given a gentle reminder to apply what I have learned to bringing about an improvement.

Needless to say, I am very grateful to Marj for what she has shown me. I have benefited immensely from my association with her and I hope I will be able to pass on some of what I have learned to my own pupils.

¹See "Marjorie L. Barstow: An Interview by Janet O'Brien Stillwell," *Somatics*, Autumn-Winter 1981.—Ed.

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it "end gaining" but that I should stay with the process, the "means whereby," and that by doing this something very valuable would be gained. The feeling was extremely reassuring.

Even if there is a willingness to change, there is at the same time always resistance to change. One probably has to deal constantly with these two opposing tendencies and to accept and balance them can be a difficult task. Out of the awareness of opposing directions, however, may come a special energy.

Towards the end of the training program I found a definite lengthening of my spine along with greater ease in movement and an increased energy level. Change in attitudes and thoughts seemed to be more subtle and may be slower except for some dramatic moments of increase in awareness of the total organism. There is mainly a better understanding of what causes me to fall back into habitual reactions.

Working with the Alexander Technique is like clearing the way to experience a new equilibrium which can be regained by tuning into consciousness or thought direction so that there can be freedom and openness for change and growth.

¹Erich Neumann; *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, G. P. Putnam Sons, New York, 1969. p. 117, 116.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

This issue, which marks the beginning of *The Alexandrian's* second publishing year, features four original articles on various aspects of the contemporary Alexander scene. It is the first issue not to have an historical reprint of some kind as a major article.

This lively quality really should continue—after all, the Technique is for NOW, literally!

This is thus both an invitation and an appeal for original manuscripts on any aspect of the Alexander Technique—teaching-learning experiences, philosophy, research, applications, book-article reviews, letters-to-the-editor, what-have-you—to be considered for publication in these pages.

The Alexandrian is intended as a forum for the Alexander community. It can function as such only if used.

Obviousness is always the enemy to correctness.

—Bertrand Russell

Seek simplicity, and distrust it.

—Alfred North Whitehead