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| Title | <u>Embodied Perspectives on Research in Higher Education</u> | - |
| Submitter | <u>Prof. Jennifer Leigh, Mrs. Nicole Brown, Dr. Lou Harvey, Ms. Jessica Bradley</u> | |

Title: Embodied Perspectives on Research in Higher Education

Abstract

This round table brings together four Higher Education researchers who are using embodied perspectives within their work to discuss how embodiment informs questions of methodology. Research into affect, emotion, and embodied experiences is growing in importance across different disciplines and theoretical frameworks within the academy, including sociology, anthropology, geography, and feminist theory as researchers seek to understand more about individual experiences.

Using four case studies, we will discuss how different methodological approaches fit within the epistemology and ontology of research questions to begin to understand how and why a researcher might choose particular methods and the consequences those choices may have for ethics, data collection, the co-construction of knowledge, and dissemination.

We want to explore how using creative approaches to methodology can bring richness and different understandings to qualitative work, and where these might fit within the larger picture of an increasingly neoliberal and disembodied academy.

Context:

Over the last decade Higher Education has seen drastic changes due to increased marketisation and globalisation processes (Hussey and Smith, 2002; Tilak, 2008; Gewirtz and Cribb, 2013). Stakeholders are taking more prominent roles and students expect to be treated as paying consumers (Thompson and Bekhradnia, 2010). Satisfaction surveys and excellence frameworks have become common-place tools for quality assurance and monitoring purposes (Robinson and Hilli, 2016). These neoliberal emphases on metrics and managerialism have led to the removal of emotion from the academy (Bloch, 2012) and what could be termed a disembodied experience for staff and students alike. However, many areas of research attempt to explore lived experiences of students and staff within Higher Education. To genuinely understand these lived experiences research methodologies need to be re-considered, re-defined and re-developed in order to incorporate the embodied, breathing, fleshy bodies that live them. It is against this backdrop that we argue that an exploration of embodied perspective within Higher Education research is required.

Embodiment:

Embodied perspectives offer new ways of a challenge to dualistic and bounded ways of knowing which privilege the mind over the body and circumscribe what can be known, as well as challenging the implications for the researcher, research ethics, and research methods. However, whilst the concept of embodiment is found across many disciplines, its definition is contested (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015), and the implications for research methodology remain underexplored. Sociologists often use embodiment to describe how people use their bodies to represent themselves at an individual or cultural level (Shilling, 2012), and some might argue that all research has to be embodied because we are all embodied beings carrying out the research. Whilst this predominantly constructionist view of embodiment focuses on embodied experiences and emotion work, it tends to ignore the body as physiology (Freund, 1990). An alternative understanding sees embodiment as both a state of being and a process of learning about the self (Leigh & Bailey, 2013). Embodiment understood in this way is an on-going process of bringing conscious self-awareness to and about the body. In this sense, embodiment seeks to fully bridge the gap between the Cartesian mind-body

dualism and provide a dialogue between constructionist and physiological understandings of the body. Whilst the duality is required as a stage to understanding and analysis, focusing on one without the other, thus the body without the mind or vice versa, would limit embodiment (Bendelow and Williams, 2002).

Embodied research:

Within the current discourses of methodological development and interdisciplinary research the relationship between researcher and researched is still often disconnected from the body (Ellingson, 2006). Experiments with interdisciplinary, creative and innovative methods as an alternative to traditional research methods have met with varying successes (Bagnoli, 2009; Guell and Ogilvie, 2015; Burge et al, 2016), and creative and visual research methods are growing in popularity (Kara, 2015; Pink, 2015; Rose, 2016). However, explicitly embodied research stances are less commonly explored. Taking an embodied perspective means accepting that knowledge is embodied and tacit. Therefore, incorporating ideas of embodiment impact on central epistemological questions underpinning methodological approaches. Methodology should be congruent. A focus on embodiment has implications for epistemic and social justice in research relationships and the academy more broadly, as it has potential to enable the articulation of what was previously unarticulated, unknown or undervalued. The recent turn towards the sensory and sensorial (Todres, 2007; Eccleston, 2016; Pink, 2016) demonstrates the increasing interest in embodiment, but has so far not penetrated Higher Education research. However, to make Higher Education research future-proof embodied perspectives need to be embraced and incorporated. This would allow for more collaborative and participatory research and would reduce the power differential between researchers, staff and students. Whilst Higher Education is traditionally equated with the elite, there are voices within Higher Education that continue to be unheard: staff and students from minority backgrounds or those with chronic illnesses, non-traditional and mature students. However, at the same time using embodied perspectives in this way also throws up ethical questions around consent, assent and anonymity, the possibility of increased potential risks for the researcher, and boundaries of research, practice, performance and exploitation.

The round table:

We have brought together four HE researchers interested in aspects of embodied research to share different perspectives and to discuss how embodiment informs questions of methodology.

Embodied belonging: attention to the sensory in migration ethnographies incorporates linguistic, visual and sensory ethnography to develop understandings of communication across HE and creative practitioners through engaging with arts practice. Embodiment is explored through creative inquiry and methodologies.

The embodied researcher: reflexivity and creative methodologies explores the embodied researcher, how embodied experiences influence data analysis and how reflexivity is key to counteract biases and foreground the embodied research practice within HE.

Using embodied drama techniques in intercultural research explores embodiment as it relates to performance methodology in intercultural research in UK HE, with a focus on the potential of an embodied approach for developing an immanent (as opposed to transcendent) intercultural research ethics.

Provoking honesty: using creative methods to capture embodied experiences interrogates how an embodied approach to using arts based methods within HE might capture the essence of embodied experiences relating to identity. How does this affect the researcher/researched relationship? Does it demand more or different skills from the researcher than more traditional methods?

Key discussion questions:

- What constitutes an embodied perspective in research and why might a researcher choose to work from an embodied perspective?
- How can embodiment be integrated effectively into Higher Education research?
- What are the implications for the (co-)production of knowledge and what methodological choices might result?

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