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THE BODY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: FROM DISEMBODIED KNOWLEDGE TO CORPOREAL PRAXIS

ABSTRACT

This article advances a reconceptualisation of qualitative inquiry by positioning the body as a foundational condition of knowledge production rather than a peripheral concern. I argue that sociological and methodological traditions have historically privileged abstraction, cognitive detachment, and normative assumptions about the “ideal” academic body. These tendencies obscure the sensory, affective, relational, and situated processes through which research is actually conducted and knowledge is produced, reinforcing the illusion that inquiry can be separated from the embodied researcher. Against this backdrop, the article argues that embodiment should be understood not merely as an object of study but as a constitutive feature of qualitative research itself. The article makes three key contributions. First, it develops and consolidates Embodied Inquiry as a coherent theoretical framework grounded in phenomenology and hermeneutics, emphasising experience as inherently embodied, interpretive, relational, and situated within social and material contexts. Second, it introduces and elaborates the concept of corporeal praxis as the methodological and practical extension of Embodied Inquiry. Corporeal praxis translates embodied theory into research practice by foregrounding the researcher's bodily engagement, reflexivity, sensory awareness, and responsiveness as integral to data generation, interpretation, and analysis. Third, the article identifies the epistemological, methodological, analytical, ethical, political, and practical contributions that corporeal praxis offers to qualitative research, demonstrating how embodied engagement enriches both the conduct and evaluation of inquiry. Through this framework, the article redefines methodological rigour as embodied reflexivity rather than disembodied neutrality. It also exposes how the “normal academic body” functions as an implicit methodological standard that shapes inclusion, authority, credibility, and legitimacy within knowledge production, with significant implications for disability, inequality, and institutional power. In doing so, the article shifts embodiment from a descriptive concern to a transformative epistemological, ethical, methodological, and political intervention in qualitative research.

Keywords

Embodied Inquiry; Corporeal praxis; Qualitative research methodology; Reflexivity; Embodiment.

1. Introduction

For much of the history of academic knowledge production, the body has been treated as a silent background to intellectual work. The absence of the body within sociological research has been widely discussed, most notably through Chris Shilling's (2012) concept of the "absent presence" of the body in sociology. Shilling (2012) argues that although sociological theory is fundamentally grounded in assumptions about bodily functioning and human embodiment, the body itself often remains implicit rather than explicitly analysed. Classical sociological works frequently presume a normative and able body without acknowledging bodily variation or disability. For example, Émile Durkheim's study of suicide focuses on social integration and regulation while largely overlooking the embodied dimensions of mental and physical suffering. Similarly, Karl Marx's discussions of labour and productivity assume a standardised productive body, without considering how differing bodily capacities or disabilities may shape an individual's relationship to labour and economic production. In this sense, the body functions as an unspoken foundation of sociological analysis, simultaneously central to theory and absent from direct examination (Shilling, 2012).

The absence of the body is also central to the work of Drew Leder (1990), whose phenomenological exploration of embodiment examines how the body is experienced in everyday life. Leder (1990) argues that human consciousness operates in a way that causes the body to "dys-appear," meaning that the body ordinarily recedes from conscious awareness during states of health and functional normality. In everyday experience, individuals rarely notice routine bodily processes such as breathing, digestion, or the movement of joints because these systems function automatically and without disruption. However, when bodily processes malfunction or become painful, the body is brought sharply into awareness. A cough or respiratory illness draws attention to breathing, digestive discomfort highlights ordinarily unnoticed internal processes, and aching joints make movement suddenly perceptible. The body therefore becomes most visible through dysfunction, discomfort, or interruption to normal functioning, it "dys-appears". The concept of dys-appearance (Leder, 1990) demonstrates how embodiment is often characterised by absence in everyday consciousness, only becoming present when the body fails to operate seamlessly.

These understandings of the body as simultaneously foundational and absent provide an important framework for examining how embodiment is negotiated within academic institutions and research practices, where the presence of the body is similarly overlooked or marginalised. Many academic knowledge practices privilege abstraction over embodiment (Ellingson, 2008). Researchers are trained to value conceptual distance, theoretical generalisation, and methodological neutrality. Sensory experiences, bodily responses, affect, and movement are frequently considered distractions from rigorous analysis rather than sources of insight. This hierarchy reflects a long-standing philosophical division between mind and body that has shaped Western epistemology and scientific practice (e.g. Duncan, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 2012).

It is against this backdrop that I argue for the body to be brought back into scholarship and scholarly consciousness. The dominant model of the disembodied scholar privileges abstraction, neutrality, and cognitive detachment (Purser, 2021; Das Gupta, 2021), thereby erasing the sensory, affective, and relational processes that shape how researchers encounter, interpret, and analyse the social world. The persistent separation of mind from body within academic knowledge production therefore obscures the embodied conditions through which knowledge becomes possible. As a result, important dimensions of qualitative inquiry, including emotion, movement, vulnerability, and relationality, remain under-theorised and methodologically marginalised. Re-centering the body as an epistemic condition allows scholarship to move from disembodied representation toward corporeal praxis, enabling researchers to develop more reflexive, rigorous, and ethically grounded forms of knowledge production. Corporeal praxis refers to a mode of research practice that actively engages the body as a site of inquiry, experimentation, and reflexivity. Rather than treating embodiment as a theoretical add-on, corporeal praxis invites researchers to embrace the sensory, emotional, and relational dimensions of research.

By adopting this perspective, researchers can reimagine methodological rigour in ways that recognise embodied engagement as a source of analytical depth rather than methodological weakness (Tracy, 2010). To explore this argument, this article first outlines the theoretical foundations of embodied inquiry. It then critically examines how disembodied knowledge practices shape qualitative research. Finally, it discusses how corporeal praxis offers methodological contributions and opportunities for epistemological, ethical, political, analytical, and practical transformation.

2. Theoretical foundations of Embodied Inquiry

In the following I present the theoretical framework by providing an overview of the philosophical and methodological foundations of Embodied Inquiry. This outline draws on and summarises concepts developed in my previous publication on Embodied Inquiry (Leigh & Brown, 2021), where these ideas are explored in greater detail. In particular, the following section highlights the phenomenological and hermeneutic foundations of Embodied Inquiry, as well as an invitation to consider human understanding and communication before examining its key research foci across four interrelated dimensions of embodied research practice.

Embodied Inquiry (Leigh & Brown, 2021) is grounded in a philosophical tradition that challenges the separation of mind and body and instead positions human experience as fundamentally embodied, relational, and interpretive. Its theoretical foundations draw primarily on phenomenology and hermeneutics, both of which foreground lived experience, interpretation, and situated understanding as central to knowledge production. Within phenomenology, Edmund Husserl's work established the importance of investigating the essence of experience through attention to consciousness and perception (Husserl, 1927).

This was subsequently expanded by Martin Heidegger, who argued that human beings are inseparable from their social and relational contexts, conceptualising existence as being-in-the-world rather than as detached consciousness (Heidegger, 1996/1953). The phenomenological emphasis on embodiment was further developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose conception of the body-subject positioned the body not as an object but as the means through which the world is encountered, experienced, and communicated (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Embodied Inquiry therefore adopts the phenomenological position that experience is always embodied, contextual, and interpreted through lived engagement with the world.

Alongside phenomenology, Embodied Inquiry is informed by hermeneutics, particularly through the emphasis placed on interpretation and relational understanding. Hermeneutic theory suggests that meaning emerges through an iterative movement between individual experiences and broader contexts, commonly conceptualised as the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 2006/1975; Zimmermann, 2015). Within Embodied Inquiry this process is understood less as a closed circle and more as a spiral that allows increasingly deeper engagement with embodied experience and interpretation. Knowledge is therefore not treated as fixed or objective but as relationally constructed through interaction between researcher, participant, body, and context. This orientation is reinforced through the argument that human understanding is fundamentally embodied (Finlay, 2015), that language is often insufficient to fully communicate bodily experience (Scarry, 1985; Sontag, 2003), and that communication itself is deeply metaphorical and multimodal (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Embodied Inquiry consequently draws on multimodality (Jewitt et al., 2016) as a framework for understanding how meaning is produced not only through words but also through gesture, movement, posture, expression, sensation, and spatial relations.

Within this philosophical framework, Embodied Inquiry focuses on four interrelated dimensions of research. The first dimension concerns lived experience, where inquiry seeks to move beyond cognitive accounts of experience and attend to the embodied and sensory dimensions of everyday life. Research in this area includes studies of health and illness (Bates, 2019), sport and leisure (Allen-Collinson & Owton, 2015; Faulkner, 2018), identity work (Inckle, 2009; Weiss, 2013), and sensory experience (Pink, 2015; Eccleston, 2016). This dimension also incorporates proprioceptive and interoceptive experiences such as balance, pain, breathing, fatigue, dizziness, and bodily discomfort (Virtbauer, 2016; Yardley, 1999), recognising the body as a site through which individuals encounter and make sense of the world.

The second dimension foregrounds the researcher's body in the field, positioning embodiment not merely as background to inquiry but as part of the research process itself. Embodied Inquiry conceptualises the researcher's body as both a tool and subject of inquiry, particularly within ethnographic and anthropological traditions that attend to learning, transformation, and immersion in the field (Csordas, 1994, 2002; Jordan, 2001; Bodenhorn, 2016; Halstead, 2016).

This perspective is also evident in work on rhythm analysis, where the researcher's embodied experience of rhythm and spatiality becomes central to understanding social life (Lefebvre, 2004; Lyon, 2019), and within autoethnography, where the researcher's bodily experiences and transformations form part of the analytic process (van den Scott, 2018; McMahon & Dinan Thompson, 2011; Ettorre, 2010).

The third dimension conceptualises the body as a communicator. Embodied Inquiry challenges the treatment of research interactions as disembodied exchanges of verbal information by recognising that communication occurs through multiple bodily modalities. Gesture, facial expression, posture, movement, and nonverbal interaction are therefore understood as meaningful forms of data that complement and extend spoken language (Heath, 2002; Alibali & Nathan, 2012). This focus is particularly evident in research on tattoo culture (Leader, 2015, 2016), fashion and appearance (Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Thapan, 2004), and the hair and beauty industry (McCabe et al., 2017; Flores, 2016; Crawford Sheare, 2008). Methodological discussions around transcription and interview practice similarly demonstrate how bodily communication shapes the production and interpretation of knowledge (Chadwick, 2017; Sandelowski, 1994).

The fourth dimension focuses on the body in interaction, emphasising embodiment as socially situated and relational. From this perspective, bodily actions and experiences are understood as embedded within wider social conventions, interactional practices, and spatial-temporal relations (Vannini, 2016). Embodied Inquiry therefore investigates how bodies interact with other bodies, environments, rhythms, and social structures, requiring attention to movement, positioning, gesture, and social context (Gibson & Vom Lehn, 2020). Research within this dimension includes analyses of movement-based therapies and practices such as dance movement therapy, which explore the reciprocal relationship between movement, emotion, and bodily experience (Hartley, 1989; Fogel, 2009; Leder, 1990). Together, these four dimensions illustrate how Embodied Inquiry positions the body as central to meaning-making, communication, relationality, and the production of knowledge.

A commitment to Embodied Inquiry is foundational to re-centring the body because it recognises that knowledge is always produced through lived, sensory, and relational experience rather than detached cognition alone. Embodied Inquiry provides the philosophical and methodological grounding for attending to the researcher's and participant's bodies as active contributors to the research process (Ellingson, 2017; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). In this sense, corporeal praxis represents the practical enactment of Embodied Inquiry by deliberately bringing bodily awareness, sensory engagement, movement, and affect into qualitative research. Such an approach challenges the longstanding absence of the body within academic knowledge production and creates space for recognising the diversity, vulnerability, and situatedness of "real" bodies within research encounters (Shilling, 2012; Haraway, 1988).

3. Corporeal praxis: a critical discussion

Corporeal praxis offers a critical response to dominant assumptions about how knowledge should be produced within qualitative research. Although embodiment has become increasingly visible within contemporary methodological discussions, academic research continues to privilege forms of knowing associated with rationality, coherence, and detachment, even though forms of disembodiment limit the analytical possibilities of qualitative research. When bodily experience is excluded from methodological reflection, important aspects of knowledge production remain invisible. Embodied approaches challenge these limitations by foregrounding the researcher's corporeal involvement in the research process. Recognising embodiment allows researchers to reflect on how power relations, social norms, and cultural expectations influence bodily interactions in research settings (Wacquant, 2004). Theoretical traditions such as phenomenology, feminist epistemology, and Embodied Inquiry have challenged the separation of mind and body by arguing that knowledge emerges through situated and lived experience (Haraway, 1988; Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Grosz, 1994). Haraway's (1988) critique of the "god trick" of disembodied objectivity is particularly significant because it demonstrates how claims to universal knowledge often conceal specific social and political standpoints. Issues of normativity and exclusion become more visible when attention is given to bodies in research.

The notion of the "normal" academic body is central to this discussion. Not all bodies are equally accepted within academic environments or research contexts. Gender, race, disability, age, and physical appearance can influence how researchers are perceived and how they navigate fieldwork (Haraway, 1988; Grosz, 1994). Academic institutions often operate through implicit assumptions about bodily capacity and acceptable scholarly behaviour. The ideal researcher is commonly imagined as intellectually productive, emotionally controlled, physically resilient, and continuously available for work. By presenting itself as universal, the normal academic body obscures how knowledge production is shaped by embodied positionality, power relations, and situated experiences (Haraway, 1988; Grosz, 1994). Additionally, institutional norms function through repetition, making some bodies appear natural and compatible with academic spaces while rendering others disruptive or out of place (Ahmed, 2021). Disability scholars have argued that such expectations are fundamentally shaped by ableist assumptions that privilege bodies capable of conforming to institutional norms of productivity and endurance (Goodley, 2017; Dolmage, 2017). The apparent neutrality of the academic subject therefore masks forms of exclusion that marginalise disabled, chronically ill, neurodivergent, ageing, or otherwise non-normative bodies. Corporeal praxis therefore has important political implications. By acknowledging embodied differences, researchers can challenge assumptions about who is recognised as a legitimate knowledge producer.

However, corporeal praxis should not be treated as an uncomplicated solution to disembodied knowledge production.

Critical discussions of standpoint epistemology caution against assuming that embodied experience automatically produces more truthful or politically progressive knowledge (Alcoff, 1991; Haraway, 1988). Embodied perspectives remain partial, situated, and shaped by broader social relations. There is therefore a risk that embodiment becomes romanticised within qualitative research, particularly when reflexivity is reduced to performative disclosures of vulnerability that leave institutional structures unchanged. Embodiment can easily become incorporated into dominant academic practices as another marker of methodological sophistication without challenging the systems that privilege some forms of bodily participation over others.

Corporeal praxis becomes meaningful only when it critically interrogates the norms through which academic legitimacy is produced. Traditional methodological approaches often position the body as a source of bias that threatens rigour and objectivity. From this perspective, bodily responses such as discomfort, emotion, or fatigue are treated as distractions from analytical reasoning. Embodied inquiry challenges this assumption by arguing that bodily responses can reveal important dimensions of social interaction and knowledge production (Ellingson, 2017; Finlay, 2006). Yet critics may question whether emphasising embodiment risks undermining methodological consistency or encouraging excessive subjectivity. Such concerns reflect longstanding tensions within qualitative research regarding the relationship between experience, interpretation, and validity.

Rather than dismissing these critiques, corporeal praxis requires a more nuanced understanding of embodiment. Bodily sensations do not provide direct access to truth because experiences are mediated through culture, language, memory, and power relations. Merleau-Ponty (2012) himself emphasised that perception is always relational and situated rather than purely individual. Corporeal praxis therefore does not reject intellectual analysis in favour of bodily intuition. Instead, it recognises that cognition, affect, and sensation are interconnected dimensions of interpretation. Finlay (2006) similarly argues that reflexivity involves continuous negotiation between subjective experience and critical analysis rather than the elimination of subjectivity altogether.

One important contribution of corporeal praxis lies in its capacity to expose the hidden labour of research. Academic writing often presents inquiry as orderly, coherent, and primarily cognitive. The embodied work of conducting fieldwork, managing emotional strain, travelling, coping with exhaustion, or navigating inaccessible environments is frequently erased from published accounts. Pink (2009, 2015) argues that fieldwork is fundamentally sensory and spatial, while Ingold (2011) suggests that knowledge develops through movement and practical engagement rather than detached observation. Corporeal praxis therefore challenges the abstraction of research by drawing attention to the temporal, affective, and sensory conditions through which knowledge is produced.

In practical terms, corporeal praxis may involve researchers attending systematically to their bodily experiences during research encounters. Sensations such as tension, anxiety, fatigue, or excitement can provide insight into relational dynamics and power structures operating within the field. Wacquant's (2004) ethnographic participation in boxing demonstrates how bodily immersion can generate forms of understanding inaccessible through observation alone. Similarly, researchers experiencing discomfort or vulnerability during interviews may become aware of ethical tensions, unequal power relations, or emotional complexities that remain absent within textual transcripts.

To this end, corporeal praxis may also involve the use of alternative and multimodal forms of expression capable of engaging sensory and embodied dimensions of experience. Conventional academic writing privileges verbal abstraction and linear argumentation, often limiting the representation of bodily and affective experience. Researchers working within sensory and embodied methodologies have therefore explored visual methods, movement-based practices, creative writing, sound, and sensory ethnography as ways of engaging with embodied knowledge (Pink, 2009, 2015; Ingold, 2011). These approaches acknowledge that communication occurs through gesture, rhythm, silence, spatiality, and atmosphere in addition to language.

And yet, alternative methods are also not automatically inclusive. Movement-based and sensory approaches may unintentionally reproduce exclusions if they assume particular bodily capacities or forms of participation. Disability scholars caution that embodiment must not be conceptualised through universal assumptions about sensory experience or physical engagement (Goodley, 2017). Corporeal praxis therefore requires ongoing attention to accessibility, participation, and power relations within research design. Researchers must critically consider whose bodies are centred, whose experiences are legitimised, and which forms of expression are recognised as academically valid.

Ultimately, corporeal praxis is significant because it unsettles assumptions about neutrality, productivity, and bodily normality within qualitative research. It exposes how academic knowledge production has historically depended upon the abstraction of the body while simultaneously relying upon normative assumptions about bodily capacity and control. Embracing embodiment encourages researchers to confront discomfort and failure as productive aspects of inquiry. Corporeal praxis invites experimentation with new forms of engagement and reflection. Rather than avoiding uncertainty, researchers can treat unexpected bodily responses, such as tension, anxiety, or excitement, as signals that something significant is occurring within the research encounter. Through these practices, embodiment becomes not merely an object of analysis but a method of inquiry that reveals hidden dimensions of knowledge production. At the same time, corporeal praxis resists simplistic celebrations of embodiment by recognising that embodied knowledge is always partial, mediated, and politically situated. By foregrounding bodily difference, vulnerability, and sensory engagement, corporeal praxis creates possibilities for more reflexive and inclusive approaches to qualitative inquiry that acknowledge the realities of embodied research practice.

4. Contributions of corporeal praxis

Integrating corporeal praxis into qualitative research offers several important contributions. The following section outlines five interconnected key contributions of corporeal praxis as an extension of Embodied Inquiry within qualitative research. I demonstrate how a sustained focus on embodiment not only reframes how knowledge is understood, but also reshapes methodological practice, ethical responsibility, and political awareness in research contexts. Taken together, these contributions show how attending to the body is not an optional addition to qualitative inquiry, but a foundational element that informs how research is conducted, interpreted, and situated within broader structures of knowledge production.

4.1 Epistemological contribution

Corporeal praxis offers an important epistemological contribution by challenging the assumption that knowledge is produced primarily through rational detachment and abstract cognition. Instead, it foregrounds the body as a central condition of knowing and understanding. From this perspective, knowledge does not emerge solely through intellectual reasoning but through embodied engagement with the world. Human beings encounter, interpret, and make sense of reality through sensory perception, movement, affect, and relational interaction (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Corporeal praxis therefore shifts epistemological attention from the mind as an isolated site of cognition towards the body as an active participant in the production of knowledge.

4.2 Methodological and analytic contribution

Corporeal praxis offers a significant methodological contribution by expanding the scope of what qualitative research can attend to and how knowledge may be generated within research encounters. Traditional qualitative approaches have often prioritised verbal accounts, interview transcripts, and textual analysis as primary sources of data. While these methods remain important, embodied approaches argue that meaning is also communicated and experienced through gesture, movement, silence, rhythm, spatial relations, atmosphere, and sensory engagement (Ellingson, 2017). Corporeal praxis therefore encourages researchers to attend to dimensions of social life that may not be fully captured through language alone. This methodological orientation broadens the possibilities of qualitative inquiry by recognising the body as both a site of experience and a methodological resource. Such an approach moves beyond treating the body as background to research and instead positions embodiment as integral to the research process itself. Methods such as sensory ethnography, movement-based observation, visual documentation, and multimodal forms of expression become valuable tools for engaging with embodied and relational forms of knowledge (Pink, 2009, 2015).

A key practice within corporeal praxis is reflexive research journaling. Reflexive journals provide a structured space for researchers to document bodily sensations, emotional responses, sensory observations, and moments of discomfort or tension throughout the research process (Finlay, 2006). Rather than treating these experiences as irrelevant or subjective distractions, corporeal praxis recognises them as important analytical insights that can deepen understanding of research encounters. For example, noting feelings of unease during an interview or physical exhaustion within a field site may reveal underlying power dynamics, emotional intensities, or environmental conditions that shape the research context. Journaling therefore supports a more reflexive and transparent methodological process by making visible the embodied dimensions of inquiry that are often excluded from traditional academic accounts.

As such, corporeal praxis does not replace established qualitative methods but extends them. It encourages researchers to integrate bodily awareness with critical reflection and analysis. In doing so, embodied approaches challenge narrow methodological assumptions about what constitutes valid data and create opportunities for more nuanced, sensory, and relational forms of qualitative research. Without embodiment, significant aspects of experience may be lost in analysis. Bodily cues, such as silence, posture, or proximity can reveal subtle dynamics within social interactions that verbal data alone may overlook.

4.3 Ethical contribution

Corporeal praxis offers an important ethical contribution by foregrounding responsibility, care, and relationality within qualitative research (Ellis, 2007, 2016). Traditional approaches to research ethics have often focused primarily on procedural concerns such as informed consent, anonymity, and institutional approval. While these remain essential, embodied approaches emphasise that ethics also emerge through lived interactions between researchers and participants. Research encounters involve real bodies situated within relationships shaped by emotion, vulnerability, power, and social difference. Recognising this challenges the assumption that ethical practice can be reduced to formal procedures alone.

A focus on embodiment encourages researchers to become more attentive to the emotional and relational dimensions of research interactions. Participants do not simply provide information but share experiences that may involve discomfort, trauma, fatigue, or personal vulnerability. Similarly, researchers themselves are emotionally and bodily implicated within the research process. Corporeal praxis therefore promotes an ethic of care that recognises the mutual and relational nature of qualitative inquiry.

This ethical orientation also highlights issues of power and accessibility. Attention to embodiment makes visible how research environments and methods may privilege certain bodies while excluding others. Researchers are therefore encouraged to consider how factors such as disability, age, gender, race, illness, or neurodivergence shape participation and experience within research settings.

Ethical practice within corporeal praxis involves creating more inclusive and responsive approaches that acknowledge bodily difference rather than assuming a universal participant or researcher experience. By recognising participants and researchers as embodied subjects rather than abstract sources of data, corporeal praxis encourages more reflexive, compassionate, and accountable forms of qualitative research.

4.4 Political contribution

Corporeal praxis offers a political contribution by making visible how power, normativity, and inequality are inscribed within both research practices and academic knowledge production. A focus on embodiment disrupts the assumption that research is neutral or detached, showing instead that all knowledge emerges from situated bodies that are differentially valued within institutional and social hierarchies. Corporeal praxis encourages researchers to critically examine how their own bodies are positioned within these relations and how such positioning shapes what can be known, said, or recognised as legitimate knowledge. This political dimension becomes especially evident in relation to normativity within academic environments. As previously discussed, the figure of the “normal” academic body is not neutral but reflects historically privileged ideals of able bodiedness, productivity, and emotional control. Corporeal praxis exposes how these norms structure participation in research and academia by privileging certain bodies while marginalising others. Bodies that do not conform to these expectations, including those marked by disability, chronic illness, neurodivergence, ageing, or fatigue, are often rendered less visible or less legitimate within knowledge production processes. In this sense, embodiment becomes a site where inclusion and exclusion are actively produced and maintained.

By foregrounding embodied positionality, corporeal praxis also challenges hierarchies of knowledge that privilege abstraction over lived experience. It highlights how intellectual authority is often tied to disembodied performances of objectivity that obscure the material and bodily conditions through which knowledge is produced. This has implications for how researchers understand authority, credibility, and expertise. Rather than assuming a universal or detached standpoint, corporeal praxis insists that knowledge is always shaped by embodied difference and social location.

Corporeal praxis also draws attention to broader institutional and structural conditions that shape which bodies are enabled or constrained within research environments. Issues of access, mobility, sensory environment, and institutional expectation all play a role in determining who can participate fully in academic life. In this way, embodiment becomes a lens through which wider systems of power can be interrogated. By reframing embodiment as a political condition of knowledge production rather than a secondary or personal characteristic of researchers and participants, corporeal praxis demonstrates that bodies are not only involved in research but are actively shaped by and implicated in relations of power. In making these dynamics visible, corporeal praxis opens up possibilities for more critical, inclusive, and accountable forms of qualitative inquiry.

4.5 Practical contribution

Finally, corporeal praxis offers a practical contribution by drawing attention to the lived conditions under which qualitative research is actually conducted and by foregrounding sustainability, care, and researcher wellbeing as integral to methodological practice rather than peripheral concerns. In many academic contexts, research is still organised around assumptions of continuous productivity, cognitive endurance, and emotional detachment. These expectations can obscure the physical and emotional demands involved in fieldwork, analysis, and writing, particularly when research involves prolonged engagement with participants, challenging environments, or emotionally charged material.

By recognising research as an embodied practice, corporeal praxis makes visible the limits of researcher capacity and the importance of attending to bodily signals such as fatigue, stress, or emotional overload. Embodiment in qualitative inquiry requires acknowledging that researchers are not detached observers but fully implicated participants whose bodies shape and are shaped by the research process (Ellingson, 2017). This has direct practical implications for how research is designed, paced, and supported. For example, incorporating rest periods into fieldwork schedules, allowing time for reflective writing, and recognising the cognitive and emotional labour involved in analysis can help create more sustainable research practices.

A focus on embodiment also encourages the use of reflexive strategies that support ongoing awareness of researcher wellbeing. Practices such as embodied journaling, sensory reflection, and affective note-taking can help researchers monitor their physical and emotional states throughout the research process. This is not simply a matter of personal self-care but a methodological consideration, as the researcher's embodied condition influences perception, interpretation, and engagement with data. Recognising this interdependence allows researchers to make more informed decisions about when to pause, adjust methods, or seek support.

Corporeal praxis also challenges the normalisation of overwork within academic culture. By emphasising that knowledge production is materially and bodily situated, it questions expectations that researchers should continually push beyond physical and emotional limits in the pursuit of productivity. Instead, it encourages research practices that are paced, responsive, and attentive to sustainability over time. This includes recognising that different bodies have different capacities and constraints, and that these differences should be accommodated rather than overlooked within research planning and institutional expectations.

In this sense, the practical contribution of corporeal praxis extends beyond individual wellbeing to broader questions of how research environments are structured. It invites consideration of how institutions can better support embodied researchers through flexible timelines, accessible fieldwork arrangements, and recognition of emotional labour as part of scholarly work.

5. Final considerations

The integration of embodiment into qualitative research represents a significant shift in how knowledge production is conceptualised and practised. Moving from disembodied knowledge toward corporeal praxis challenges long-standing assumptions about objectivity, neutrality, rigour, and disembodied knowledge. Simultaneously, the shift to corporeal praxis builds on broader societal and scholarly developments towards recognising bodily difference, disability, and the situated nature of experience. It responds to growing demands within and beyond academia to acknowledge that bodies are not uniform, abstract, or interchangeable, but diverse, materially situated, and differentially enabled within institutional and social structures. In doing so, corporeal praxis reinforces the argument that no research is ever produced outside of embodied, partial, and contextually embedded conditions of knowing.

In this article, I have argued that the dominance of the normal academic body and the privileging of abstraction have contributed to forms of temporal and spatial disembodiment within scholarly research and that these practices obscure the embodied labour, relational dynamics, and sensory experiences that shape qualitative inquiry. I offer Embodied Inquiry as an alternative framework that recognises the body as an epistemic condition. My article contributes to the field by offering a coherent articulation of how embodied inquiry can be translated into concrete methodological, ethical, political, and practical orientations through corporeal praxis. It is both an analytical framework and a methodological invitation to rethink what counts as knowledge, who is recognised as a knower, and how research is enacted. By emphasising practice rather than representation alone, embodied approaches reveal how knowledge emerges through lived engagement with research contexts. Corporeal praxis provides a practical pathway for implementing these insights. By embracing joy, experimentation, discomfort, and failure, researchers can develop more reflexive and responsive methodological practices. Importantly, corporeal praxis does not weaken methodological rigour. Instead, it encourages deeper reflexivity regarding the conditions under which knowledge is produced. By acknowledging embodiment, qualitative research can produce knowledge that is more attentive to lived experience, relational complexity, and the material realities of research encounters.

As such, I see my work as a call to action for individuals and institutions alike to critically re-examine the norms that structure research practice and to actively cultivate more inclusive, reflexive, and embodied approaches to knowledge production.

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Informed Consent: This work did not involve human participants or identifiable data; therefore, obtaining informed consent was not applicable.

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