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Citation for published version

Leigh, Jennifer S (2019) Exploring multiple identities: An embodied perspective on academic development and higher education research. *Journal of Dance and Somatic Practices*, 11 (1). pp. 99-114. ISSN 1757-1871.

DOI

https://doi.org/10.1386/jdsp.11.1.99_1

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Document Version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

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Exploring multiple identities: An embodied perspective on academic development and higher education research

Abstract

In this paper I discuss how my background as a somatic movement therapist and educator has informed my identity and current work as a higher education (HE) researcher and academic developer, or teacher of HE. I explore what it means to come from a non-traditional home discipline, and to work in a non-unified field within academia. How does it impact on the academic credibility, and the practical choices of methodology and dissemination? What might a new, less traditional home discipline bring to HE research, and what problems might arise for a researcher wanting to draw on less known or regarded methods, practices or theories of research?

Within somatic movement and education the ethos of embodiment, that is an awareness of the importance of the body, underlies all theory and practice. Elements of this ethos can also be found across many disciplines within academia.

HE is a non-unified field that has been described as atheoretical or without an overarching theoretical base. It attracts researchers from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds, and yet draws strongly on social science and hard science descriptions of rigour, validity and what is considered knowledge and research.

In this paper I take a reflective and embodied approach to consider how this impacts on issues of credibility working in HE, drawing on conversations with other HE researchers and academic developers, and the consequences and tensions that result.

Key words

Embodiment, Credibility, Somatic, Movement, HE research, Academic development, interdisciplinary

Introduction

When I first began to write this paper two years ago I wanted to use it to navigate and reflect on a transition into a new post as an academic developer and Higher Education (HE) researcher, and my personal motivations as an early career researcher. I wanted my teaching and research to continue along lines that were congruent with my background in somatic education. I wanted to be credible with the academics with whom I work, without losing the integrity of my previous focus on authentic and embodied experience. In this paper I reflect on these, and draw on conversations from other academic developers and higher education researchers combining a phenomenological and autoethnographic research in order to write from my somatic and lived experience of working within academia and coming from a somatics background.

In the last few months I have attended several academic conferences, disseminating the findings and thoughts from a study funded by the Society for Research into Higher

Education that set out to explore embodied academic identity¹. Within the study I took an autoethnographic and phenomenological approach to explore how academics with an embodied or somatic practice experienced and expressed the tensions they felt between their practice and their academic work. I have shared this work at methodological conferences, because I used innovative, creative and embodied research methods. I have shared it at HE conferences because the focus of study is academic identity. I have been asked to contribute to feminist books. I have also shared my work at anthropological and historical conferences that focused on the praxis of research and the body. In all of these situations I found myself feeling the need to justify who I am, and why I am choosing to research into these issues in these ways. Most recently I found myself saying “I’m not an anthropologist”, “I’m not a feminist scholar” and “I’m not a historian” in order to position myself in my work and in respect to that of the audience.

Before I became an academic I was a somatic movement therapist and educator and a yoga teacher. This impacts on and influences my identity and my academic work in myriad ways, most recognisably in my emphasis on embodiment, and embodied experience. However, it is not always easy to explain this background, as the terms ‘somatic movement therapist’ and ‘embodiment’ do not necessarily mean the same across the academy. In fact, in my experience, if I am speaking to an audience of anyone who is *not* familiar with it already, ‘somatic movement therapist’ is nothing but jargon, whilst embodiment might be a recognisable though contested term (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). Embodiment might be used to mean body image, ‘body work’ by way of the clothes we wear or body modifications we

¹ Please see Leigh, 2019a and Leigh (forthcoming) for findings of this study.

choose, or the physical fact of having a meaty breathing body to carry a disembodied 'us' around in. Given the highly competitive and critical nature of academia, a particular and specific working environment and culture, I want to reflect on what it means to be authentic (that is in the sense of being and working in a mode that is emotionally appropriate, significant and responsible) to the somatic and embodied background I have come from, and still work within the academy in a field that is not closely aligned to somatics such as dance or drama.

The word somatic is intrinsically linked to embodiment, and is defined by Hanna as having "evolved to mean the living body in its wholeness" (1990 p. 6). To be whole, and to be living does not mean to be perfect. It is an inclusive concept. It means developing a consciousness about where in the process one is on the path seeking "to increase the sense of the embodied self, 'the body experienced from within', and to cultivate awareness and harmony within the body-mind-spirit continuum" (Hartley, 2004, p. 12). Somatic education is "the educational field which examines the structure and function of the body as processes of lived experience, perception and consciousness" (Linden, 1994). It can incorporate developmental movement patterns, the emotional content present in movement, the physiology of the body and the words in which we speak of and process movement (Bainbridge-Cohen, 1993). Somatic movement practices are the forms by which we might achieve somatic education, and could include some dance forms (Adler, 2002; Da'Oud, 1995), bodywork such as Alexander Technique (Schirle, 1987), Rolfing (Feitis, 1978), Feldenkrais (Feldenkrais, 1981), Yoga (Iyengar, 1966), and breathwork (Rosen, 2002) among others.

Somatics can be explained to those unfamiliar with the term and the practices as a way of encouraging someone to be more mindful. Mindfulness is a term that has become more main-streamed and understood within society. However, I acknowledge that the conflation of the two is somewhat controversial. Langer (2000) offers a psychological view of mindfulness, whilst Zen Buddhism offers an alternative definition (Kabat-Zinn, 2004). Both traditions historically and generally agree that mindfulness is rooted in the fundamental capacities of consciousness. Somatic movement practices allow us to pay more attention to our mind and body, so that we do not become 'mindless' (Langer, 1989).

Mindlessness, according to Langer, can be caused, by among other things: being trapped by categories; automatic behaviour; or acting from a single perspective or focus on outcomes. In contrast, the education system in the West, including of course HE and academic culture, often have a focus on goals rather than the process by which they are achieved (Jones, 2006). It is an arena in which mindlessness abounds (Lu, Tito, & Kentel, 2009). Outcome orientations can induce mindlessness throughout life, as we do not have to pay attention if a situation is believed to be familiar and so only notice minimal cues relating to carrying out the scenario. Conversely, if a situation is strange to us, then we can become preoccupied and so miss nuances of our own and others' behaviour and so become mindless with respect to the immediate situation. With regards to education and research, if facts are presented unconditionally, then mindlessness is encouraged and accepted truths are not challenged.

Somatics is not a well-established academic field. Even 'embodiment', a key underpinning assumption, is a contested term (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015). However elements of somatics

and embodiment can be found across assorted and more traditionally academic disciplines including philosophy (Merleau-Ponty, 2002), dance (Claid, 2016), drama (Spatz, 2015), physical education (Wellard, 2010), sociology (Back, 2007), psychology (Totten, 2003), ethnography (Pink, 2006; 2007; 2009), and science studies (Latour, 1999). The importance of the body, emotion, and movement within research, ideas directly connected to the theory that the mind is embodied can be seen with the growing interest in the 'affective', often investigated through creative and innovative research methodologies and dissemination (see for example: Lyon, 2016; Bartlett, 2015; Mannay & Edwards, 2013; Tarr, Ganzalez-Polledo, & Cornish, 2017).

HE research

My current role is as a lecturer of HE and academic practice. This means that my work consists of academic development (working with new academics and supporting them with their teaching and practice) and HE research. The pressures on new academics are well documented (Fanghanel, 2012; Fitzgerald, White, & Gunter, 2012; Debowski, 2012), as are the difficulties of combining academic development work, research and teaching (McAlpine & Akerlind, 2010; McAlpine, Amundsen, & Jazvac-Martek, 2010), and the challenges of negotiating the hierarchies of academic tribes and disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 1989). Academics in the UK are subject to a number of metrics and measures to ascertain the quality of their work. One of these, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) was first introduced as a Research Assessment Exercise in the 1980s as a light touch exercise to see that funded research proved value for money, and to act as a system for portioning out additional resources. The REF has expanded and morphed and is now seen by many academics as a burden and infringement (Watermeyer, 2016). It has contributed to an

academic culture which privileges research over teaching. It involves rating research articles or outputs onto a starred grading system to assess quality from 4* (quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour), 3* (internationally excellent), 2* (recognised internationally) down to 1* (recognised nationally) and unclassified (falls below the standard of nationally recognised work or does not meet the published definition of research) (REF, 2014). Research has become more than just a question of interesting, novel or important questions to be answered. It also has to fit within a 'REF story' for a department, presenting their cohesive approach to research, and meet the requirements of producing the requisite number of acceptable research outputs to a nominal 3* or 4* standard, as these are the only quality ratings that attract funding or recognition.

HE is a field unlike more traditional academic disciplines in that it has no overarching approaches or theories or viewpoints that define it. I use the term 'field' because HE has been seen to evolve as a field (Jones, 2012), with the issue of whether it is a legitimate and academic discipline or not discussed widely (notably in a special issue of *Higher Education Research and Development* published in 2012). In brief, HE research is an essentially contested concept (Hanckock, Clegg, Crossouard, Kahn, & Weller, 2015). This means that there is no agreed, fixed definition as to what it constitutes (Gingell & Winch, 1999). Unlike hard sciences, where you might expect to see an experiment and its results, or philosophy, where you would expect a theoretical essay, HE research can encompass these and more. HE in all its conglomerations is the *subject* of our research, by whatever means, rather than a lens by which we view the world. Unlike sociologists for example, HE researchers do not have a defined view of the world that focuses the way they approach research (Tight, 2012). Instead, HE research contains a huge variety; in terms of methodology, theoretical

approach, and subject (for example including HE policy, pedagogy, student experience, student learning, and research into the lives of those who work within HE institutions). This can be a positive – if there is no definition of HE research, then theoretically we can take any approach. However, the subjective grading of research in the REF means that traditional and recognised approaches are often seen more favourably by departments than ‘risky’ novel or innovative work.

It seems that those that move into the field of HE research are a bit of a strange breed. We encompass academics, teachers, practitioners, and researchers. Some are employed as academic developers. Not all academic developers are required to undertake HE research. There is an ongoing discussion of job titles, contract types, and academic pressures in various institutions across the UK and worldwide (Bennett et al, 2016; Fraser & Ling, 2013; Kensington-Miller, Renc-Roe, & Moron-Garcia, 2015). The need for academic developers to be active HE researchers is not always seen as a positive thing (Gibbs, 2013). There is arguably a need for research driven practice within academic development as in any other field (Clegg, 2009). If academic developers have no personal experience of the pressures of teaching and researching within an HE environment, and are not under the same expectations to be productive in terms of research outputs, impact and grant income, then it may be difficult for the academics they are meant to develop to relate to them and to see them as credible.

Other HE researchers are more focused within their own discipline, and dabble a little into the scholarship of teaching and learning, by researching pedagogy, case studies or action research. This type of work within HE with a focus on teaching has become an area of more

interest with the introduction of another metric to measure quality – the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The TEF focuses on metrics related to teaching excellence (Wood & Feng, 2017). Despite concerns around the difficulties of recognising and identifying ‘excellent teaching’ (Prodzynski, 2017), growing numbers of academics who are employed on scholarship and teaching contracts (that is they are not paid to research and their work is not considered as part of the REF), are still keen to publish and disseminate in order to progress their careers. This work is also HE research.

From conversations with academic developers and HE researchers that came about as part of a research project into programmes for academic development, I became aware of the importance a home discipline has for an individual in their on-going work, as well as on personal perceptions of academic identity and credibility as an academic. This paper reflects on some data from that study, and offers a personal reflection on what I felt as they shared their stories on how their home discipline impacted on their perceptions of identity and credibility. Given my own home discipline of somatics, with, as explained, a variable degree of academic credibility, I was consciously aware of my own reactions to others discussing the need for credibility as part of their academic identity.

Conversations and reflections on credibility, identity and academicity

The conversations reported here were part of a larger study that took a phenomenological approach to exploring the perceptions of those involved in a suite of postgraduate programmes at one HE Institute in the South-East of England in 2013/14. There were eight participants in total, including members of the academic development team responsible for

delivering a programme to new academics. For this paper I was interested in the conversations that reflected how they positioned the work they did and how they identified themselves as academics, as well as my own reactions to their words.

I chose to take a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is that form of enquiry concerned with the nature of human experience, and is a rigorous qualitative approach used to study everyday human activities and experiences (Leder, 1990; Merleau-Ponty, 2002).

Given that somatics are also concerned with increasing conscious awareness of our experiences, phenomenology is a methodological approach that is congruent with a somatic approach. As can be seen in this paper, I also take a reflexive and autoethnographic stance (Ellis, 2004) as I was interested in how the themes and conversations played out against my own experiences, and not just the experiences of those I spoke to.

After ethical approval, I conducted a series of conversations with the participants. My focus was on the experience of these individuals, and I used long semi-structured interviews. These were transcribed verbatim, and analysed from a phenomenological perspective (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). I immersed myself in the data, committing to understanding and interpreting the participants' experiences.

The participants ranged in age from early twenties to late fifties. All participants were given pseudonyms chosen from the most popular names in the US in 2014. The conversations were wide-ranging. They were asked to speak about how they came to do their work, and covered issues including their identity as academics and the need for academic credibility.

However, not all of the participants reflected on these issues. The four that did are shared here, along with my reflections. Ava and Olivia were members of the academic development team. Emily was the head of the department in which the team was located. Mason was a successful academic within another discipline who had been seconded to the team.

Identity

Having had questions around my own positioning as an academic and academic developer, I wanted to find out how the members of the academic development team positioned themselves relative to their work. Ava had many years experience within the historical context of academic development programmes and qualifications. She had had a long history with academic development from its first inception. She had been involved with an informal pre-1997 academic development programme “it was very much a bunch of us who decided that this was important and significant.” She went on to explain that through the 90s the universities became more aware of the importance of teaching and learning, and began to develop their own programmes. This reflects the growth in scale of such development through this period, driven by grants available to develop teaching and learning strategies (Gibbs, 2013). Ava very definitely saw her role as an academic developer. I found this interesting, and a lot of what she said resonated with me, as she was passionate about the importance of good teaching, and development for those in academia. I believe that her teaching was not necessarily ‘embodied’ or at least did not come from an embodied theoretical perspective, however she was engaged, and engaging with what and how she taught.

In contrast, Olivia delineated areas of her role. It was very important to her to separate out the instrumental teaching she did from the more academic and research orientated work. She spoke of the academic development programme “the motivation for the students is that they’re there for their professional development...whereas ... the [Master’s] you know, that might happen but...it’s completely irrelevant”. I felt that there was a status issue here, with research being seen as superior to learning and teaching. This prioritising of research is reflected across universities within the academy, with promotion and progression more commonly rewarded for research than teaching success. It was an interesting tension for me, as obviously I was having these conversations as part of a funded research project, and I had/have a requirement to produce research outputs as part of my job role, and yet fundamentally I am passionate about and enjoy teaching. I wondered whether the focus on research alienated and othered those who genuinely loved to teach and to facilitate learning?

Mason believed passionately in the importance of good teaching, and reflected on exactly this issue of it having a low status within academia.

“I remember times when people said ‘oh you are interested in teaching? Obviously you didn’t make it in research then.’ And if you said you were passionate in teaching it was something like a dirty word that you would only say in the toilet or so. A recent example is that a senior member of staff referred to people on teaching contracts as ‘little people’.”

This view of those who dedicate their academic careers to developing others could explain the reluctance that Olivia had to identify herself as an academic developer.

An academic's home discipline can shape a researcher's subsequent career (Hottenrott & Lawson, 2015), we learn and embody tacit knowledge that allows us to recognize what is appropriately academic (Peterson, 2007). Ava and Olivia both referred to their 'home' disciplines when describing their journey into academic development. As discussed, my home discipline feels very much in somatics, as that is the practice that has stayed with me and remains part of my day-to-day life. As a perspective on academic work, an embodied, mindful or somatic outlook might encourage us to be more aware of the emotions, feelings, images and sensations that we, our students, and our research participants experience. As researchers, it affects the questions that we ask, and the ways in which we go about answering them and what we see to be valid as research. Brew and Lucas call for more research about research and researcher identity (2009). In my case it has resulted in an emphasis on embodied and creative approaches to answer explicitly embodied research questions (Leigh, 2019a; forthcoming a).

Credibility

Tied up with ideas of identity is the issue of credibility. A lot of the credibility the academics I spoke to attached to themselves and the programmes they taught on concerned their research or lack of it. Academic development and higher education research are not areas that attract much funding, or other markers of academicity. The idea of 'academicity' can be related to how easily a subject can be recognised as academic (Jackson, 2000), with HE research being seen as more academic than academic development (Fraser & Ling, 2013). Yet what is appropriately academic does not necessarily equate to markers of success, job satisfaction and well-being. Both Olivia and Ava spoke of their identity as academics, and the need to be recognised as academic by those they worked with.

The director of the programme, Emily, said that she believed, “we have a programme that’s research led”, which in her view greatly enhanced its impact and credibility, though she added “I still think there’s probably opportunities for us to be even more linked within the discipline and more research focused.” I believe that she wanted the programme to have credibility both as a practical thing for developing good teachers within the institution, but also as an academic qualification and course in its own right. Practical experience does not seem to be rated as highly as academic knowledge (Harman, 2015). The academic rigour of the programme was important to Olivia:

“The reputation of what we do [here] is I think good but it’s been a very hard won good reputation and it’s taken an awful long time for us to win people over to what we do and I think the good reputation that we’ve got could be, could unravel very very quickly”.

The continuation of academic rigour and credibility was vital to her continued confidence in the programme. I feel conflicted about this, in that although I agree that academic credibility is vital in programmes for academic development, I also feel they need to be of practical use and inspire the new academics they are designed to support. For me, this comes about through embodying the passion I feel for teaching, modelling teaching practices and conveying that through the way I ‘hold’ a room or guide a discussion as much as sharing the knowledge that I have from experience and research.

Ava commented on the need for credibility from the academics she worked with.

“If you have got a bunch of bright academics, or would be academics in a room, they will know what they would expect in their own discipline, and actually for the

[programme] to have serious street-cred, it needed to be very clear that there was serious academic underpinning”.

Ava believed that her credibility came through having the same pressures, and expectations placed on her as the academics she taught. Academic developers are often employed on academic related or professional services contracts, and sometimes similar programmes are delivered by human resources professionals with no experience of teaching at university level. Ava saw her credibility coming from her background and contractual obligations to produce high quality academic research and be engaged with scholarship as much as her teaching expertise and the content of the programme.

The role, work and identity of academics have changed since the early days of Ava’s career. Academics have to contextualize their identity in the framework of their workplace, and recent times have challenged values such as collegiality, collaborativity and academic freedom (Billot, 2010).

I feel that my pathway into academic development and teaching both gives and detracts from my credibility as an academic. My first degree was in Chemistry with Analytical Science. I then completed a 3-year yoga teacher training course, a year of post-certification studies specialising in peri-natal women and children with special needs, and a 3-year diploma in Integrative Bodywork and Movement Therapy that led to me being accredited as a somatic movement therapist and educator. My PhD was in Education and I explored the experiences of children’s sense of embodiment. My post-doctoral experience was in psychology. My post in academic development meant I effectively changed fields three times within a period of five years. I feel that my breadth of experience gives me credibility with academics from a wide range of disciplines which is useful for my academic development work.

With regard to the academicity or credibility of my research, I face an uphill battle as somatics is, in my experience, something that people 'get' or not. I sometimes feel that the very nature of what I do may result in other academics valuing my work less. In order to combat this in the past I found myself refraining from spending time on the floor or in a studio, and instead sitting more, reading more, writing more. When I wrote I cited many authors in attempts to show that my words had justification and a weight of evidence behind them. Whilst I was writing about embodied perspectives in an attempt to bring credibility to somatics within HE, my own health and well-being was being negatively affected by feeling as though I was stapled to a computer. I ended up feeling quite isolated, and at times disembodied. I felt as though the credibility of my work was being challenged as it was from the perspective of a new field, somatics, in the contested area of HE and academic development. Credibility and academicity seemed to be focused on the cognitive and intellectual achievements of academics, particularly in the current metric-driven climate.

Somatic identity as a basis for HE research

Initially when I set out to research my practice with children, I chose to take a phenomenological approach. In its application this method has similarities to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is a method that looks to explore how the participants make sense of their personal experiences of their world (Smith, 2008). IPA is a methodology most closely associated with health research and psychology, and not higher education. IPA has roots in phenomenology and hermeneutics. Smith (2011) describes IPA as a double hermeneutic, as the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying

to make sense of their experiences. It is a methodology that urges researchers “to listen and understand...collaboratively with researcher and participant. It urges us to trust” (Todorova, 2011, p. 37). IPA, like other qualitative research, values individual subjectives and voices that may otherwise be ignored or silenced. As a research method, it resonated most strongly with my already established way of working with clients or groups in my somatic practice. However, even with the focus on the subjective experience of research participants, I found myself wanting to engage more with the affective, embodied experiences and doing this through more creative, innovative and embodied research methods such as using art materials, metaphorical representations, video and film, and movement as a research tool (see figure 1). I have produced videos for conferences and for submission into journals (Leigh, Brown, & Blackburn, 2018; Leigh & Blackburn, 2018).

[figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 ‘Drowning’ a collage created as part of a research study exploring the tensions between embodied practice and academic identity funded by SRHE

When I work in this way, I find my own practice becomes foregrounded in my life. I need to feel embodied within my own flesh and receptive to my feelings, sensations and emotions if I want to work in a reflexive and autoethnographic way. I use the presence I gain from my practice within my research, to give me space for my thoughts and to make connections. As I become more settled in my body, and within my role in HE, it also becomes easier to integrate more elements of somatic work into my academic development and teaching. This might be through ensuring that I practice in the morning before a class so that I feel present with my students. I have also developed a module exploring reflexivity and reflective

practice in HE that explicitly brings the embodied into the academic and incorporates aspects of bodywork. I talk honestly and reflectively about my embodied approach to both research and teaching. The reception for this type of teaching or research is often mixed. In the classroom it can make people feel uncomfortable initially, although there has been growing interest with requests for me to lead workshops on embodied and creative research from organisations such as the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) and the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), as well as forthcoming books exploring embodied inquiry² and the borders of research³. In research it throws up methodological questions (McMillan, 2015) due to its inherent reflexive and participatory nature. Data created using more creative means is 'messy' and unconventional and does not fit well within traditional forms of analysis and dissemination, again leading to questions of academicity. At a recent conference where I screened a video essay from my study exploring embodied academic identity I was called 'deviant', because I was not reading from or presenting a paper.

These questions of academicity and home disciplines are particularly important in fields which are not well established or recognised, where academics migrate into them from a prior background as in academic development and HE. The 'deviancy' of arts-based, embodied or creative research, teaching and dissemination would not be questioned in many arts-based disciplines. Thus the role of disciplinary experiences and its impact on academic identity and work becomes important. Those who are contractually obliged (or have a desire) to research into aspects of HE are likely to draw on their disciplinary

² Leigh & Brown (forthcoming)

³ Leigh (forthcoming b)

grounding and current interests to shape their research. It is going to have a pivotal role in defining the how and why of research, if not the what. The what, as already explained, *has* to be HE in some vagary. Within HE research there is the added tension between the inherent interdisciplinarity of much of the work, and its lack of prestige. HE is interesting, as the conventional definitions of early career academics do not necessarily hold true (although these definitions are not always consistent e.g. eight years from award of PhD or six years from first academic post for the Arts and Humanities Research Council, but only four years postdoctoral academic research experience for Economic and Social Research Council). Those teaching or researching in HE may or may not have a PhD, and even if they are established within their own field, they may be new to researching within HE. So what happens, as in my case, if the home discipline is also a field that is rather new? Obviously I have reflected on the tensions and insecurity that I felt establishing myself as a credible researcher, and these are unlikely to have been apparent in the same way had I been within a more accepting discipline such as drama or dance with more of an understanding of somatics.

Discussion

My home discipline in somatics has been hugely influential in my work. For example, it led to the development and use of a mosaic of phenomenological research methods (Leigh, 2012). an interest in how embodiment can impact on developing effective reflective practice (Leigh & Bailey, 2013; Leigh, 2016), the expression and regulation of emotion (Leigh, 2017), and more recently research using creative methodologies in order to more accurately capture an embodied experience (Brown & Leigh, 2019; Leigh, 2019a; forthcoming a; Leigh et al., 2019). My embodied perspective has led me to be more creative

and playful in my approach to HE research (Brown & Leigh, 2019). The lack of traditional academic writing in my home field led to me reading across many disciplines, searching out work that I felt was congruent to my own, and editing a book that brought together these disciplinary perspectives (Leigh, 2019b). However, this increased feelings of not belonging wholly to one discipline, as I draw on theories and ideas more commonly associated with philosophy, sociology, physical education, dance or even science education. This breadth, whilst adding to my vocabulary and ability to transcend disciplinary boundaries, compounds feelings of a lack of academicity because whilst it is challenging to master the literature in one field, how much more challenging is it to master work across many?

The issues around 'getting' somatic education or not are reflected in research, some of my academic audience, be they colleagues, at a conference, reviewers or funders will just not understand my work or the point of it. There are ethical questions too. As a trained somatic therapist, used to working with private clients, I wonder about the place of artistic work or research and where the boundaries are between exploitation, intervention, and therapy⁴. The artifacts that my participants and I create, and the films we edit from the footage, can be considered to be stuff in their own right (Latour, 1999) as well as representations of experiences and tools for elucidating reflections. However, if we consider this 'data' as 'art' that brings up questions of ownership (does it belong to the participant or the researcher?), analysis (is it fair to analyse an artefact created in research as a piece of art; do we incorporate audience reaction into our analysis?) and dissemination (if we exhibit or screen our data, does it 'count' for the REF? Will a journal article publish full colour images or

⁴ This is the subject of a forthcoming book Leigh (forthcoming b).

include links to video?). With regard to the boundary between research and therapy, this is something that requires careful consideration. Much of the work I do now as research is similar to the work I used to do in private practice as part of a therapeutic process. In my experience creative and embodied research methods allow participants to become more honest and more vulnerable as they access deeper stories than they might choose to tell if they were merely answering interview questions (Brown & Leigh, 2019). Participants might find themselves sharing sensitive and personal information that goes beyond the anticipated outcomes of the study. Whilst this allows the researcher to gain rich data, it is unusual for researchers to have therapeutic training or support. If academics hearing about my work tried similar research approaches without this, could it lead to damage to participants and to the researchers themselves? There are ethical issues around the intention of the research and researcher (are they being exploitative or working in service to their participants?) the researcher's ability to hold the boundary for the research meeting to safeguard the participant, and the researcher's possibility to encounter burn-out, transference and projection.

The focus on movement and embodiment meant that my work had more in common with dance and arts researchers than many educationalists. I sometimes feel that the very nature of what I do may result in my peers in HE valuing my work less, particularly if their home discipline is very theory driven, or if their HE research focus is more policy based for example. HE is not a field that has yet accepted Practice as Research (Trimmingham, 2002). I have to try and persuade HE researchers that an embodied approach is of interest, whilst continually explaining what it is that I mean by an embodied approach. As an HE researcher and teacher I seem to have two options to combat this. The first, as I already reflected on

was to refrain from spending time on the floor or in a studio, and to try to increase the cerebral nature of my writing. This ended up with me feeling disembodied, inauthentic and unconnected to my work. How could I write about embodiment if I am not consciously moving?

The alternative, as I am doing now, is to actively seek out different academic audiences for my work, those who understand the underlying ethos and approach who might come from dance, drama, visual anthropology or feminist leanings. My practice is part of my work, and feeds into both my thinking and my writing. There are still tensions however. As well as my need to constantly justify my position as *not* a dancer, anthropologist or feminist to these audiences, there are implications within my own department. If my work diverges too much from my colleagues in method or manner, it may not fit within a cohesive REF story, may not be supported, and so attendance at conferences to audiences that would be interested in how somatics and embodiment transfer into HE are not funded. If I want to be an HE researcher then I have to mould my work to fit the demands of my employment whilst trying not to stray too far from the ethos and practice that underlies everything I want to do. If I want to be an HE teacher, I have to teach within a structured programme of modules. I want my research to continue along lines that are congruent with my background in somatic education, and my work as an academic developer. I want to be credible with the academics with whom I work, without losing the integrity of my previous focus on authentic and embodied experience. Somatic education, though not viewed as particularly academic, could provide approaches that have the potential to ameliorate the effects of the emotionally repressed, mindless (as opposed to mindful) culture often seen and

experienced in academia, and as such could be a valuable part of academic development programmes.

An embodied approach to HE and HE research could lead to one where the body, the feelings and the emotions of academic staff are allowed to exist, and to move away from Bloch's (2012) description of "the culture of Academia is one from which feelings are absent" (p 140). She says "academia emerges...as being a somewhat unpleasant workplace" (Bloch, 2012, p. 136). Cultivating mindfulness, and the skills of embodiment "may be important in disengaging individuals from automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behaviour patterns" (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 823). I intend to continue lines of enquiry from this embodied and somatic perspective, using a reflexive approach to exploring embodied expressions of academic identity and academic practice.

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