



Kent Academic Repository

Leigh, Jennifer S and Brown, Nicole (2021) *Embodied Inquiry as a Research Method*. . blog.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/91215/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<https://www.methodspace.com/blog/embodied-inquiry-as-a-research-method?rq=embodied>

This document version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

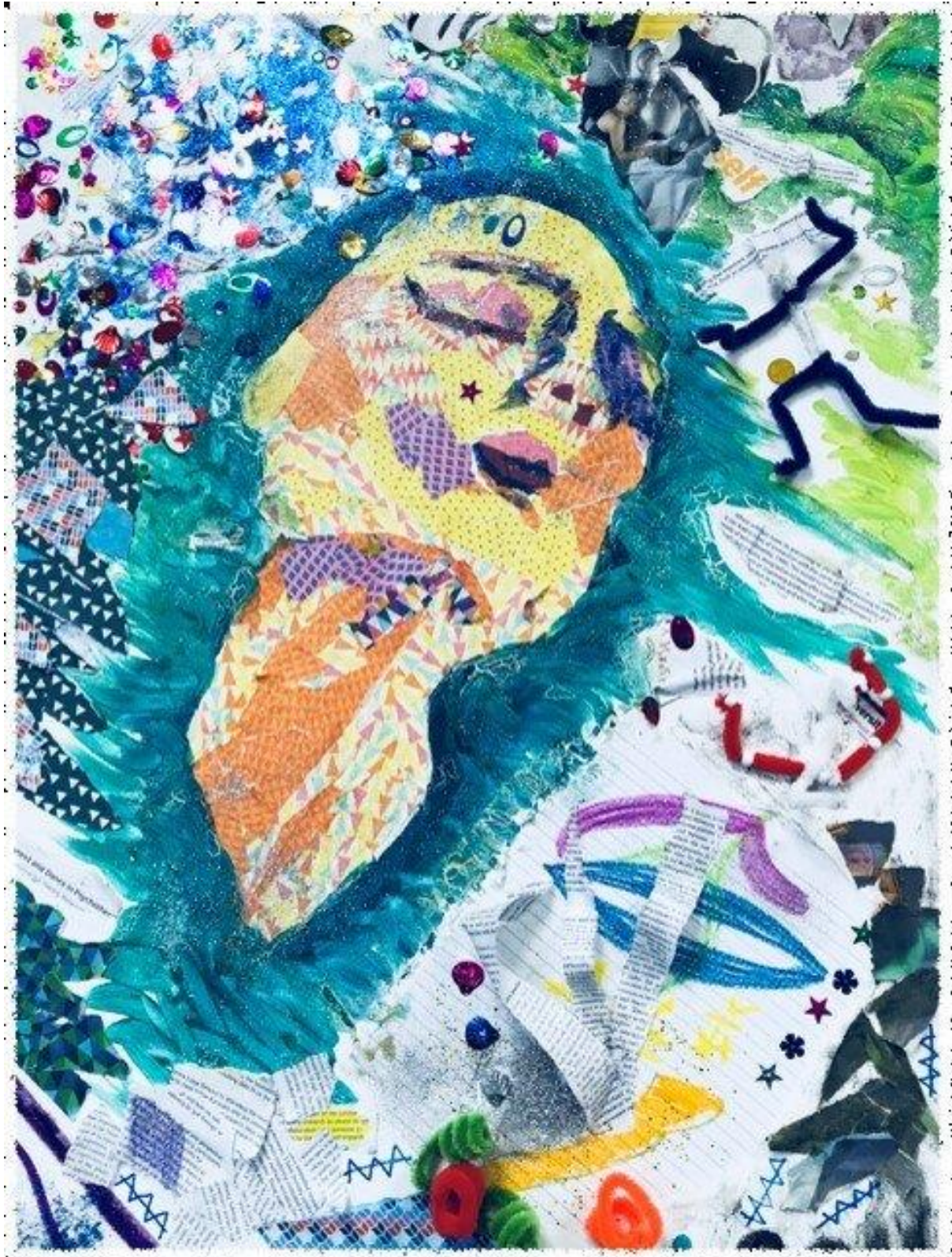
If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

Methods Innovation

Jul 13

We are kicking off a three-month focus on data analysis, starting with **Analyzing Words, Pictures, and Numbers** in July. This month we will have the opportunity to learn new ideas and practical skills from Mentors in Residence Stephen Gorard, Jean Breny, and Shannon McMorrow. Find the unfolding series through this [link](#).

In this post Jennifer Leigh and Nicole Brown introduce Embodied Inquiry, including a discussion of how to analyze data collected through this approach. Also see this [interview with Nicole Brown](#), for more about choosing to conduct research with creative methods.



Embodied Inquiry is an approach to research that privileges the lived, embodied experiences of the researcher and the researched. A fairly simple sentence to write for us, who have lived, breathed, worked on and in Embodied Inquiry, and utilised it as a research approach for years. However, for the uninitiated we are very aware that even in that one sentence there are many words that seem like

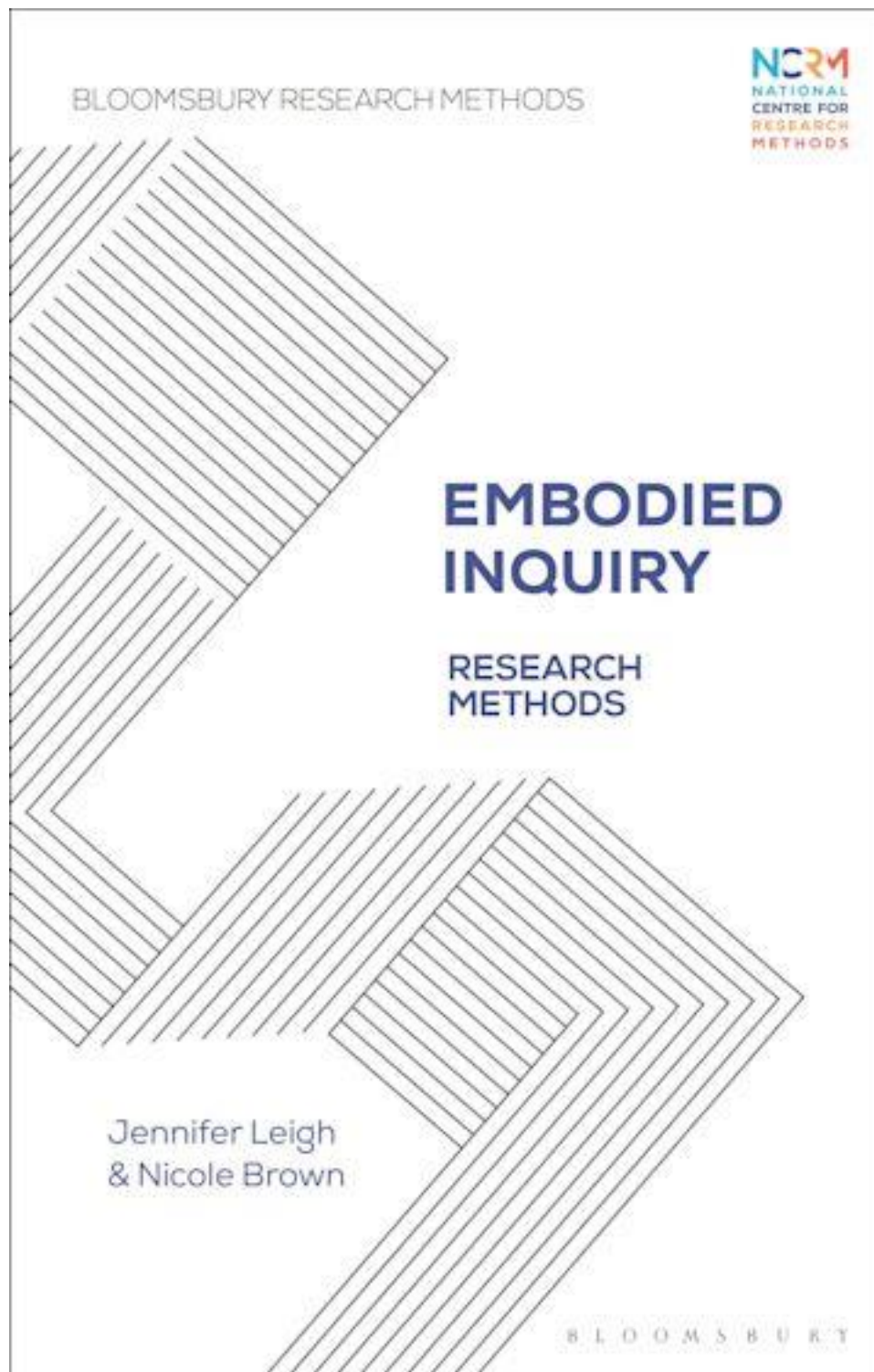
jargon, or have ambiguous meanings, with the result that it is hard for a researcher to know if what they are doing is actually Embodied Inquiry or not. This is true even more if you are new to the whole idea of doing research and what research actually looks like or feels like.

It would probably help to have a list of terms:

Approach to research: If research means the process of finding out the answers to a particular question or questions, then an approach to research means the way that we go about that process. It includes the ways in which we see and understand the world and come up with the questions in the first place. It includes the ways that we understand data, that we gather or collect data in order to find the answers to those questions. It includes not just the content of those answers, but the type of answers we are looking for. An approach to research also includes the ways in which we analyse our data, and then disseminate it to our audiences.

Privileges: Privilege is defined as an advantage given to a particular group. It has come to be associated with ideas of social justice and the request to '[check your privilege](#)'. If we say that a particular approach is privileged, it means that we are centering it, and focusing in on the ideas that are connected to and with it.

Lived, embodied, experiences: Lived experiences is easy to understand. Embodied is a word that is more contested, less well understood. Here we are using it to mean a process and a state of being where an individual is consciously self-aware of their body, their mind, their thoughts, feelings, sensations and proprioceptive responses. In real terms, this might mean being aware of your breathing, the way that you are sitting, the tension in your body, any pain or discomfort or feelings of ease. It includes the thoughts and emotions that you have as well as an awareness of where these come from or what they might be connected to.



So an *Embodied Inquiry* would mean an inquiry into something where at least one part of the research process foregrounds that embodied self-awareness, of either the person or people doing the research, or those who are being researched. The focus here is on embodied self-awareness. This does not mean that Embodied Inquiry needs to be done "in person". As the Covid-19 pandemic has hit, obviously a lot of research work was moved into an online, virtual space that is experienced as disembodied. However, just because we may live a felt

experience of disconnect, we still are and have bodies and can pay attention to them and the feelings, sensations, and emotions that arise from them.

Learn more from the new book from [Bloomsbury](#).

In our book, *Embodied Inquiry: Research Methods* we set out what an Embodied Inquiry might look like in terms of research design, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. We talk about the ways in which creative methods often resonate with Embodied Inquiries. We discuss ethics and common challenges. We also discuss what might and what might not be an Embodied Inquiry. We set out three principles that to us defined Embodied Inquiry: the *what*, *why*, and *how*. We said that an Embodied Inquiry focuses on the self in an on-going process of awareness and reflection in a non-judgemental way. We said that the starting point of an Embodied Inquiry is that the mind and body are connected. We said that conscious awareness and intent are the keys to conducting an Embodied Inquiry.

Not all Embodied Inquiries state explicitly that this is what they are, or that this is a framework that they are using. It might help to do a thought experiment or two to see what these principles might look like in practice.

Option 1: Studying Confidence and Imposter Syndrome

Let's think of a study focusing on confidence and imposter syndrome in early career researchers. We could explore this by asking participants to complete a standardised questionnaire to self-assess their imposter syndrome. We could observe them at work, rating their body language, and assessing the extent to which they appear confident, perhaps by videoing their interactions in a meeting and counting the numbers of times they make eye contact, and the duration of that contact. We could analyse these results statistically, and present them to show how different categories of early career researchers varied in their self-assessments and presentations of confidence and imposter syndrome. Despite the use of a creative method (video), and a focus on the body, this would not be an Embodied Inquiry.

Option 2: Studying Confidence and Imposter Syndrome

Alternatively, we could approach the same topic by incorporating a reflective journal of our own experiences. We could invite a group of early career researchers to participate in a collaborative collaging session to explore how they perceive their own levels of confidence and how they relate to ideas of imposter syndrome. We could ask participants to keep diaries of how they felt and experienced their own levels of confidence in an embodied way within

different scenarios, or to participate in a collaborative autoethnography sharing their experiences with others. We could return to our reflective journal throughout the analytic process, recording and questioning how other people's reflections resonated or were dissonant with our own. This is clearly an Embodied Inquiry.

Takeaways from the Examples

These two examples were written specifically to contrast ways of approaching a particular topic. We are not saying that an Embodied Inquiry is better than other ways of researching, but that they ask different questions, gather data, or analyse that data in a different way. We would like to add here that most of the activities described above can and have been undertaken as remote activities online via emails, social media posts and conference calls. Not all Embodied Inquiries will look the same, and not all will incorporate embodiment into every aspect of the research process, and that enables us to continue using Embodied Inquiry as an approach within the context of social distancing. The requirements to be reflexive, and self-aware are similar to those for other research approaches such as ethnography. It is possible to build Embodied Inquiry into a study that was designed without those principles, perhaps by focusing first on the embodied experiences of the researcher through an analytic process with data that is more traditional in terms of scope or method, or through taking an embodied approach to dissemination.