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## Theorizing bodily dialogs – reflection on knowledge production in phenomenological research

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Every aspect of research engages the body in some way.

**Purpose:** In this article the researchers discuss the epistemological challenges of engaging with lived experiences and the opportunities and challenges that arise in conjunction with the embodied aspects of interviewing, analysis and turning visual and oral research material into written text.

**Method:** The authors draw on experience from interviewing and reflect on how phenomenological philosophy of the body can both challenge and contribute to unpacking the role of the body in research processes.

**Results:** Research on patients' experience of illness provides examples of how bodily experiences are intersubjective and subjective explored. The authors discuss how to let the bodily spoken contribute to the knowledge creation by "taking the body with them" in all parts of the research process.

**Conclusion:** The article contributes with theoretical perspectives and highlights intercorporeal and inter-affective bodily communication as an essential element in physiotherapy research practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

*"The world is a synthesis of meanings, but this synthesis is bodily, it is the body that brings it about, it is not an "I" that brings the world together into one whole. It is the body that opens up to the world and its meaning."* (Österberg, 1994).

Österberg inspires, with this quote, a central theme in physiotherapy, that it is the body "that opens up to the world and its meaning" to a person. As the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1989) puts it, "the body is in the world as the heart is in the body".<sup>1</sup> In this sense the body and the world are dialectically interwoven. An embodied perspective in research methods involves using a basic, pre-reflective, sensuous understanding of relationships with other people, oneself, and the world.<sup>2</sup> In this article, we try to unpack embodied sensuously saturated understanding whose meaning emerges before we have put it into and often along with verbal language. We<sup>3</sup> understand, for example, what a chair, bed or table is by touching and sensing the object, and thus we become aware of the role of the body in relation to things and the world, through touch and bodily resonances. In this context Fuchs and Koch (2014) defined bodily resonance as something "that includes all kinds of local or general bodily sensations: feelings of warmth or coldness,

tickling or shivering, pain, tension or relaxation, constriction or expansion, sinking, tumbling or lifting". Bodily resonance corresponds both to autonomous inaction and muscular activation. Even small children can feel in their bodies whether the people around them are friendly, irritable, or hostile by the way they move and speak and by their energy, tone, and manner (Bainbridge Cohen, 2017). This type of bodily resonance guides and colors communication. Due to the impact a person's bodily awareness has on communication, several researchers in the field of phenomenological philosophy have described the potential benefits of adopting a phenomenological perspective within health research (De Jaegher, 2015; De Jaegher, Pieper, Clénin, and Fuchs, 2017; Fuchs, 2016, 2018; Fuchs and De Jaegher, 2009; Gallagher, 2017; Gallagher and Hutto, 2008; Thanem and Knights, 2019). From a phenomenological perspective, bodily and affective resonance and emotional interaction with others are what allow people to understand each other. Fuchs (2016) extended his discussions on Merleau-Ponty (1968) notion of intercorporeality. Fuchs (2016)<sup>4</sup> argued that intercorporeality and interaffectivity in the close encounters with people who interact with each other, can be experienced as a web of bodily resonance processes, characterized by mutual incorporation of each

other. He emphasized the mutual bodily resonance that arises in the dynamic interaction of the encounter with others and argues that this resonance is the basis for a common understanding of each other and the world. His colleagues De Jaegher, Pieper, Clénin, and Fuchs (2017)<sup>5</sup> has shown that professionals sensitize or, to use her word “calibrate” their body to perceive the other’s (the patient’s) bodily. She argues that this is of importance in the interpersonal contact and contributes to the patient’s quality of experience and contribute to mutual understanding created through what she conceptualizes as “participatory sense making”. She has used this knowledge in her research and trained her researchers in body awareness to make them more sensitive to the intersubjective, intercorporeal and interaffective communication in research settings. Here, De Jaegher, Pieper, Clénin, and Fuchs (2017) operationalized the phenomenon of inter-subjectivity as follows:

*“In order to make intersubjectivity ‘graspable’ and to operationalize its investigation, we need characteristics of social action that are concrete and ‘handy’ to be accessible to experience and testable in a research setting. For this, we employ three characteristics of social perception: its spatiality, its sociality, and its modalities of sensing, feeling, and thinking”.*

The researchers we have mentioned here have inspired us to embark on our own investigation of interview research in physiotherapy<sup>6</sup> and ask what kind of knowledge researchers can gain about patients’ bodily experiences when they become aware of the subjective and intersubjective processes that enclose the interview.

### **Giving language to lived bodily experience in qualitative interviews**

A fruitful way to gain knowledge about peoples lived bodily experiences is to ask them to recount events from their lives. However, this type of interview consists of a verbalization of experience, and as we will discuss, that process entails certain challenges which must be approached on a theoretical foundation in order to be overcome.<sup>7</sup> Theorizing, however, requires an object or theme to theorize about. The object of our theoretical approach in this article is material created in a dialogue, between people who through their bodily empathy can ask questions of and generate interest in each other (De Jaegher, Pieper, Clénin, and Fuchs, 2017; Fuchs, 2016, 2018; Zahavi, 2014, 2017). Conducting an interview is more than simply asking questions, it entails reflecting together with the interviewee, listening, remembering, and staying attuned.<sup>8</sup> The interviewer’s ability to do this with awareness creates a framework for what the

interviewed can tell and express. Embodied knowledge can be vaguely felt and difficult to express verbally. The interviewee sometimes expresses ambivalence or other feelings that are relevant to the theme of the interview. At times like these, the relevance of listening to and with the body becomes evident.

Rosberg (2000) encountered something similar when she studied how experienced physiotherapists treat patients with long-term, complex functional problems such as pain and stress, to catch their lived experience and understanding of the possibilities lying in the bodily approach of PT in rehabilitation. Rosberg (2000) found that the physiotherapists had difficulty articulating the way they worked with the patients in the treatments as well as their thoughts and rationalities for how and why they did what and when in the treatment. They often expressed this challenge in a bodily manner by throwing out their arms and using their hands to explain their interactions with the patients. The use of movement and bodily expression in an interview, when one is expected to verbalize experience, represents a challenge to the researcher. Do researchers understand bodily expressions as “language” and do they reflect on their meaning or how to explore this together with the interviewee? To further explore the physiotherapists understanding of their work and rationalities, together with the informants and validate bodily expression as a legitimate means of Rosberg (2000, 2017) chose to videotape the physiotherapists treating their patients. She then brought these films into her interviews with the physiotherapists and thereby changed the procedure of the interview to give the bodily experiences its due and trust that it would be possible to develop language from the body.

Before she even began her interviews, Rosberg (2000) first analyzed the films in detail in order to understand what the physiotherapists did during treatment and how they were in dialogue and touch with patients during the treatment process. By watching the entire treatment film together with each of the physiotherapists and freezing the frame at points of interest, the film was used as a kind of “stimulated recall” (Calderhead, 1981; Dempsey, 2010). It provided an opportunity for what Spiegelberg (1982) called “phenomenological intuiting”. By allowing the informants to sensuously explore their own bodily experiences in the present moment together with the researcher, the interview gave the participants the chance to experience the moments “anew” and at the same time with a perspective to consider the treatment “from the outside”. The researcher could ask questions and together with the physiotherapists reflect on and explore their experiential understanding of the events in a new setting. Questions such as “What do you see?

What is happening here?” and “How do you think about the way you use touch here?” stimulated reflection on inter-affective situations between the researcher and informants. Basing the interviews on the films helped both the researcher and the physiotherapists to recall, explore and give verbal language to the bodily lived, as well as engage in an intense dialogue on the nature of these topics in a form of intersubjective participatory sensemaking (we will return to the subject of this dialogue).

Merleau-Ponty, De Jaegher and Fuchs’s work reminds us that the body should not be (mis)taken as an object or mechanical entity, neither by the physiotherapist nor their patient. In the pages that follow, we will share experiences and reflections from our own research. We intend to describe what we experience as researchers during interviews when we “release our body weight” toward the ground, and what this does to our openness and presence in dialogue with others.

### ***Giving into Gravity – An opportunity to be present in dialogue with others***

Research on how to be present and open in dialogue with others is still relatively uncommon in qualitative methodological literature. However, several researchers (Fog, 2005; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2014) attested to the importance of listening to the other/interviewee, providing opportunities for him/her to reflect and allowing enough time to explore their experiences verbally. This exploration is intersubjective, and it requires that all participants make themselves available to each other to create knowledge and understanding together. Todres (2007) argued in the book *Embodied Enquiry*, that bodily presence, peace, warmth, and empathy for others all characterize a state of being that is desirable for opening accessibility to each other. He also stresses that this must be practiced being achieved. As already stated, De Jaegher, Pieper, Clénin, and Fuchs (2017) advised the researcher to work to sensitize her own body with the help of various body awareness exercises. Our experience from body practices and research is that openness, presence and the ability to listen to our own bodies and to others during research dialogs, are tied to the seemingly simple idea<sup>9</sup> of releasing the weight of your body toward the ground and receiving its support, often referred to as “being grounded”. It involves giving in to and relying on the support of the ground beneath you, finding balance between the body’s center of gravity and the periphery, feeling support in the skeleton, and allowing the release of unnecessary tension in order to maintain the position whether seated or standing. Letting go of your own weight, allowing yourself to receive the

support from the ground beneath you and thus allowing your body to inhabit the weight and space it needs – these actions both admit and require free, deep breathing (Ekerholt and Bergland, 2008; Rosberg, 2000; Roxendal and Winberg, 2002; Sviland, 2014). Relaxing the body and giving leave to the movements of the breath also allows a person to become aware of the present body, in its particular space and time. According to Rosberg (2000) the sensation of permitting the full weight of your body in the room is connected to the justification of your own right to be, of your own *raison d’être* and the foundation upon which you also can “let others be as they are” (Maclaren, 2002).

The works cited above as well as Fuchs (2016) elaborations on “intercorporeality and interaffectivity” serve as a theoretical background for our analysis of the interview situation. When the researcher allows herself “to release the weight of her body, «it allows a feeling of rest and frees her breath. From this position, through bodily resonance processes, she “tells” the interviewee with her body that she is also invited to release her weight, rest in herself, and thus be open to her bodily lived experience and pre-reflective understanding.<sup>10</sup> It gives space to the other person, to be and to try out also unthought thoughts in the dialogs.

The dialogue between researchers and informants’ lives in bodily experiences, which provide the basis for the further (verbal) exploration of the lived bodily experiences that the researcher is interested in exploring. Zahavi (2017) confirms the opportunities offered by contact with and within the body and the importance of the body in developing an understanding of relationships with the self, the world, and other subjects. The body transforms self-consciousness, intentionality and intersubjectivity.

Our exploration of the body’s weight and the space it occupies is embedded in the relationship between resting in one’s own body and the ways that it affects emotional interaction with others. As stated in the introduction, Fuchs (2016) described “intercorporeality and interaffectivity” as key concepts in social meaning-making. De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007) called the same phenomenon participatory sense-making. As mentioned earlier, De Jaegher, Pieper, Clénin, and Fuchs (2017) developed methods of body consciousness training that can sensitize and “calibrate” the researcher’s body toward the object of their research. They argue that the researcher herself is the best research tool in the exploration of social interaction.

Considering the work of these researchers, we see an opportunity to practice bodily awareness as a method in the interpretation of lived experience. Intersubjectivity and reflection are essential elements of the

phenomenological process, and if applied consistently they have the potential to improve the quality of research. As we see it, this method, if supported by reading theory about the body and lived experience, could help researchers generate meaning-rich data material. In the following section we elaborate further on how a researcher can explore her bodily experiences and use this understanding to convey deeper meanings together with the informants in interviews in phenomenological empirical research.

### ***Double dialogs and the importance of space between the self and the other***

A sensitive interview is not just one dialogue, it is a pair of dialogs occurring simultaneously where a skillful interviewer can be in dialogue with herself while talking to others. The “inner conversation” that the interviewer has with herself allows her to reflect on the course and shape of the interview even as it occurs. In this sense the dialogue is doubled as each person speaks and listens to the other and to herself. Being in a continuous dialogue means being aware of what the other person hears, perceives, and understands; listening to the other’s “listening ear.” The interviewer should also be attuned to both tacit communication; what is left verbally unspoken and to tonal variations that are often laden with meaning. The skill of initiating and maintaining a productive dialogue must, according to Andersen (2011), be practiced and learned. Andersen (2011) in his influential book *Reflective Conversations* described dialogs as both “inner” and “external,” and makes the argument that within every dialogue, three sub-dialogs are simultaneously ongoing: an external verbal dialogue between the two participants and an interior dialogue in each of them. Each person’s inner dialogue deals with: 1) interpretation of content in the external conversation and evaluation of own involvement in that conversation; and 2) how to direct the external conversation so that the other can best understand what we want to say. We can also recognize the dialogue that occurs between bodies as yet another parallel dialogue in a growing list: 1) external verbal conversation; 2) “external,” bodily, non-verbal communication; 3) internal dialogue with own lived experience of what the other says to figure out the meaning of it; and 4) an internal conversation about how to formulate our thoughts and experiences verbally so that the other can understand what we want to say. The communication in an interview is thus composed of several parallel processes and Andersen’s (2011) analysis revealed the complexity at the heart of dialogue, and encourages us to ask the question: “Is the conversation I am having with this person moving at

a pace that allows me and the other enough time for our inner conversations?”. Even though Andersen’s (2011) understanding of dialogue was developed for use in a therapeutic context, we find it to be a relevant and potentially very useful perspective for application in research interviewing.

The complexity of dialogue requires the participants to allow a quiet or stillness that can make space for experiences that are not yet named and classified (Fyhn, 2011; Rodemeyer, 2018).<sup>11</sup> This stillness is the product of resting in one’s own body. Resting in one’s own body is to allow oneself to “be as heavy as one is.” This creates opportunities in an interview situation. In many cases, it simply takes time for people to find the words necessary to say what they want to say. If the person being interviewed is not given this time, they will only be able to express superficial knowledge without addressing many of the different levels of lived bodily experience.<sup>12</sup>

Participants in a dialogue can feel both limited and rewarded, occasionally at the same time. An example highlighting also ethical aspects in this, comes from a study of aerobic instructors’ experiences of teaching (Engelsrud, 2005). In an interview, the informant Edith was asked why she wanted to be an aerobics instructor. She said that she was: “sick and sick and sick” as a child and that her mother introduced her to gymnastics and sports as something “healthy”. During the interview, the researcher noticed that her tone seemed depressed when she made this admission, and that her words were left “hanging in the air” when the researcher did not ask any further questions. After Edith read the transcript of the interview, she became upset and felt misquoted, causing the interviewer to regret that she had not encouraged Edith to say more about this difficult experience during the interview. The researcher realized that the discomfort she felt in her own body in response to Edith’s words had prevented her from pursuing that line of questioning. This missed opportunity did not become apparent until the dialogue with the informant restarted later. At that point, the incident gave the researcher insight into the experience an informant can have from reading the transcript of her own interview. In cases such as this one, the words that flow through the live conversation can convey pre-reflective and not yet conscious levels of experience; in this case a sadness that the interviewer picked up on even though Edith did not intend to convey it. When these impressions are put down in black and white in the form of the researcher’s transcriptions, they can lead to responses of confusion, resentment, and dissent. When Edith got the interview back in transcribed form, she did not recognize her own responses.<sup>13</sup> When she read the transcribed text, she was



in a different situation than when she was interviewed. She asked the interviewer, “Why couldn’t you just write that I was sick as a child?” But had the researcher changed this, the deeper meaning that the body expressed would not have come to light. As Todres (2007) put it, “lived bodily participation” is more than words can say; the transcribed text is an attempt to capture an involvement between bodies that feel and think together, but this is no easy task. The researcher must listen to the answers given and the language used by the person she is interviewing while simultaneously regulating her own way of asking questions and conducting a dialogue. In the case described above, the researcher was not able to adapt her questions to the development of the interview situation quickly enough, and was not prepared for the way that saying the words “sick and sick and sick and sick” affected Edith. People occasionally speak from their unspeakable layer during interviews. In situations like these, the challenge of the researchers is to find a way to both ask questions sensitively and both hear and understand the layers of meaning in the answers, some of which the person being interviewed is not even aware of.

While it is essential for the researcher to pay attention to and listen to herself during the interview, this does not mean that the researcher should be self-absorbed. Experiencing “me-ness” does not exclude awareness of others and their experiences (Zahavi, 2014). The researcher needs to get to know her own experiences, know herself, accept herself and be able to “overcome” herself. Being able to “overcome” oneself, here in the sense of overcoming one’s own limited understanding, may at first seem impracticable in a research context. But researchers can and must strive to become aware of the limitations of their own understanding. By recognizing these limitations, they can then more easily assume a position of “conscious non-knowing” in relation to alternative ways of understanding. In other words, researchers work with what they understand, but the work is only improved by recognition of the possibility of other modes of understanding.

### ***The potential for transcription to develop your skills as a researcher***

Transcription work is like reliving an entire interview situation in slow motion; it can take eight hours to transcribe a 1.5-hour long interview. Many researchers prefer to save their time effort by leaving the work to someone else. However, the transcription of one’s own interviews gives the researcher a unique chance to get the data “under the skin,” to painstakingly do the work

of recognizing and understanding what was said “in between the words”.

When listening to the recording of an interview she has conducted and transcribing it, the researcher distances herself from the interview situation, and can reflect on her own role in co-creating the dialogue. This gives her an opportunity to develop as an interviewer and become sensitive to “saturated” silences. Every pause can offer some insight into the other’s reflection process. Gradually, each transcription process reveals a wealth of opportunities to develop one’s understanding of oneself as an interviewer and the subject of the interview, as well as the relationship between the two.

People use language to frame their understanding of the world based on their lived experiences. By attempting to make an accurate transcription, the researcher is “forced” to listen more carefully than usual the sounds, intonation, and rhythm of language. This “deep listening” to the other’s language and way of expressing themselves can help to develop the sense of the other’s experience and language world, which in turn can develop the interviewer’s ability to empathically understand.<sup>14</sup> Transcribing one’s own interviews thus helps researchers to become more sensitive to the interviewee’s mode of expression and the shape of their experiences.

### ***The importance of slow listening in the phenomenological analysis of data***

Listening to an interview recording during the transcription work and afterward is often the entryway to an understanding of what is not said. As mentioned earlier, one of the benefits of slow listening and transcription work is that it helps the researcher to get all the data “under the skin” through the sensual process of listening, listening again, and writing. Words spoken during the interview also turn into auditory memories that play through our minds again and again, almost like a kind of “song”, processing even in your dreams during the night. During the time that it takes to complete the transcription process, analytical questions about the interview material are generated.

The multilayered nature of dialogue continues into the transcription process, as the researcher responds to, reflects on and frames questions about the recording of the original dialogue between researcher and informant. The transcription process thereby contributes to an improved understanding of the dynamics between proximity and analytical distance in research. At a remote time and location, the researcher can listen to the recorded dialogue that she was a living part of and

can thus “see” and hear it as an outside observer even while she is able to remember the events as they occurred. This ability to toggle between the perspectives of proximity and analytical distance promotes reflection and advances in the analysis process.

### ***Challenges in the process of shaping oral dialogue into written text***

In “Transcription as theory,” Ochs (1979) addressed several challenges that the researcher faces when using naturalistic speech as data. Transcription is a selective process, she argues, reflecting the researcher’s theoretical starting points and their understanding of the other, the language and the body. The researcher’s theoretical approach to language is also highly influential during transcription. Questions that she asks are: Does the researcher understand language as a tool used to recount facts, a means of codifying a worldview? Or does she see language as a kind of “sense-making” that creates social and emotional meaning? What kind of “world” does the researcher perceive the interview to be about? Is it a “real world” populated by facts about, for example, the phenomenon of health, or is it a socially perceived and created world where language is used to explore the lived experience of health? Is the researcher as preoccupied with the unsaid as the said? How do they understand the process of the interview itself? According to Ochs (1979) the answers to all these questions will affect how the interview is transcribed, as well as which bits of speech the researcher believes to be crucial for analysis. When Edith read the transcription of her own statement that she was ill as a child, and the emphasis she gave this period of her life by repeating “sick, sick, sick,” the transcription confronted her with an emotional riptide that lived on in the memory of this early trauma. Ochs encourages researchers to become aware of how the conventions of written culture shape information. Even the act of writing from right to left and down on an A4 sheet of paper, for example, is a major change from the structure of oral conversation.

Ochs (1979) also criticized research that diminishes or omits the significance of the body and non-verbal language when interpreting the interview. The researcher must be careful to note when movements and bodily manifestations occur between words, in the midst of sentences. She must also be sensitive to the tone and rhythm of the dialogue and account for this in the visual map that she creates by transcribing that dialogue into written form. As researchers, we can work to incorporate tone of voice and body language into the transcription by, for example, putting words in bold to reflect the speaker’s emphasis, adding parenthetical

notes for clarification such as: “(gesticulating quickly and forcefully)”; “(interrupting)”; “(tears forming in her eyes)”; and “(she hesitates)”. These kinds of notes are possible when the researcher transcribes the interviews soon after they have taken place, allowing her to remember what happened in the interview situation. She can also use the tone of voice, pauses and other details captured in the recording as a memory aid. Filming the interviews and using a video document to examine the verbal and bodily communication is also a possibility and may offer more data for analysis than an audio recording.

According to Ochs (1979), transcriptions are data that the researcher constructs and then uses in the further research work. She warns against using standard orthography (i.e. printing the oral conversation in continuous text, word by word), which gives the impression that the oral conversation can be cut up into clearly delineated constituent parts. To base the analyses on the written word alone is unstable ground. The researcher must participate actively and be emotionally present in lived conversations: listen, take the time to feel and remember. We strongly advocate for this approach and believe that full engagement with the self and the other throughout the research process is the best way for a researcher to make the most of her material.

### ***Analyzing the material***

There are many approaches to the process of analyzing research material; different strategies have been developed over time and compete with each other for influence. We believe that the theory of the different levels of bodily experience and embodiment (Rodemeyer, 2018) should inform the process of analyzing interview material and encourage researchers to be aware of rhythm and tone in spoken words. Analysis begins during the interviews and continues through the dialogs a researcher has with the material during the process of transcription. The next stage consists of identifying, sorting, condensing, and highlighting the meaning of the interviewees’ lived experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) distinguished between different levels of interpretation in the analysis of data material and emphasize that the researcher’s choice of questions and guiding theory greatly influence the interpretations that are made. Awareness of both what is said and unsaid, sensitivity toward changes in tone and moments of silence, recognition of the meaning embedded in gesture and body language; these are the skills that will allow a researcher to make the most of their interviews and provide fruitful material for analysis.

After transcription is completed, the next step is to read and listen through each interview to get a sense of the material. Various phenomenological methods indicate slightly different approaches in the analytical procedure. However, many of these methods (Giorgi, 1985, 2009; Malterud, 2019; Van Manen, 2017) have in common that they recommend listening to the interviews while simultaneously reading the transcriptions in order to differentiate themes and aspects of the interview that relate specifically to the study's original question. Initially, the researcher should try to create a descriptive overview of themes and aspects, but it is important to remember that our choice of what to describe and define as data is, in itself, a kind of interpretation. Nevertheless, this identification of themes and aspects will form the basis for the next stage of interpretive analysis.

What is at stake in the analysis of material derived from interviews about other people's lives? Effective analysis requires a researcher to face an entire spectrum of possibilities in order to understand how the material can help to solve the research question. In the classic phenomenological directive to "go to things themselves" the thing must always manifest itself to someone. In our work, researchers interview people about their lived experiences. This interview is "the thing" the place where meaning is created, using the bodies and voices of the people involved. Bodily openness is a prerequisite for the production of knowledge in the interview.

In a study about how patients develop exhaustion disorders (Jingrot and Rosberg, 2008), the researchers noted that they had to give their participants time and space to reflect on their lived experiences and stimulate them to listen to their own words about their experiences of becoming sick. The material consisted of 12 interviews with people who had been on sick leave at least 6 months because of exhaustion. The researchers received large amounts of data on the symptoms of informants, their relationships in the workplace; organizational problems, cuts in human resources at the workplaces, their survival strategies both at work and at home. In their analysis of the data, the researchers considered to focus a number of different topics brought up by people during their interviews: health care that treats only symptoms, not root causes; the role and power of the social insurance office; gender and women's life situations; the struggle to organize one's life at work and at home; their social and economic situation, etc. In a process that took place over the course of about a year, the researchers chose, after much reading and debating, to home in on events linked to the informants bodily experiences of the process that lead to exhaustion. They examined, from both

a phenomenological and a physiotherapeutic perspective, how study participants talked about different stages in a process that led to total collapse. Thus, the researchers chose to focus on the interviewees' lived experience of the process of becoming exhausted rather than exhaustion itself as a condition. To interpret the material in this way, the researchers used Merleau-Ponty's theoretical understanding of the body, as well as Heidegger's notion of Dasein as an attuned way of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962) and Gadamer's theory of health as a feeling of a homelike being in the body (Gadamer, 1996). The researchers saw a pattern of distinct stages running through their patients' stories, describing a gradual loss of control and a flood of related emotions as they descended into exhaustion. Being able to recognize and identify these stages, the researchers argued could help health professionals provide the support and help their patients need before the situation gets too bad, by taking their bodily experiences seriously and participating in a bodily sensitive dialogue. The challenge that the researchers faced was: how to write about the results of their research in a way that accurately and clearly reflected the participants' lived experiences?

### ***The writing process – "Writing is to think in a particularly exhausting way"***

"To write is to think in a particularly exhausting way" (Johansen, 2009). Most of a researcher's ideas and discoveries will not become clear until they are written down. We have already discussed the challenge of translating the diffuse bodily and vocal signals that occur during interviews into written form. We have argued above that inclusion of these elements of communication is essential if the transcription is to transcend superficial knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Writing good research about bodily knowledge depends on the researcher's sensitivity to bodily kinesthetics while writing. If, for example, in the study described earlier, Edith's reaction was interpreted as a fear of being presented as a sick or pathetic person, that would be too quick an interpretation. By instead seeing her reaction in the context of her role as an aerobics instructor, we can also see her as a human being who is used to having her body seen and commented upon by her clients. We interpret her expression more as a human dilemma than as inherently self-defensive.

We have previously pointed to the advantages of taking time to reflect together with the informants and the potential that the transcription process has to aid in the development of understanding. By remaining in the bodily experience of data generation and processing and allowing these to go into dialogue with theory, researchers can develop a language that provides opportunities to reach new meanings in the lived experience. When



the researcher is embedded in the process of analysis, and have a sensuous feeling that the word have, their rhythm it support her to find the words that express the experience she is trying to capture. The art is to take advantage of the feeling and intuitive sensuous association with what we are trying to capture. If we are hurrying there is a risk that we are suffocating what is in its way to take form. The anchoring in the body and the sensation of the words in the body in the writing process, supports the validation process and ensures that the language used can be trusty, reflecting the inherent meaning in the lived experiences.

### ***The validity and how knowledge of the body is relevant to professional relationships***

The findings of our research have led us to abandon the idea of a stable and objectified body and replace it with the phenomenological perspective of the lived and felt body. By advocating that this perspective applies to the researcher's body as much as the patient's, we challenge the standard approach that is often associated with research on physiotherapy. Taking such a position entails its own set of challenges. Even if a researcher follows phenomenological theory, her own bodily experiences might be unclear to her, or she may disregard them as irrelevant in the context of her research. This should come as no surprise: phenomenologically speaking, bodily experience is ambiguous and partially non-verbal. However, in order to validate her work, a researcher should be prepared to make all aspects of her process as visible and transparent as possible, leaving her judgments, assumptions and conclusions open to criticism. In this article we have used the concepts of intercorporeality and interaffectivity to describe how, during close encounters, people can experience a bodily resonance that is characterized by mutual incorporation and a joint understanding that emerges from shared experience. Nevertheless, intercorporeality does not always apply, and as in the case of Edith, interviewer and interviewee may experience both the interview and the transcript in strikingly different ways. When the differing views are considered, this type of divergence can produce criticism that can be discussed and incorporated into further research. We have tried to explore and explain the way we communicate during interviews, how that communication affects us in our bodies, and the process of transforming this shared experience into a written record. We believe it is essential to frame experience in a theoretical context. In our work, subjectivity and intersubjectivity provide the raw material for further understanding.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this article we have discussed various aspects of the body's involvement in empirical phenomenological research based on interviews. Our purpose has been to explain how phenomenological theory can be understood and applied to empirical research work by paying attention to the involvement and responsiveness of the researcher's body in the different stages of a research project. We have highlighted how the researcher's internal dialogue, presence, and willingness to release the tension in her body can affect and enhance knowledge creation. Furthermore, we have shown how listening with the body can support language that accurately and sensitively reflects lived experiences. Understanding from and with the body contributes to deep insight about the phenomena being explored in professional health encounters. We have demonstrated the potential benefits of bodily involvement in the practice of phenomenological interview research. We cannot overstate the value of listening while participating in an interview – both to the person being interviewed and to one's own bodily responses. A better understanding of the body can be achieved only by a sensuous engagement with the body.

## **Notes**

1. "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle always alive; it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system." (Merleau-Ponty, 1989, p. 203).
2. It does not mean that the perspective is not relevant for other health professionals.
3. The use of the pronoun "we" refers here to an existential dimension that all people live through and in.
4. Thomas Fuchs is professor and head of research at the University in Heidelberg <https://www.klinikum.uni-heidelberg.de/Prof-Dr-med-Dr-phil-Thomas-Fuchs.6031.0.html?&L=1>.
5. <https://hannedejaegher.net/>.
6. As well as other contexts in interview research.
7. A frequent source of difficulty is the fact that experiences are bodily embedded in people's "self-evident actions" – a kind of "knowledge in action" (Åke, 2015; Schön, 1983).
8. Cf. Kvale and Brinkmann's qualifications for the interviewer (2014).
9. When we write that this is "simple", we do not mean that it is simple to achieve or to understand the processes at work, but that it is foundational for the experiential work of the body and from the body (see also Bainbridge Cohen, 2017). We do not intend to suggest a causal relationship, but rather an experience- and meaning-based relationship.
10. This reminds us of how we as parents put a child to sleep, by lying next to them, relaxing my body and breathing slowly and deeply – my body next to the child mimics the relaxation of sleep, to the extent that the parent often

do fall asleep for a few minutes, and the child sleeps as well, the bodies are following the same rhythms.

11. “To be able to listen to the intension that is on its way to take form, requires inner stillness. This means that to listen without “the inner voice” that constantly tells us what we see and hear. We have to give space to the reality the way it encounters us before we name and frame it” (Fyhn, 2011, p. 3).
12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lgNkIIHtcQ>.
13. It might also be that the interviewer’s impression that the words were spoken with a feeling of sadness also included in the transcription. Edith really was responding to her words as they include her emotional state.
14. Gunnar Karlsson refers to this as “Researchers’ emphatic understanding” RES in Karlsson G (1995).
15. If the researcher sees others only as rational actors, the findings also become superficial.

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