A Whole-Body Approach for Social Workers: Integrating Embodiment and Body-Mind Resources to Enhance Wellbeing and Practice

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Abstract

This study explored how embodiment and body–mind resources support social workers' wellbeing, particularly within contexts marked by high stress and burnout. Motivated by professional experiences and witnessing colleagues navigating similar challenges, the research explored whether embodiment practices could serve as a meaningful form of support. Using an action research methodology that intentionally incorporated embodiment into the research process, the study explored an embodiment program that consisted of four phases: a one-day experiential embodiment workshop, a five-week online extension to support ongoing practice, individual semi-structured interviews and a final phase in which participant insights informed the redevelopment of the embodiment program.

Findings indicate that embodied awareness offered diverse support. Embodiment emerged as a practical resource that enhanced wellbeing, professional presence and grounded responsiveness when navigating complex and stressful situations. The collective nature of the program played a key role in supporting learning and integration. However, ongoing organisational pressures and limited structural support hindered the full realisation of the sense of embodiment. Highlighting the need for systemic rather than individualised approaches to wellbeing. The study recommends integrating embodiment within social work education and organisational frameworks to support a shift from self-care toward embodied

collective-care, positioning wellbeing as a shared rather than solely personal responsibility. It also highlights the importance of developing a shared definition of embodied awareness to support continuity in future research, policy development and professional practice. Further research is recommended within organisational and educational settings to explore the impact of embodied collective-care on wellbeing, retention and sustainability across diverse groups of social workers.

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Chapter One Introduction

As a social worker, social work supervisor and through discussion with colleagues, I have found that the demanding nature of social work is inherently associated with stress, and this is an unavoidable aspect of the work. The complex and multifaceted stressors that social workers encounter can make the work unsustainable for some, as accumulated stress can result in burnout. Giménez-Bertomeu et al. (2024) found that social workers, when compared to other professions, have a significantly higher risk of burnout. Self-care has been identified as a strategy for managing stress and preventing burnout; it involves several dimensions, including a physical component. Traditionally, the physical component of self-care has focused on the body from a functional perspective, emphasising fitness, nutrition and sleep quality (Collins, 2021).

However, the body is more than simply a tool for maintaining physical health. Life is experienced through the body; it carries knowledge, wisdom and information. From this understanding, the body has the potential to extend beyond its conventional role of self-care, offering social workers a deeper awareness of self and supporting their overall wellbeing. This thesis focuses on how the body can engage in self-care practices beyond the more traditional approaches. Therefore, this research aims to investigate embodied awareness and the use of body-mind resources as support for

social workers. An action research approach was taken utilising the cyclical approach of Stringer and Ortiz Aragōn (2021). To maintain methodological continuity and reflect the embodied focus of this study, I incorporated an additional element, this being embodiment. The study involved four phases and within each phase the adapted cyclical approach was applied, with each phase offering new insights and understandings that informed the fourth and final phase, as well as the study's recommendations.

Social Work Pressures: Acting from the Inside

Throughout my social work career, I have listened to the challenges colleagues experience and their stories of stress and burnout while also being a witness to the impact this has had on them. Some have left the field due to burnout, taking time to reset and restore so they could reengage with the challenges and complexities of the work. As a social worker who has also experienced near burnout and continues to experience intermittent stress associated with my work, I was drawn to explore a novel way to support social workers.

Embodiment practices have supported me throughout my career and personal life, and I would suggest that it is what has kept me from falling into the dark abyss of burnout, even though I have teetered on the edge on several occasions. I also work in the therapeutic field, and through exploring embodiment practices with clients, I have witnessed the powerful, positive impact they can have. Embodiment has

supported people to reconnect with themselves, to support healing and to build needed boundaries within their lives. With this understanding, I wanted to explore how it might enhance social worker's wellbeing.

Several of my values guided how I was to approach this research: *Connection* - valuing relationships with others; *Empathy* – a passion for taking care of the carers; *Action taking* – seeking to generate knowledge that is practical rather than dormant. I wanted this research to generate practical ways to support social workers in their everyday work or to at least offer participants who took part some further ways to support themselves. Using an action research approach aligned with both my values and positionality as a practitioner-researcher. It allowed me to actively engage with participants in exploring embodiment practices and generate knowledge that could be applied in practice. My personal and professional experiences position me as an insider-researcher with a nuanced understanding of social work stress and wellbeing, while also utilising reflexivity to reduce the potential bias.

Key Terms

Within this thesis, most terms are explained in the text; however, several key terms require additional clarification. The following definitions are provided to ensure clarity in how these terms are understood.

Embodied awareness, embodied, embody and embodiment are used interchangeably

throughout this study. Embodied awareness is the conscious awareness of sensations, feelings, and movements of the body, recognising that interactions with the external environment shape bodily experience, and that this awareness, in turn, can influence the environment through our bodily actions. Cultivating embodied awareness deepens self-understanding and supports in-the-moment action guided by both body and mind. This explanation of embodiment has been adapted from Merleau-Ponty (2002) and Schwartz and Maiberger (2018).

'Tuning in' is the practice of consciously noticing the body's sensations and signals, listening to what they reveal about one's emotional, physical, and relational state, and fostering connection between body and mind.

Body-mind resources are a range of brief techniques that engage both the body and mind, which can be used throughout the workday to support social workers in counteracting stress.

Vagus nerve is a key nerve that connects the brain to many organs, helping regulate functions like heart rate, digestion, and breathing.

Interoception involves sensing the body's internal state, including things like temperature, hunger, and tiredness. It's closely connected to our emotional experiences, since sensory nerves carry information from our organs, muscles, and

other tissues to the brain.

Proprioception is the body's ability to recognize its position in space—such as knowing if it's standing straight, tilted, or inverted. This awareness comes from sensory signals originating in the joints and the inner ear.

Exteroception the body collects sensory details from the environment through the skin, eyes, nose, tongue, and ears. These outside signals are then transmitted back to the brain for processing.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis explores the role of embodiment and body-mind resources in supporting social worker wellbeing, examining how bodily awareness might enhance self-care and professional practice. The study's working definition of embodied awareness conceptualises it as a reflective connection to the body that informs thought, emotion, and action. Using an action research approach, the study engaged social workers in a multi-phase process, including a workshop, follow-up online sessions, and individual interviews, exploring the integration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources into social work practice.

Chapter Two presents the literature review, outlining key theoretical perspectives and current scholarship regarding the body in self-care and embodiment for social

workers. Chapter Three discusses the action research methodology used and describes the four-phase research design along with the methods, ethical process and participant selection. Chapter Four presents the findings from the first three phases of the study, followed by a reflection of the findings. Chapter Five discusses these findings in depth, the limitations of the findings, and presents Phase Four, which involved the redevelopment of the workshop informed by insights from the three earlier phases. Chapter Six concludes the thesis with a summary of key findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for social work education and professional wellbeing, while also ending with a personal reflection.

The appendices include participant handouts for the workshop, facilitator copies for the delivery of the workshop, five-week online follow-up, and the individual interview questions. They also contain the ethics approval, the acceptance email for the amendment to the research process, and the information sheet for potential participants. Three separate consent forms are provided for participants taking part in each of the first three phases of the study. In addition, the appendices include a demographic questionnaire, a pre and post self-reflection questionnaire for the morning workshop, a workshop development questionnaire for both the morning and afternoon workshops and four additional facilitator-guided embodiment practices for the Phase Four workshop, which were informed by the findings from the previous three phases.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review aims to define and explore the concept of embodiment within the field of social work. It is structured into sections; the review begins by outlining the search strategy. Embodied awareness is defined as it will be used in this study, followed by a discussion of social work scholars who advocate for its integration into practice. It then addresses the compounding stress faced by social workers, its contribution to burnout, and the role of self-care, highlighting how the body is currently incorporated into these practices. The potential of embodiment to enhance self-care is then explored, including the benefits it may offer to practitioners, clients and organisations. Throughout the review, the essential role of social work education and organisational systems in actively fostering embodied approaches is emphasised. Without their intentional involvement, the contribution of embodiment to sustainable, holistic wellbeing in the profession may not be fully realised. The review examines emerging body-mind approaches used for wellbeing, expanding the role of the body in supporting social workers. The chapter ends with concluding reflections.

Literature Search Strategy

To inform this literature review, a structured and iterative search was completed across six academic databases: PsycINFO, CINAHL, Education Source, Education

Research Complete, MedLine, Scopus. The initial search focused on peer-reviewed articles published from 2015 onwards for contemporary relevance.

A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used, including:

"social worker*" OR "social service*" OR "social case work*"

AND resilien* OR wellbeing OR cope* OR coping OR wellness OR "wellbeing"

AND embodiment OR embody OR somatic* OR soma OR "self-concept" OR "self-perception*" OR "self-aware*"OR “selfcare” OR “self-care” OR “self*”

A second search iteration was used:

"social work" OR "Social worker" AND burnout OR stress AND Body OR soma OR somatic OR embodiment

A third search used the terms:

body-mind OR "body & mind" AND "social work" OR "social worker"

Duplicates were removed. Relevant articles were screened by title and abstract, with inclusion criteria focused on literature that:

1. Specifically explored social work practitioners (rather than clients or broader professional level analysis)
2. Addressed themes of embodiment, somatic awareness, wellbeing, self-care, burnout or body awareness

Once I found relevant articles, I sourced further articles from their reading reference

lists. In addition to journal articles, key books and earlier studies published prior to 2015 were consulted to provide a theoretical background and a deeper understanding of embodiment and its application.

Defining Embodied Awareness

Merleau-Ponty (2002) was a philosopher who challenged Renē Descartes' dualistic view that the body and mind were separate, and the body was machine-like, and had lesser value than the mind (Descartes, 2008). Instead, Merleau-Ponty (2002) emphasised the importance of recognising the body as an integral part of our lived experience. He argued that the body and mind are not separate entities, but are unified, and that our body is more than just an object. Life is experienced through the body, making it an essential part of who we are. Our body shapes our sense of self and informs how we perceive and interact with the world. Through our bodily actions, we influence our environment, and in turn, our environment and interactions with others shape our embodied and perceptual experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 2002).

A neurobiological perspective supports this understanding, highlighting the body and mind as interconnected systems with a bidirectional exchange of information. This relationship informs how we interpret and respond to the world around us, further reinforcing the importance of embodied experience (Schwartz & Maiberger, 2018).

Embodiment, when viewed through a neurobiological lens, involves the concept of the 'felt sense' which Schwartz and Maiberger (2018) describe as comprising three sensory components that connect the body and mind. The first, interoception, refers to internal sensory information such as body temperature, hunger or fatigue. Interoception is also linked to emotional feeling states, with sensory neurons delivering signals from organs, muscles and supportive tissues to the brain.

The second component, proprioception, involves the body's sense of position in space, for example, whether it is upright, leaning, or upside down, which is derived from sensory input from the joints and inner ear. The third, exteroception, gathers information from outside the body, via the skin, eyes, nose, tongue and ears. These external sensory experiences are also fed back to the brain (Schwartz & Maiberger, 2018). While exteroception and proprioception provide information about the external environment and the body's position and movement, interoception monitors the body's internal state, generating continuous, subjective signals that Carvalho and Damasio (2021) identify as the foundation for conscious feelings. Collectively, these three systems inform the mind's interpretation of bodily signals and influence an individual's experience of and response to the environment, thereby forming the foundation of the 'felt sense' (Schwartz & Maiberger, 2018).

This integrated explanation of embodied awareness highlights that social workers, like all people, share a bodily experience grounded in universal aspects of

neurobiology, while also acknowledging the individual differences that arise from the subjective nature of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Schwartz & Maiberger, 2018). Therefore, it could be suggested that embodiment honours the diversity of experiences and cultural identity among social workers, as each person's neurobiological responses are shaped by their unique lived experiences.

Additionally, the neuroscientist Porges (2009) introduced the concept of neuroception, which refers to the brain's automatic and unconscious ability to assess the environment for cues of safety or danger. This process draws on physiological and sensory input and enables individuals to respond quickly, often without conscious thought. While neuroception can operate below conscious awareness, Schwartz and Maiberger (2018) note that it can also occur within conscious awareness. Through developing embodied awareness, individuals can become more attuned to these cues of safety and danger. This suggests that fostering embodied awareness could help social workers regulate their emotional responses and effectively attune to clients' nonverbal signals.

It may be proposed that embodied awareness is both an art and a science. Merleau-Ponty (2002) offers a nuanced philosophical account of embodiment, emphasising the experiential aspect of tuning into the self as a way of consciously knowing oneself. This is a subjective process, informed by our lived experience through the body, which shapes our perception of the world. In contrast, neurobiology offers a

functional, scientific explanation of embodiment, describing the mechanisms behind the 'felt sense' (Schwartz & Maiberger, 2018). Taken together, these perspectives suggest embodied awareness is a practice through which our body and mind work together, supporting in-the-moment action, adaptive engagement with the environment and relational attunement. From my perspective as a practitioner-researcher, both views are essential. This study, therefore, recognises the value of both philosophical and scientific understandings of embodiment and incorporates these perspectives to define embodied awareness.

The Call for Embodied Social Work

Mensinga and Pyles (2021) emphasise in their editorial that social workers bodily awareness is central to understanding social injustice and maintaining wellbeing. They use the term disembodiment to describe the disconnection from physical and emotional experiences, noting that when social workers are disembodied, they might struggle to fully understand the effects of oppression on themselves and their clients. Attending to how social, political and economic factors manifest in the body allows workers to engage more thoughtfully and ethically in their work. Recognising bodily signals can also help identify stress and inform strategies for wellbeing. The authors highlight the link between embodied awareness and sustainable, anti-oppressive practice while offering insights and approaches to self-care. They also note that embodiment currently has a limited role in the social work field, constraining both its individual and collective potential. To integrate embodiment meaningfully, they

argue for the use of embodiment in social work practice. In doing so, embodiment becomes a professional and political resource, supporting social workers to address oppression, promote social justice, and maintain wellbeing over time.

Additionally, van Rhyn et al. (2021) draw on phenomenological theory to explore embodiment as a way to enhance empathy in social work. They suggest that engaging with clients through embodied empathy can deepen understanding and strengthen connection. They also propose that embodied empathy can support a social worker's wellbeing by bringing awareness to their body's subjective response to a client's story. This bodily awareness helps practitioners differentiate their own experience from that of the client, safeguarding them from internalising a client's story.

Gardner et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review exploring embodiment in social work over the past two decades. They found limited research involving embodiment in social work practice. Similar to Mensinga and Pyles (2021) and van Rhyn et al. (2021), they assert that embodiment in social work should be further developed. Additionally, Gardner et al. (2023) found multiple understandings of embodiment and its application in the field. They suggest that embodiment should play a key role in social work; however, for this to occur, there must be an active engagement in building knowledge and practical application to develop a shared and cohesive approach. They emphasise the need for further research incorporating the body, with

the aim of fostering a shared understanding that is also transferable, so that social workers can engage more fully with their own embodiment. Similarly, Bogue Kerr (2025) noted that although the body is present in every aspect of social work, it is often overlooked. This led them to conduct a scoping review examining how the body is represented and understood in the social work literature. They also found that the body is approached in diverse ways, showing limited consistency in how it is researched.

Martin et al. (2023) conceptualise embodiment in social work education as a part of a multidimensional framework aimed at supporting self-care and professional sustainability. While their approach integrates embodiment into a curriculum design as reflective teaching, it primarily positions embodiment as a conceptual and educational lens rather than focusing on direct body or sensory practices. The framework encourages critical reflection and awareness of the body but does not emphasise the 'felt sense'. This illustrates one of the multiple interpretations of embodiment currently emerging in the field. As a practising social worker and researcher who has experienced and witnessed the benefits of embodiment both personally and professionally, I strongly align with the arguments made by Gardner et al. (2023); Mensinga and Pyles (2021) and van Rhyn et al. (2021), who advocate for a more integrated role for embodiment within the field. I also call for an approach that not only clearly articulates what embodiment means in our social work field, but also ensures it is enacted in practice, so that social workers can truly experience

embodiment rather than only speak about it conceptually.

Stress, Burnout and Social Workers

The World Health Organisation identifies burnout as a significant concern, and it is included in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), recognising that it impacts the wellbeing of workers. Workers who experience burnout may disengage from their role, become disheartened, and this can result in a negative view of their work. They can experience lower energy and fatigue, and their professionalism may decrease (World Health Organization, 2019).

Burnout and wellbeing concerns have long been prominent issues within the social work field. Travis et al. (2016), using longitudinal data from child protection workers in the United States, demonstrated that work related stress contributes to emotional exhaustion and detachment from the work, which in turn can result in reduced engagement including work withdrawal. Building on this earlier study, Maddock (2024) shows that stress is a significant risk factor for poor mental health among social workers in Northern Ireland, further increasing the likelihood of burnout. A systematic review and meta-analysis completed by Giménez-Bertomeu et al. (2024) found social workers had high levels of burnout symptoms, and they carry a higher risk of burnout when compared to other professions. Collectively, these studies indicate that occupational stress has a persistent and detrimental impact on social workers' wellbeing, highlighting the critical need to continue developing strategies to

support social workers.

Tan and Yeap (2022) completed a study in Aotearoa/New Zealand with social workers in non-profit organisations. They found that meaningful work contributes to work engagement, and work engagement holds promise in reducing burnout, both elements working together can be protective. For these two elements to be realised, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. They suggest organisations have several responsibilities: resourcing workers technically and emotionally for the complexities of the work, defining work values and creating opportunities for social workers to gather and explore work practices. This complements research by Adamson et al. (2014) in their Aotearoa/New Zealand-based study, which identified resilience as a protective factor for social workers. They mapped three contributing elements of resilience: Self, Mediating Factors and Practice Context. The authors emphasised the importance of practice context in shaping resilience, suggesting that organisational factors can influence workers' experience of resilience.

Additionally, a study that developed a culturally specific tool to measure stress for Māori (Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand) workers in the health and disability sector found that workers had similar stressors as non-Māori, however, they also experienced the further stressor regarding a lack of cultural safety and systemic racism, increasing the risk of wellbeing concerns (Stewart & Gardner, 2015). Although this study was not specifically about Māori social workers, it identifies a

further unique risk Māori workers have in the caring field. Stress, wellbeing concerns and potential burnout remain pressing issues within the social work field, Aotearoa/New Zealand is not immune to these challenges (Maddock, 2024; Tan & Yeap, 2022). Despite widespread awareness, social work education, organisations and practitioners themselves have not yet succeeded in reducing the impact of these concerns. In response, this study explores an embodied approach to supporting social workers' wellbeing, recognising that resilience and self-care are experienced through the body.

The Body's Role in Self-Care

Self-care is identified as an approach to maintaining wellbeing, and it has grown in importance in the social work field due to the increasingly inherent stressors social workers are experiencing. Self-care has multiple definitions; however, at its core, it is used to support a person's emotional and physical health. To do this effectively, it considers the physical, professional, psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of a person (Collins, 2021).

Self-care, according to Miller et al. (2020) has been identified as a useful approach for reducing the risk of burnout and managing workplace stressors. Their exploratory cross-sectional study in the United States investigated the use of self-care practices for self-identified social workers. Although the study did not specify what was being used, it found that the application of self-care was limited. Similarly, Collins (2021)

noted a lack of research on self-care within the United Kingdom context, with most available studies originating from the United States. The findings revealed a strong theme of limited self-care among social workers, who appeared to prioritise organisational demands over their wellbeing. Furthermore, Collins (2021) argues that much has been written about self-care, yet little research demonstrates its effectiveness. Collins (2021) also noted that the term self-care can potentially be unhelpful as it identifies the individual as being solely responsible for their wellbeing. He emphasises the need for research that also incorporates a collective approach towards self-care and contends that the responsibility for promoting self-care lies with organisations and social work education providers.

An earlier study by Bloomquist et al. (2015), involving master of social work practitioners in the United States, reflected a similar concern as the later studies by Collins (2021) and Miller et al. (2020), namely, the limited application of self-care in social work practice. Bloomquist et al. (2015) also noted a lack of support or guidance from both educational programs and workplaces on how to enact self-care, and social workers' limited ability to express their wellbeing needs within the organisations they worked. When self-care incorporated the body, it was primarily framed around a functional approach of maintaining physical health, such as medical care, exercise, sleep and dietary requirements (Bloomquist et al., 2015; Collins, 2021). Self-care involving the body appears to have a narrow focus. This functional use of the body's incorporation into self-care appears to be reflected in Aotearoa/New

Zealand.

Gallagher and Cooper (2023) completed a qualitative research study with end-of-life care social workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, exploring how they incorporated self-care into their practice. It was found that the incorporation of their body for self-care focused on eating well, achieving good sleep, along with relaxing the body. Though this was a small study, participants' responses were similar to those of the physical approach noted by Collins (2021). Addressing the body in self-care is important; however, to only implement nutrition, sleep hygiene and exercise to support the body is limiting. A person's psychological response to stress is informed by the body and the mind.

Stewart and Gardner (2015) developed the *Mahi Oranga* tool to measure occupational strain, among Māori (Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand) workers, drawing on the foundational Te Whare Tapa Whā model (Durie, 1998), which is a holistic model of Māori health. They used the following four dimensions taha whānau (social and family), taha hinengaro (emotional and mental), taha wairua (spiritual) and taha tinana (body). While all four dimensions are deemed equally essential, the developers (in consultation with Māori stakeholders) chose to omit taha tinana (body) from the cultural safety domain, suggesting a division between the body and mind (Stewart & Gardner, 2015).

This decision reflects a broader pattern in the literature, where the body's role in self-care is framed in primarily functional terms (Collins, 2021). For example, Stewart and Gardner (2015, p. 84) also included a participant quote regarding the body: "I regularly participate in activities that keep me physically active." The use of this quote suggests that both the authors and the participant approached the body as something to be maintained or managed for wellbeing, rather than engaged with as a source of felt experience, presence, or self-awareness. Potentially, viewing the body primarily in this way limits its contribution.

Potential Benefits of Embodiment in the Field

Mehling et al. (2011) completed a qualitative study based in the United States with influential practitioners in the embodiment field along with some of their patients/clients. Participants shared a common view that embodiment is closely tied to enhanced self-awareness and increases a sense of wholeness, the body and mind are not separate aligning with Merleau-Ponty's (2002) stance. This emphasis on self-awareness aligns with findings from Katz et al. (2024) who conducted a mixed methods case study evaluating an embodied mindfulness approach in Canada within a master of social work course. The study found that students developed deeper reflective capacities and self-awareness, which supported greater emotional regulation and, in turn, increased empathy towards clients. These outcomes suggest that cultivating embodied awareness in social work education may benefit both practitioners and those they work with.

Pfluger et al. (2023) conducted a psychometric evaluation of the *Reactions to Somatic Stress Questionnaire* in Germany and found that individuals' perception of bodily sensations could either amplify or reduce stress, depending on how those sensations are interpreted and managed. Sabbagh et al. (2023), in a qualitative study of Australian hospital social workers, demonstrated that a negative interpretation of bodily sensations led participants to disconnect from their bodies, ignoring the discomfort to maintain function in high stress environments, ultimately resulting in fatigue and unhealthy physical symptoms. Their findings strongly suggest that the intentional practice of disembodiment is concerning as it can result in unhealthy consequences. Together, these studies highlight the importance of cultivating a responsive relationship with bodily sensations. It could be suggested that fostering embodiment may offer a deeper awareness of the body-mind connection potentially offering a more adaptive approach towards stress. However, without structures that actively promote embodied awareness, particularly in education and workplace settings, these benefits may remain underutilised.

The findings from Sabbagh et al. (2023) suggest that disembodiment may function as a short-term coping mechanism in high-pressure environments but ultimately contributes to whole-person exhaustion. In contrast, this study proposes that increasing embodiment may offer an approach to support social workers in managing the demands of work practice. The embodied mindfulness study by Katz et al. (2024) demonstrates how such awareness can be cultivated in social work

education, enhancing students' self-regulation, empathy and reflective capacity. These insights point to the potential of embodied approaches, particularly if supported by both education and organisations.

Body-Mind Resourcing: A Novel Approach

The integration of body-based interventions within talk therapy is increasing and has been used in social work practice. Kimmell and Gockel (2018) refer to these approaches as body-oriented psychotherapies (BOP). They conducted a qualitative study in the United States exploring the use of BOP in client group work facilitated predominantly by social workers. Although their study focused on facilitators' perceptions of the effectiveness of BOP strategies for participants, it also provided insight into how these practices benefited the facilitators themselves. Their findings suggest that when practitioners attune to their own bodily signals, their responsiveness to clients' needs within a group setting can be enhanced, thereby supporting more effective program delivery. This points to the broader possibility that body-based strategies may strengthen practitioners' self-awareness and potentially contribute to more sustainable self-care practices.

Griffiths et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review looking at self-care interventions for social work students in the United States. They found only four interventions that met their criteria, and all were mindfulness based. Though this study focused solely on research in the United States, it does suggests there is limited research on

evaluated self-care programs in social work education, with mindfulness being the main approach used. Maddock et al. (2024) completed a focus group study involving participants who were frontline social workers in Northern Ireland. The study explored their experiences of a six-week mindfulness-based programme. The findings suggest the programme supported social workers' wellbeing. Interestingly, each week, a mindfulness practice was explored and then linked with a body-based home exercise, such as a self-compassion body scan and body acceptance scan. Although mindfulness was the primary framework, the inclusion of body practices points to embodiment's potential to offer additional support for social workers.

A multi-site randomised controlled trial involving community mental health workers in Hong Kong delivered a brief, daily fifteen-minute workplace wellbeing program integrating body-mind-spirit dimensions over three months, with a further three-month follow-up. The program aimed to enhance work engagement and reduce burnout. Results showed significant improvement in work engagement, alongside modest reductions in burnout at follow-up (Ng et al., 2024). Though this was a more novel approach for exploring wellbeing the study's incorporation of the body appeared to reflect the more common functional use of the body with the application of exercise and massage; the only element that deviated was the exploration of using singing collectively. Additionally, they suggest that for workplace wellbeing programs to be sustainable, they need to be embedded within the organisational context, which is also reflected in Pyles et al. (2021).

Pyles et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods pilot evaluation of a two-day workshop for social workers exploring the Holistic Engagement Practice (HEP) model. HEP develops four key skills, including one that addresses the body, mind and spirit experience called the "whole self presence" (Pyles et al., 2021, p. 287) . The program was found to enhance empathy and self-care among participants. However, the ongoing application of these skills outside of the workshop was challenged by work pressures and a perceived loss of the connection fostered during the collective and supportive workshop environment. The study emphasised the importance of mainstreaming these practices by integrating them into social work education and organisational structures to fully realise their benefits.

To date, the only exploration of body-mind resources for social workers in an Aotearoa/New Zealand context is by Sirs and Meek (2021). They discuss incorporating a Māori (Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand) grounded embodiment practice, poi spinning (which involves swinging weighted objects tethered to strings around the body), into both client work and self-care. Poi is presented as an accessible modality to support healing and enhance wellbeing. However, this account is experiential and reflective rather than research based. The authors are not Indigenous practitioners, and while they acknowledge poi's cultural origins, their framing largely removes poi from its cultural context. Thus, embodied body-mind resourcing remains minimally explored in the social work literature of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Beyond social work, research demonstrates body-based interventions can support stress management in caring professions, approaches that may be transferable to social work. The Community Resiliency Model (CRM) is a biologically grounded program originating in the United States designed to reduce stress in the workplace and community settings through body awareness and self-regulation skills (Grabbe et al., 2023). While not a therapy, CRM is grounded in the principles of body-focused trauma psychotherapy and was designed to support individuals to bring awareness to their bodily sensations with the intention to develop self-regulation and resiliency (Grabbe et al., 2020). A randomised controlled trial among nurses found that a single three-hour CRM session resulted in improved wellbeing measures, and they actively used the CRM strategies during their workday to support themselves. Although this study focused on nursing, it holds relevance for social work given the shared exposure to trauma and emotional labour in caring professions (Grabbe et al., 2020).

Freeman et al. (2022) further evaluated CRM's effectiveness in a diverse, underserved community in southern California, where participants faced significant inequality and trauma. CRM's non-stigmatising, body-based approach showed promise in supporting a broad range of individuals influenced by systemic stress and cultural trauma. Together, these findings suggest that body-based resources like CRM have transferability across a variety of populations as an effective self-care strategy. Therefore, it could be suggested that body-based support like this may also be supportive for social workers' wellbeing.

These studies highlight the potential of incorporating body-mind resources within organisational and educational settings to support social worker wellbeing and engagement. However, the limited research that incorporates the use of the body in social work, particularly within the Aotearoa/New Zealand landscape, indicates that more work is needed. This gap reinforces calls from scholars for further investigation into embodiment in social work practice (Gardner et al., 2023; Mensinga & Pyles, 2021; van Rhyn et al., 2021). I suggest body-mind resources can be seen as an extension of embodiment; once embodiment is fostered, it provides a foundation that enables social workers to more readily recognise when resources are needed and to engage them in a timely and effective manner, potentially further contributing to wellbeing.

Concluding Reflections

This literature review provided a definition of embodiment, highlighted the limited use of the body within social work, and explored embodiment's potential contribution to the field. While scholars have begun investigating the integration of embodied awareness, it is evident that further research and practical applications are needed to explore its possibilities in the social work field. This study focuses on how embodiment might support social workers' wellbeing and extends this exploration with the inclusion of body-mind resourcing. Consequently, the research inquiry that guides this study is an exploration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources as support for social workers.

Chapter Three Methodology and Research Methods

This chapter outlines my position as the researcher and the motivations behind this research. It discusses the chosen methodology and the rationale for its selection. Following this is an overview of the research methods used, the steps taken for ethics approval, and the insights gained from this process. The recruitment strategy and selection criteria for participants are explored, as well as the data collection methods. A discussion on the data analysis procedures is included along with concluding thoughts.

Action Research Methodology

Action research is a study approach that involves the researcher engaging in social contexts to gain understanding and develop solutions that can be applied to improve concerns (McNiff, 2017). The beginnings of action research occurred in the 1940s, and the German social psychologist Kurt Lewin was the first to name this process of generating knowledge and creating change 'action research'. A noteworthy article written by Lewin (1946) regarding this approach continues to be referred to by action researchers (McCormack & Dewing, 2013; Mertler, 2020; Stringer, 2014). Given the experiential nature of this research, a pragmatic approach was necessary, as the intention was to explore embodied learning within a community of social workers, providing opportunities for reflection and further development. The action research

methodology was well suited to this approach, as it offers a cyclical process of reflection and action, while emphasising collaboration. Additionally, the action research process of seeking solutions through reflection and collaboration in real-world contexts aligns with how I strive to operate in the world. However, at times, work overload and life demands cause me to lose sight of this way of being. As a social worker, using action research in this study provided me with the opportunity to further develop practical skills that I can continue to use long after the research is completed, while also exploring an approach that aligns with the core values of how I want to engage in the world.

Action research can take various forms, and it is designed to meet the needs of the community. Therefore, action research is the overarching umbrella, and the researcher uses an approach that best meets the research inquiry. Developmental and educational approaches are examples of this coupling with action research. The varied approaches are chosen by the researcher based on the field they sit within and what they hope to achieve (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Dick, 2015). Hence, action research is adaptable based on the researcher's context and objectives, as in the case of educational action research (Dick, 2015).

Vaartjes and Goff (2008) emphasise the significance and importance of embodiment in the action research process. They suggest that an action researcher brings with them, their whole self, thoughts, history, emotions and their body into the research.

This means that the body should not be considered separate from the mind; both are actively involved in the research. Consequently, research becomes a holistic experience. This research focused on exploring the use of embodied awareness coupled with body-mind resources. Hence, it was important to have a methodology that incorporated an embodied approach, which gave continuity to the research. Action research's adaptability enabled the use of an embodied approach, giving the research a cohesive, integrated method honouring the body-mind unity. Therefore, the research involved theoretical concepts (through the mind) while also incorporating direct physical experience (through the body) to inform the research process. Further, Johnson (2022) states that it is important that research gains knowledge from both the body and the mind. With this understanding, I took an approach that identified myself as an embodied researcher.

The commonalities within the various action research approaches are that any person can initiate action research in their work, social setting or personal life to create positive change or improvements (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Cardno, 2003; Dick, 2015). As noted by McNiff (2017), unlike traditional research, where the researcher maintains a distance from what they are researching, in action research, they are active participants in the setting or context that is being studied. This identifies the researcher as an 'insider', unlike traditional research where they are perceived as an 'outsider'. Therefore, the researcher is not observing from afar (traditionalist approach), instead they are actively within the setting they are researching, taking a

my/our approach rather than the traditionalist approach of they/them. This 'insider' approach of action research allowed me to carry dual roles of being an embodied social work researcher who is researching within their own professional community, while also locating myself as an embodied social worker facilitator who created and delivered the program.

Further, as noted by McNiff (2017), action research has three ontological components these being a moral commitment, it is collaborative and has values of equality. The action researcher is influenced by and influences the field they are exploring, which differentiates it from traditional research that has neutrality as one of its main values. Action research identifies the importance of values as they give the motivation and guidance for research and drive the action. This methodology met my own personal and social work value of collaboration to 'do with' rather than 'do to'. As noted by Stringer and Ortiz Aragōn (2021) action research takes a pragmatic approach and is about taking action to improve a current situation, this too aligns with my value base and that of the social work field of creating beneficial practical change. This research aimed to develop a practically useful approach to support social workers that could easily be integrated into social work practice.

As suggested by Stringer and Ortiz Aragōn (2021), action research is a cyclical process and consists of three steps: Look - Think - Act. Each of these steps occurs within each of the research processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating.

Look - Think - Act creates the cyclical nature of the action research process. This dynamic process is non-linear; stages may be revisited as new understandings are gained during the research process, which in turn may result in a new inquiry. Below is Stringer and Ortiz Aragōn (2021, p. 9) explanation of the three cyclical steps and Figure 3.1 visually demonstrates this:

Look

1. Observe what is going on (observe).
2. Gather relevant information (gather data).
3. Describe the situation (define and describe).

Think

1. Explore and analyse: What is happening here? (analyze).

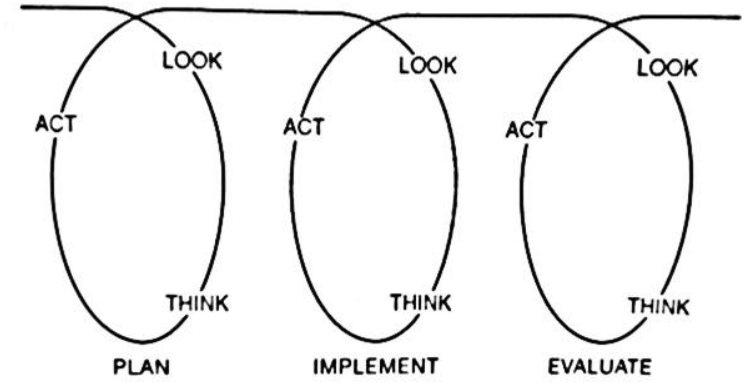
2. Interpret and explain: How or why are things as they are? (theorize).

Act

1. Define a course of action based on analysis and interpretation (plan).
2. Implement the plan (implement).
3. Evaluate: Assess the effectiveness of actions taken (evaluate).

Figure 3.1

Action Research Interacting Spiral



Source: *Action research* (5th ed., p. 10) by E.T. Stringer & A. Aragōn, 2021, SAGE.

Social workers within Aotearoa /New Zealand experience work-related stressors that can ultimately increase the risk of burnout. Research within this country that has addressed this concern has mainly focused on researching what is already available as support for social workers, such as monthly supervision or exploration of the cause of burnout (Gallagher & Cooper, 2023). The research generally offers theoretical knowledge such as recommendations or new insights regarding this concern, however; there is no implementation of change during the research itself. Therefore, instead of addressing what is already being used as support for social workers or exploring the causation of stress within the field, I wanted to take a more proactive approach.

The generative process of action research creates practical knowledge that can lead to

positive change in real-world settings (Mertler, 2020). Similarly, my research aimed to generate insights that are not only theoretical but are also practically applicable. This ensured that findings were actionable and had the potential to bring about meaningful change. Further, I align with the understanding that nothing is static; the planet continues to change, evolve and adapt, as do people. Therefore, action research offered an approach that was dynamic and allowed the research to continue to evolve and maintain relevance. The cyclical approach offered the ability to establish further or new inquiries that could build upon the initial research. Therefore, when this study ended, there was the possibility to further use action research to continue to explore the embodied approach as a support for social workers.

I actively engaged as an embodied researcher, incorporating my physical presence and experience into the research, ensuring that the findings were grounded in lived experience and practical realities, which is a cornerstone of action research (Stringer & Ortiz Aragōn, 2021). The planning phase using Look - Think - Act has been an ongoing process throughout my time as a social worker. As I observed the stress experienced by colleagues and myself, I began to reflect upon potential solutions. Initially, offering various micro-level approaches to support us. Over time, this evolved into a meso-level exploration, and I became involved in a working group focused on streamlining paperwork to help reduce the workload within the organisation where I practiced.

When transitioning to private practice, as a social work supervisor and through discussion with colleagues, the theme of stress and overload continued to present. This experience led me to pursue my current research, which culminated in planning a workshop focused on embodiment and body-mind resources. The workshop's delivery and the subsequent five-week online follow-up constituted the implementation phase of the planning. Throughout this process, I continuously applied the Look - Think - Act cyclical model, allowing me to evaluate the effectiveness of my actions and refine my approach. The evaluation aspect has further reinforced the cyclical nature of Look - Think - Act offering ongoing learning and adaptation.

Methods

This study sought practical knowledge on how embodied awareness coupled with body-mind resources might offer support to social workers. With this intention, the following methods were used and consisted of four phases.

Phase One

Phase One was informed by my experiences running experiential therapeutic groups, completing professional development focused on embodiment, and exploring the benefits of embodiment coupled with body-mind resources in therapeutic work with clients. Through these learnings a full-day in-person workshop was designed. This

format was the most practical and effective way to explore and share these approaches.

In the morning the focus was on experiential practices to foster embodied awareness (see Appendix A). As noted by Schwartz and Maiberger (2018) the experience of embodiment is informed by three sensory components of the body these being interoception, proprioception and exteroception. Therefore, the experiential practices were either adapted or created to have one or more of these three components. For example, the *embodied walking* offered proprioception with a spatial cue "Walk slowly and deliberately, paying close attention to each step you take". *Noticing the outer arm to noticing the inner arm* explored interoception with an internal cue: "Shift your awareness gradually toward the inner arm. Notice the sensations deep within your arm, such as muscle tension, pulsing blood flow, or subtle movements". Additionally, while all participants share the commonality of having a body, each carries their own unique experience of being in their body. Therefore, it was essential for the morning workshop to offer a variety of experiential practices to foster embodied awareness.

In the afternoon, the focus was to learn about and explore experientially body-mind resources (see Appendix B). In this study, body-mind resources are techniques that incorporate the body and mind to support wellbeing and can be used for self-care purposes. Through experience, simplicity and ease of transferability were key,

allowing participants to apply the resources outside of the workshop. A range of resources were offered to increase the likelihood of participants finding techniques that suited their needs. Following are the resources that were shared:

Body-Mind Resources

Centring: This resource was adapted from Schwartz and Maiberger (2018) and was used to support embodiment and was introduced at the beginning of the afternoon workshop to help participants centre themselves by bringing awareness to their thoughts, emotions and body sensations, preparing them for the exploration of the resources. Additionally, it was used after each resource exploration to help participants return to a neutral state, ensuring readiness for the next resource experience. In my own work, I often use this resource at the beginning of a session with a client to bring us together. The positive feedback from clients regarding this resource led to its inclusion in the research.

Shaking Resource: Originating from somatic experiencing (Levine, 1997), this technique has been shown to be effective in releasing trauma from the body. I have found this resource effective when working with clients and for myself to support the letting go of difficult material that has been explored in session. For the workshop, it was adapted to focus on the release of tension and stress, with participants using the verbal intention "I am releasing" or "I am letting go" to further support this process.

The Physiological Sigh Breath: While breathwork is often used in the therapeutic field to support calm, it can have the opposite effect for some individuals, potentially triggering dysregulation. Therefore, only one breath resource was selected, with the physiological sigh chosen for its simplicity and the research supporting its effectiveness in reducing stress (Balban, 2023) .

The Flash: This resource was introduced to me during Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing (EMDR) training with Graham Taylor. It was discovered by Philip Manfield and it is considered a safe and gentle way to desensitise distressing experiences (Manfield et al., 2024). Both my personal experience and feedback from clients who have used it have found it effective in easing the emotional charge of recent difficult experiences. In the social work field, distressing events can hinder the ability to move forward in the workday. This resource can dull the emotional intensity of the experience and support moving forward.

Letting Go: Social workers can face various and significant challenges during their workday. This resource was adapted from Mark Walsh's work. It offers an opportunity to take physical action to release and let go of pressure, potentially reducing the risk of accumulated stress (Walsh, 2020).

Shifting from Tunnel Vision to Panoramic Vision: Stress can narrow attention, producing tunnel vision, which can trigger the sympathetic nervous system, which causes

adrenaline and promotes reactive fight or flight responses (Huberman, 2021). In contrast, deliberately broadening one's view can help reduce a reactive response, supporting a more regulated state while still maintaining alertness. This resource was chosen because, it can be practised discreetly while working at a computer, when moving between appointments or sitting in a meeting without drawing attention from colleagues.

Letting Go of Client Material: This is a further practice of letting go of the workday. It could potentially be used for consciously preparing to transition from the workplace to home. It was chosen for its intentional focus on releasing the day's emotional or mental load. This practice can also be used during the workday or at the end of the day to create a sense of a 'clean slate' and it intentionally engages both the body and mind, creating a whole-body experience of letting go (Schwartz & Maiberger, 2018).

Supporting Self: In challenging situations, our bodies often respond with tension, such as clenching the jaw, stiffening limbs, or an increased heart rate. This tension can persist long after the incident. Using a self-soothing technique, like a gentle self-hug, can help release the tension and encourage the body to relax. This was a tactile resource offered to participants who may find comfort in touch and was adapted from Peter Levine's work (Levine, 2008).

Humming: Humming has been shown to support the nervous system by stimulating

the vagus nerve. This resource was chosen as it can be used without interrupting the workday, for example, while driving back to the office or on the way home, helping to promote a calming effect during or after a demanding day (Trivedi et al., 2023).

Both the embodiment practices (see Appendix A) and the body-mind resources (see Appendix B) were either reproduced, or adapted approaches based on learning experiences and readings from various fields such as neuroscience, psychotherapy and somatic therapy.

Phase Two

Phase Two was optional for those who completed the workshop. It was developed due to past discussions with social work colleagues and my own experiences with professional development, where workshops often provide initial learning, but without further exposure to the material, it becomes challenging to integrate it into practice. Further, in my work, when delivering therapeutic groups, it was found that weekly repetition for several weeks increased clients' use and development of practices. Therefore, the decision was made to create a live five-week online follow-up via teams to support integration of the workshop learnings.

The decision to complete this phase online was made to increase accessibility for participants; no new material was offered in these sessions. The outline (see Appendix C) followed a semi-structured, repetitive approach, focusing on the same

embodiment practice to begin each session and then exploring the body-mind resources. The weekly structure allowed for continuity and reflection, with each session revisiting core practices and providing space for participants to share their experiences and challenges. Each session lasted sixty minutes, and all sessions but one occurred on Mondays due to Waitangi weekend (a public holiday), which was moved to Thursday. All sessions took place in the evening at the same time as this best met participants' needs.

Phase Three

The purpose of Phase Three was to gain an in-depth exploration of participants' personal journeys of embodiment, to further explore whether embodiment and/or the body-mind resources offered any support, and the potential to capture unexpected insights and shared themes. Additionally, the interview provided an opportunity to gain further feedback for the development of the five-week online follow-up. This phase was optional for participants who attended the five-week online group, and it consisted of a sixty-minute, semi-structured individual interview (see Appendix D). This interview was conducted either in person or online, depending on the participant's needs.

Phase Four

The aim of this phase was to further develop the workshop and five-week online

group. The data collected from all prior phases were revisited to identify areas of improvement and to enhance the program's relevance. This analysis provided key guidance for adapting and modifying both the workshop and the online group. This iterative process reflects the core principles of action research, where the data collection, reflection and refinement occurred in real-time to improve the program. The development of Phase Four will be discussed in Chapter Five, which examines the reflections and implications arising from the study.

Ethics Process

Full ethical approval for application OM3 24/26 was received from Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) Ohu Matatika 3, Manawatu campus in Palmerston North, New Zealand on the 13 August 2024 (see Appendix E). The ethics process is guided by Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations and principles which address and honour the bicultural landscape of Aotearoa/New Zealand (MUHEC, 2017). Due to limited uptake from social workers, an amended application was sent to MUHEC requesting that Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) be approached to have the research placed in their electronic newsletter and Facebook page while also sharing the research information at an ANZASW gathering to take place in Invercargill on the 25 September 2024. Additionally, two further organisations based in Invercargill were added to assist in the recruitment of participants. The amendment was approved on 20 September 2024 (see Appendix F).

Due to the research occurring in the small city of Invercargill, it was evident that participants would either know the researcher or know of the researcher. Due to this possibility, during the ethics approval process, it was noted that social work friends would be excluded from the research and there would be limited contact with social work colleagues who took part in the research to minimize influence. Consent was sought by fully informing the participants in the individual meetings prior to the study of the possible risks and benefits. The participant information sheet (see Appendix G) also noted the potential risk of discomfort, and on the day of the workshop, participants were given a support contact sheet that had support numbers/websites for them to access if needed, along with my own contact details (see Appendix H). On the day of the workshop, a participant experienced some discomfort they were supported, and the participant was able and willing to continue with the workshop. On leaving the workshop they also had available to them the support contact sheet.

Due to the research incorporating group work, the importance of confidentiality was discussed with the participants to ensure that this was maintained. As this research involved three phases of data collection, two approaches were used to protect participants' privacy: identifying participants as participant A, Participant B, and so forth and assigning pseudonyms. Each phase specifies which approach was used to support privacy. However, two participants had life situations that were relevant to their experience of embodiment. It was discussed with both participants that some of

their data may cause them to be easily identifiable. They both verbally consented to the use of this data. Additionally, participants' workplaces and the locations of their workplaces are not identified in the study to further support confidentiality.

Participation Criteria

Action research positions the researcher as an 'insider' who seeks to create change within their own profession or social setting (McNiff, 2017). Therefore, as a social worker researcher focused on supporting colleagues in the field, the recruitment criteria included all current practising social workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, who were willing to self-select to participate in the research and were able to attend an in-person workshop in Invercargill. Social workers who were no longer practising were excluded from the research.

Recruitment

This study consisted of three phases for recruiting participants:

Phase One

Contact was made with the management of organisations where social workers are employed to discuss the research, and a request was made to meet with social workers in person. However, all organisations approached chose to disseminate the information sheet (see Appendix G) to their workers through their

own meetings or via email instead of having the researcher speak with them. ANZASW was approached, and the research information sheet was shared in their electronic newsletter and Facebook page. Additionally, I attended an ANZASW gathering where the research was shared, and the information sheet was provided.

Upon reading the information sheet, social workers contacted me directly via email stating their interest. We then arranged a time to meet either in person or online via Teams (dependent on the participants' preference) to discuss the research and answer any further questions the participants had. During this meeting, cultural and other needs were explored, and a follow-up email was sent to participants confirming their place in the workshop along with the time, address/directions on where it would be held. The consent form (see Appendix I) for the workshop was completed on the day of the workshop.

Phase Two

Recruitment for Phase Two took place at the end of the Phase One workshop; as a group, the participants were offered the opportunity to attend the five-week online follow-up sessions. The consent form (see Appendix J) for this phase was available to complete at the workshop.

Phase Three

Phase Three recruitment occurred on the last session of the Phase Two five-week online group; participants were asked if they would like to take part in the individual interview. Their answer was not requested at that time. Instead, they were made aware that a follow-up email would be sent out to gauge interest, and they could respond via email if they would like to participate. Those who stated their willingness via email were sent the Phase Three consent form (see Appendix K). Recruiting participants as a collective for phases one to three offered a non-intrusive, choice-driven approach.

The Data Collection Process

Demographic Data

In Phase One, participants completed an anonymous demographic questionnaire (see Appendix L). The questions covered age, how you identify, ethnicity, years of experience in social work, practice setting, and the population participants work with. The demographic data was used to define the scope and boundaries of the study results, ensuring that the conclusions were not overly generalised to groups outside of this sample. Demographic data is displayed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Range	Response	Total
Experience	1-5 years	1
	6-10 years	2
	11-15 years	2
	16-20 years	3
	More than 20 years	2
Age	32-42 years	3
	43-49 years	2
	50-57 years	3
	58-64 years	2
Gender Identity	Female	10
Ethnicity	New Zealand European	7
	South African	1
	British	1
	Māori/Tongan/Samoan	1
Practice Setting	Child & Family Services	6
	Private Practice	1
	Healthcare	2
	Kaupapa Māori	1

Phase One

Eleven social workers registered for the workshop; however, on the day a participant needed to withdraw due to having unwell children at home. The data gathered from the morning workshop included a pre qualitative self-reflection exercise (see Appendix M), which explored participants' intentions for attending the workshop, along with an image of a body outline prompting them to illustrate their experience of embodiment prior to the workshop. Participants were encouraged to draw, colour and/or use descriptive words on the body. The use of the body outline was informed by a group retreat for ACC sensitive claims clients that I facilitated with my colleague Andrea Greer, who is also a social worker. Andrea had introduced small cut out

bodies for participants to draw on, helping them to identify their bodily sensations, this was valuable for exploring self-connection. In the workshop this provided participants with an opportunity to express their embodiment visually, to further support body awareness that did not solely rely on the written word.

At the end of the morning workshop a post self-reflection (See Appendix N) was completed which revisited participants intentions to understand if they were met or evolved. The image of the body outline was also repeated to see if their experience of embodiment had changed. In the post self-reflection a further question was introduced exploring how participants might use embodied awareness to support them in their work. The pre and post self-reflection exploration aimed to capture personal reflections and insights, offering understanding of the individual experience and relevance of the workshop.

As the morning progressed participants appeared to become more comfortable in the environment, and I would suggest became more aware of their body's needs. As initially, they mostly sat in chairs in stillness however, during the morning practices, participants began to move more freely between sitting on a chair or moving to the floor. Conversation became more free flowing throughout the workshop, and participants offered positive words regarding the experiential embodiment practices. Additionally, they were curious and inquisitive about the body-mind resources, and everyone was willing and open to experiment with them.

One participant was activated by the embodiment practice which involved sound (a mix of music and environmental sounds), they left the room and I followed them to check in, they expressed how the sound brought up an emotional discomfort within their body, this was explored and, though they already knew how to support themselves a simple grounding practice was done with them and they quickly rejoined the group. This was a reminder of how powerful these simple practices can be and the need to continue to check in with participants. As the day progressed participants shared stories of work challenges, this felt like a nourishing time for all involved and many commented on how comforting it felt to be within a community of social workers who really understood the challenges this profession holds.

At the end of the morning session participants also completed a questionnaire (see Appendix O). The purpose of this evaluation was to support the ongoing development of the workshop, refining and improving it. It included both quantitative (Likert scales) and qualitative (open ended) questions, exploring how well the workshop facilitated embodied awareness. It assessed the adequacy of guidance and time, and it provided data on the effectiveness of exercises. The afternoon session gathered both quantitative (Likert scales) and qualitative (open ended questions) data through a questionnaire (see Appendix P). This provided insights into participants' confidence in using the body-mind resources, their likelihood of using them at work, sharing of potential barriers to using the resources, their perceptions of what resources might be useful or applicable, and suggestions

for improving the afternoon session.

Additionally, as the facilitator and researcher, I used observation and reflection to explore participant involvement throughout the day and my own experience as the facilitator. The Phase One data collection processes fed into an iterative process for the further development of the workshop while also exploring the participants' subjective experience of embodiment and how it might support them. Participants were not required to include their names on either the morning or afternoon forms. This anonymity was intended to encourage them to share their experiences and viewpoints openly and honestly, without concern about how I, as the facilitator and researcher, might respond to their responses. As a result, participants are identified as Participant A, Participant B, and so forth.

Phase Two

Seven participants chose to take part in the five-week online follow-up. One participant attended all five sessions, while others attended intermittently because of other commitments. Due to the semi-structured format, these sessions took a more organic approach, encouraging participants to share their experiences. The outline for the process of these sessions is noted earlier on pages thirty-nine and forty. Although this phase had been focused on revisiting the practice of the body-mind resources, it was found that participants enjoyed being in community through sharing and learning from each other.

There were often pockets of silence as conversations did not always flow freely, and prompts were at times used to encourage discussion. Possible contributing factors towards this were that all participants voiced a preference for the in-person workshop over the group online format for two main reasons: first, they felt more 'spotlighted' online as everyone could be easily viewed throughout the sessions, and second, they felt there was a stronger sense of connection when in person. Further, the recording of the sessions may have caused participants to feel self-conscious; this could have contributed to the earlier sense of being 'spotlighted', reducing the free flow of conversation.

The online sessions were video recorded via the Massey University Teams account and transcribed in vivo using the Team's transcription tool. The transcripts were reviewed against the recordings and anonymised. Finally, the recordings were rewatched to explore how participants engaged their bodies within the weekly sessions, and these observations were cross-referenced with the transcript. It was important for the body data to be explored, given that the focus of the research was on embodiment. To maintain confidentiality, participants have been assigned pseudonyms when their comments are shared.

Phase Three

Four participants took part in the individual semi-structured interview. Although participants preferred the in-person workshop to the online group format in Phase

Two, only one chose to conduct the interview in person; the remaining three were done online, due to participants' convenience. All participants appeared more at ease in the interviews compared to the online follow-up in Phase Two. There was no notable difference between the in-person and online interviews in Phase Three, as all participants spoke freely. As mentioned in Phase Two, the online group setting created a heightened sense of being watched, while this feeling was diminished in the individual interviews, likely contributing to the observed ease in participants bodies and freer-flowing discussions. The 60-minute interview gave enough time for participants to reflect upon their experiences and offer feedback, with two interviews being completed in 50-minutes.

All interviews were video recorded via the Massey University Teams account and transcribed in vivo using the Teams transcription tool. The transcripts were reviewed against the recordings and anonymised. Participants were given the opportunity to review and edit the transcripts; one participant chose to review their transcript and made no changes. Finally, as in Phase Two, the recordings were rewatched to explore how participants engaged their bodies during the interview, and these observations were cross-referenced with their transcript. The relevance of this is noted in Phase Two. Additionally, as in Phase Two pseudonyms were used to support participant anonymity during the sharing of data.

Data Analysis and Concluding Reflections

A thematic approach was used for the data analysis, as noted by McNiff (2017) this form of coding supports the identification of patterns in the data sets. By continuously revisiting the thesis statement, "An Exploration of Embodied Awareness and Body-Mind Resources as Support for Social Workers," the analysis stayed focused. Initially, data related to the thesis statement were underlined, and through ongoing review, themes began to emerge from the various data sets. Colour coding was then applied as a visual method to distinguish the themes, with each assigned a unique colour. This process helped to organise and categorise the data clearly. The Phase One morning and afternoon evaluative questionnaires were analysed descriptively by count.

As McNiff (2017) discusses, data authentication is a critical step in the analysis, and triangulation is one of the most used methods for ensuring validity. Triangulation involves using multiple data sources to verify the findings. In this study, the three phases of data collection provided multiple data sources with a variety of participants. Additionally, cross-referencing was used within the triangulation process to support consistency and accuracy across the data sources, further validating the triangulated findings.

Additionally, as an embodied researcher, it was important to use my own embodiment in the data analysis process as noted by Leigh and Brown (2021)

analysing of data is a whole body experience. The researcher adds a further layer to the analysis by bringing awareness to their own embodiment during the process. During the analysis stage, I felt a shift in my embodied experience. The analysis deepened my embodiment in subtle yet significant ways, such as changing my posture to support comfort, or shifting the paper copies of the data sets around the room, at times standing, sitting at the desk or on the floor to analyse them, instead of solely staying at my desk. These movements provided a new way to 'be with' the data to analyse it; this, at times, was energising and supported focus.

Further, as an embodied researcher, intentionally moving my body throughout the process made it feel more authentic, allowing me to tune into and experience my bodily responses during data analysis. When something did not 'feel right,' I decided to revisit the data, which led to a deeper analysis. As the themes and subthemes emerged, my bodily experience also shifted from heaviness to lightness, signalling that I was on the right track. This ease in my body reinforced the process, making it feel aligned and confirming that the analysis was a holistic experience that integrated both body and mind. An embodied approach offered a novel layer to triangulation by incorporating my own bodily experience during data analysis, which supported authenticating and deepening of the findings.

Chapter Four Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from participants across the three phases of the study: the workshop, five-week online follow-up, and individual interviews. Phase One involved both thematic analysis and evaluative questionnaires, which were analysed descriptively using count. Phases two and three relied solely on thematic analysis. To enhance data authenticity, findings were triangulated.

Phase One

Morning Session Pre Self-Reflection

The morning workshop included both pre and post self-reflection data. The pre self-reflection focused on participants' intention for attending the workshop, along with the visual body outline depicting participants experience of embodiment prior to attending the workshop (see Appendix M). The post self-reflection data revisited these intentions, the visual body outline and explored how embodied awareness might support participants (See Appendix N). The findings from the pre self-reflection are discussed first, followed by the post self-reflection findings.

Self-Care

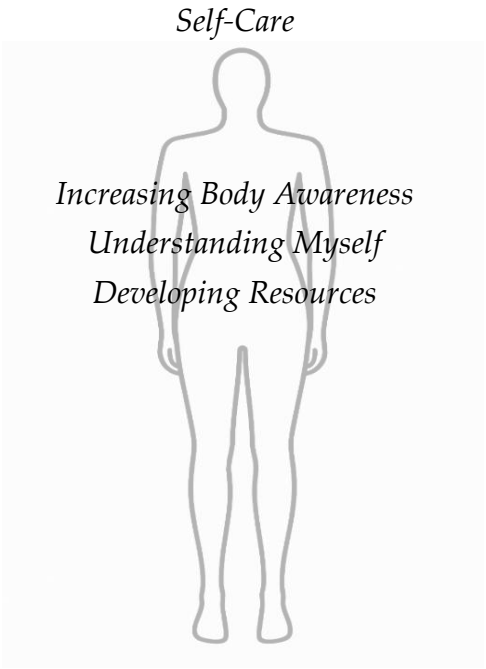
The information sheet for the research (See appendix G) shared with potential

participants communicated the core intention of self-care. This framing appeared to resonate with participants, suggesting that self-care was a motivating factor in their decision to attend. This was further, supported during the pre-workshop meet-and-greet, where several participants openly discussed their reasons for taking part. Some spoke about the pressures of work, one participant mentioned recovering from a significant illness, and others described experiences of near burnout that prompted their engagement with the research.

As a part of the workshop pre self-reflection, participants were asked to set an intention for what they hoped to gain from attending. The overarching theme of Self-Care, introduced through the research invitation, not only influenced participants' decisions to attend, but also appeared to shape the intentions they shared. The three subthemes that emerged from this process represent the different ways participants hoped to engage with and learn about self-care. Notably, several participants expressed more than one self-care intention, reflecting the multifaceted nature of their motivations. Figure 4.1 illustrates self-care as the overarching theme, along with the subthemes that emerged.

Figure 4.1

Phase One Emerging Themes



Increasing Body Awareness

The subtheme of Increasing Body Awareness identified participants' desire to feel more connected to their bodies, suggesting that there is either a limited connection or disconnection to their own bodily experience. It appears that participants recognised a need to have a deeper awareness of their body to support their self-care. This is illustrated in the following comments by participants:

Participant A: I would like to gain a deeper, more proactive and useful understanding of what my body is saying to me as I work through tasks, experiences, interactions, recreation.

Participant B: Connection and reconnection to body.

Participant C: More body mindfulness.

Participant D: better understanding of how to implement body awareness for myself.

Understanding Myself

Several participants expressed a desire to deepen their self-understanding through embodiment, highlighting an intention to connect with their bodies to better recognise their own needs. This gave rise to the subtheme Understanding Myself, in which participants articulated hopes that embodiment might support their process of self-discovery. This subtheme often overlapped with Increased Body Awareness, as participants anticipated that becoming more aware of their bodies might contribute to greater self-understanding. Therefore, embodiment was described by participants as something they hoped would help cultivate awareness and support a more 'whole' or 'complete' sense of self-understanding through the body. This desired intention of Understanding Myself is evidenced in the following intentions from participants:

Participant C: learning to be more aware of the part my body plays in my employment, triggers, smells.

Participant D: finding what fits for me.

Participant E: evaluating and reviewing what feels good for me.

Participant F: to apply the embodiment that I 'teach' and practice to apply to myself.

Developing Resources

The third subtheme, Developing Resources, was directly focused on participants' self-care. They were seeking practical, actionable ways to better resource themselves in their professional roles, while some participants also hoped to apply these tools in their personal lives. Several participants identified workplace pressures as a key reason for wanting to develop new forms of resourcing, with one participant directly expressing a need to avoid burnout. Throughout the workshop day, participants voiced various work-related stressors such as organisational constraints, the demands of meeting clients' needs and the self-imposed pressure resulting from a lack of boundaries that supported self-care.

It appears participants were seeking opportunities to gain new learning that would support them regarding these pressures. The following participant intentions reflect the desire for actionable resources as a form of self-care:

Participant G: Techniques to use through the weekday and weekends which help connecting with my body and calming my mind.

Participant H: I am looking forward to learning some new lenses about creating space in a busy environment with pressures and expectations on me.

Participant I: Learn more about self-care especially starting back after six months off, not wanting to burn out.

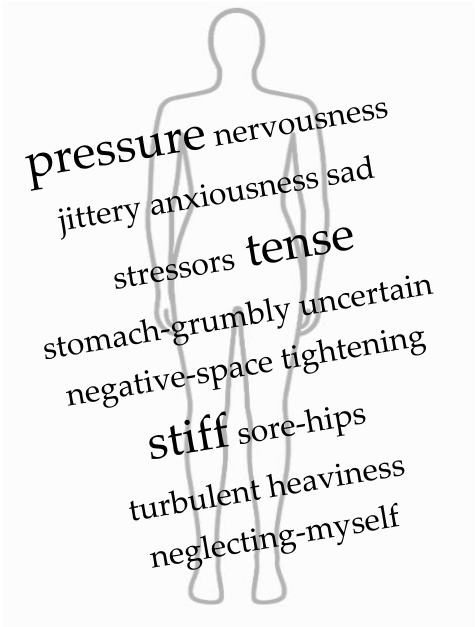
The pre body outline (see Appendix M) explored participants' current visual

experience of embodiment. This data showed that over half (7) of the participants experienced a large part of their embodiment through discomfort and used descriptive language to express it while drawing where it sat in their body. This suggests that a large part of the participants' experience of embodiment was found through bodily discomfort. Two participants used no descriptions. One coloured in just the hands and feet of the body outline, suggesting a narrow experience of embodiment, while the other drew a small heart in the chest. Lastly, one participant did not indicate embodiment on the body outline, instead, they wrote about being caught up in their thoughts.

It could be suggested that all participants had a limited experience of embodiment, and a significant number identified embodiment as directly related to bodily discomfort. The workshop was an opportunity to develop the perception of their embodiment and explore how it might be used beyond the immediate discomfort they were experiencing. Figure 4.2., is a word cloud sharing participants' experience of embodiment prior to the workshop.

Figure 4.2

Pre Embodiment Experience



Morning Session Post Self-Reflection

The post self-reflection (see Appendix N) had participants revisit their intentions to ascertain whether they were met or evolved, and the image of the body outline was revisited to see if their experience of embodiment changed during the morning. Additionally, exploring whether they might integrate embodiment into their workday as a form of support. It was found that no participants' intentions changed or evolved; however, two participants did not feel their intentions were fully met. Participant A could see the potential benefit of embodiment as she intended to continue to explore its use after the workshop. It appeared the barrier to meeting her intention was not having enough time to practice and integrate the learning, the following statement she wrote shows her wonderings of how embodiment might

further impact her wellbeing "The practices have given me experiences I plan to use again to further my understanding of what is more useful to me, I wonder if these practices will be different when I'm in different states of health."

Participant F revealed a possible disconnect between her body and mind. Although she experienced a sense of physical relaxation, this was not mirrored in her mental state, indicating a sense of incongruence "It took a long time for my head and thoughts to settle and to match the relaxation that I was feeling in my body – still not fully sure it is entirely there yet." When revisiting her initial intention, it appeared Participant F already had a clear conceptual understanding of embodiment, as she teaches embodiment practices to others. However, applying these practices to her own experience proved more challenging, as her initial intention was to apply embodiment practices for herself. This highlights the distinction between knowing embodiment on an intellectual level and fully integrating it on an experiential level. Further, these two participants' post reflections show that for some, it may take time for embodiment to be fully developed, and there is a need to have continual experiential practice for integration.

The remaining eight participants reported satisfaction that their intentions had been met. Interestingly, the fostering of embodiment allowed them to experience a new relationship with their bodies. This process offered a sense of 'coming home' to their

bodies, leading to a deeper understanding of their needs and an increased sense of comfort and calm within their body. This is illustrated in their post comments:

Participant B: Yes – deeper awareness, centre and focus on my body without using cognition but attuning to my body's needs.

Participant D: It helped me to identify blockages within my body, restrictions of movement and withholding from being fully free.

Participant E: A reminder of how good it feels or important to honour the body.

Participant H: Yes, I was pleasantly surprised at how much I have felt calmed, restored and at peace through some of the approaches we have seen.

Participant J: There are so many things in our environment that activate/deactivate us and how we can tune into our bodies to resource ourselves.

These findings suggest that embodied awareness may offer a less explored, yet useful, approach to self-care for social workers. The post body outline data supported the findings regarding a positive shift in participants' bodily experience on completion of the embodiment practices. When compared with the pre body outline, it was found that six participants coloured in or highlighted more areas of their body in the post body outline, potentially indicating an increased experience of embodiment. Within this group of six, five participants also wrote comments on their post body outline, indicating a positive shift in their experience of their body. They noted a transition from feelings of discomfort or overthinking (in the pre body outline) to identifying areas of comfort, ease or increased focus. Both Participant A

and Participant F, who felt they did not fully meet their intention, did, however, sit within the group of six who displayed on their post body outline a positive shift in their embodied awareness. Indicating that despite not fully meeting their intention through the embodiment practices, they still grew their sense of embodiment, and in turn, this increased a positive bodily experience.

Additionally, three participants did not colour or highlight the post body. Instead, they wrote words and comments that similarly suggested a positive shift in their embodied experience. However, Participant I's comments carried some ambiguity she said, "hands felt like [they were] getting pins and needles" and her "toes felt tingly". It is difficult to ascertain if these sensations were positive or negative experiences, as she also described feeling more present and embodied, "staying in the embodiment not thinking about everything else, staying focused", which contrasts with her pre body outline data, where she wrote "pressure, stiff, stomach tightening", clearly indicating discomfort. Figure 4.3. is a word cloud sharing participants' experiences after the embodiment practices. It could be suggested that through fostering embodiment, participants were able to access a deeper awareness of their body that was not solely focused on discomfort. Further, it appears predominantly the embodiment practices increased comfort and ease.

Figure 4.3

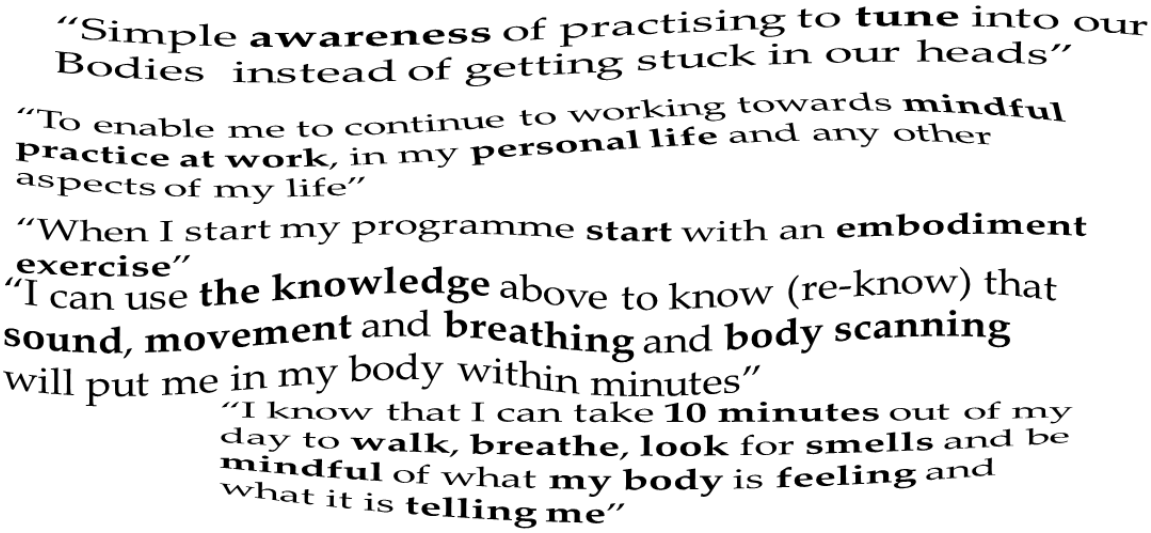
Post Embodiment Experience

The development of embodiment emerged mostly as a consistently positive experience for participants. It was important to explore how this new embodied experience might be integrated into participants' workplaces in ways that support ongoing, actionable change. All participants identified one or more ways that embodied awareness could support them in addressing their unique professional needs. The earlier theme of self-care was woven throughout their comments, with several participants offering actionable strategies for using embodiment as a self-care tool, suggesting that the development of embodied awareness not only offered a positive body experience, but it also had participants identify how it could be practically applied, shifting from a somewhat abstract concept to an actionable support.

To visually represent the participants' reflections, quotes were grouped under the earlier subthemes of Increasing Body Awareness, Understanding Myself and Developing Resources, providing ways in which the overarching theme of Self-Care could be addressed. These are depicted in visual summaries, providing a representation of how embodied awareness could be used as resourcing. The theme of Increasing Body Awareness depicted in Figure 4.4., highlighted a shift in how participants related to their bodies. Rather than viewing the body as a passive vessel (something that simply carries them through the day), participants began to see their bodies as an active source of information and presence. This body awareness supported a shift away from an over-identification with thought, toward a more grounded and embodied way of being. This resulted in several participants suggesting this would support more presence and mindfulness in both their work and personal lives.

Figure 4.4

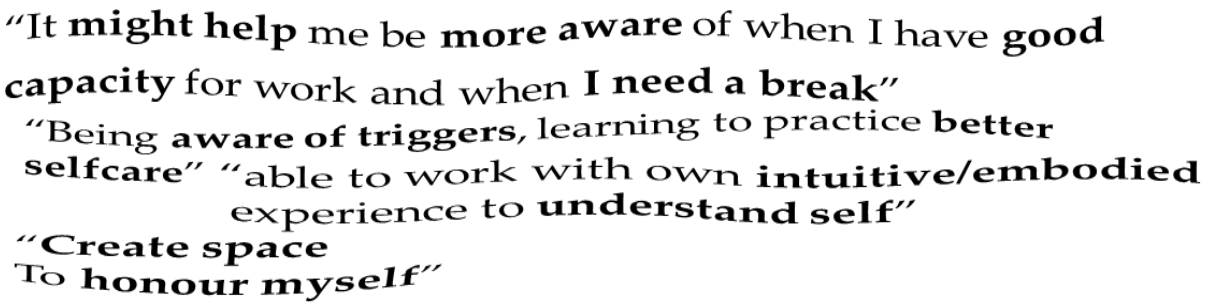
Increasing Body Awareness



Building upon body awareness resulted in several participants experiencing a deeper sense of self-awareness. Through this embodied self-knowledge, participants reported being better able to recognise emotional states and believed this would, in turn, support them in responding more effectively to their own self-care needs in their workplace. This is demonstrated in the reflections in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5

Understanding Myself

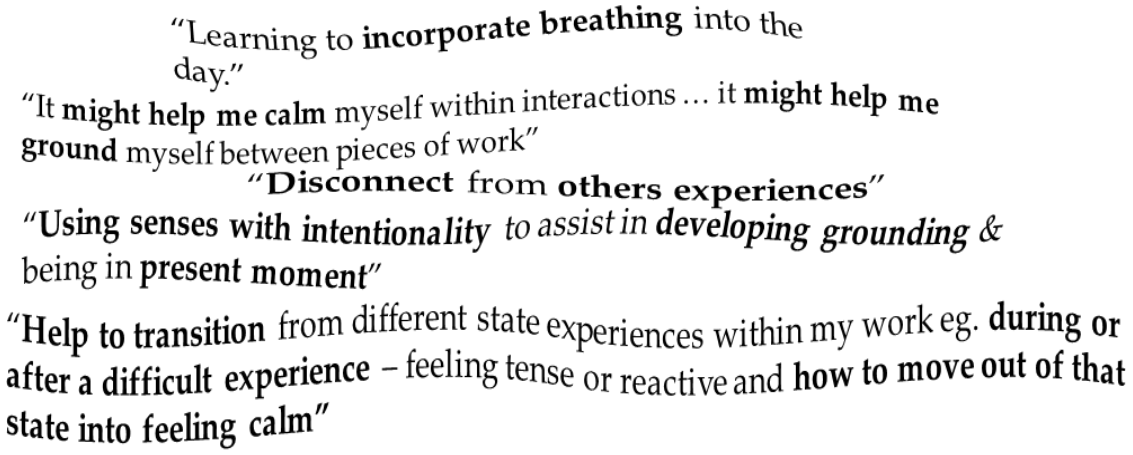


It could be suggested that each subtheme builds upon the other, developing a holistic 'whole person' approach towards self-care. Initially, participants described the development of embodied awareness, which helped them to identify the importance of being embodied. This, in turn, appeared to foster a deeper connection to themselves, supporting participants to better recognise and respond to their own needs. This process may have contributed to the final subtheme of Developing Resources. In this theme, participants described how embodied practices supported the creation of practical, actionable strategies, resources that could be used in real time to support regulation, presence and self-care in the workplace. Figure 4.6. offers

participants' reflections.

Figure 4.6.

Developing Resources



These findings indicate that developing embodied awareness, in and of itself, could provide a meaningful source of support for social workers. Even prior to the afternoon introduction of specific body-mind resources, participants shared how simply tuning into their bodies created a sense of grounding, self-connection and regulation. This suggests that embodied awareness could be a standalone form of resourcing. Several participants identified that it could be used as a tool to navigate the often stressful work environment, to manage capacity and cultivate self-care in real time. Participants experienced shifts and insights purely through the fostering of embodied awareness itself. It could be suggested that 'coming home' to the body via embodiment is an accessible resource for social workers that might support them within demanding work environments.

Workshop Development - Effectiveness of the Workshop

It was important to assess whether the morning workshop was beneficial in fostering embodiment. The questionnaire (see Appendix O) provided valuable insight into the extent to which participants experienced an increased connection with their bodies. Without this evaluation, there would have been a risk of misinterpreting the workshop's outcomes. For instance, if participants reported only a limited sense of embodiment due to ineffective workshop delivery, this could have been mistakenly interpreted as evidence that embodiment itself lacks value, rather than a weakness in the facilitation. A further questionnaire was used to assess the afternoon session. Both questionnaires were also used to support the further development of the workshop.

Quantitative data in Table 4.1 suggest that the workshop was largely effective in fostering participants' understanding and experience of embodied awareness. Eight out of the ten participants rated a *strong* increase in understanding, while two rated a *moderate* increase. In relation to the experiential practices, seven participants rated them as *strong* for deepening embodied awareness, and three rated them as *fully* beneficial. The workshop was intentionally designed to prioritise experiential learning over information-sharing. These findings support the effectiveness of the workshop's experiential design, indicating that direct engagement in embodied practices facilitated a deeper understanding that might not have been achieved through a solely theoretical approach.

Table 4.1

Morning Session Questionnaire

Question	0 None	1 Minimal	2 Moderate	3 Strong	4 Fully
1. Increased understanding of embodied awareness			2	8	
2. Helpfulness of experiential exercises				7	3
Question	Participant Feedback				
3. Most beneficial practices	• Most participants selected 3+ practices, with varied choices. • Two participants identified one practice. • The sound practice was highlighted by 8 participants as particularly effective for embodiment. • One participant reported "discomfort" with the sound practice.				
4. Guidance and understanding	• All participants reported sufficient guidance and understanding. • One participant noted difficulty hearing the facilitator at times.				
5. Time to explore practices	• All participants stated there was enough time to explore the practices.				
6. Suggestions	Three participants offered suggestions: • Use of tactile experience: "standing on/holding different textures" • Understanding colour: "how this calms our energy … boost our self awareness [sic]" • Advance notice of potential triggers: "Perhaps 'warn' people that there may be triggers and if it is ok to leave the room if needs be"				

The qualitative data provided further insight into participants' experiences. Most participants identified multiple practices they found beneficial, suggesting the use of a variety of practices was important to foster each participant's subjective experience of embodiment. The sound-based practice was particularly noted, both as highly effective, though, for one participant, it was a source of discomfort. This illustrates the importance of the unique experience of embodiment and the need to be aware that not all practices are suitable for all people. Participants generally found the guidance and time allocated to be sufficient, although one noted the difficulty

hearing the facilitator at times, pointing to the importance of delivery as a factor in shaping the experience.

Suggestions for improvement indicated interest in further sensory integration, such as tactile materials and colour. An important piece of feedback highlighted the need to forewarn participants about the potential for triggering experiences. While this was addressed in the information sheet, in the one-on-one pre workshop meetings, and at the start of the workshop. It remains unclear whether reiterating this before each practice would be helpful or limiting. Frequent warnings may enhance safety yet could also shift focus away from embodied experience and potentially hinder engagement. Nevertheless, the suggestion to inform participants that they may leave the room at any time could be beneficial and offer additional support.

Afternoon Session

The afternoon focused primarily on introducing the body-mind resources (see Appendix B), and the questionnaire for this component of the workshop was to ascertain whether the body-mind resources were easily learnt and potentially applied in the workplace. The data in Table 4.2. suggests that the afternoon session was effective in building participants' confidence and the intention to use body-mind resources in the workplace. Most rated their confidence and likelihood of use positively, suggesting the practices were perceived as both accessible and applicable.

Table 4.2

Afternoon Session Questionnaire

Question	0 None	1 Minimal	2 Moderate	3 Strong	4 Fully
1. Confidence in use of resources			1	6	3
Question	0 Very Unlikely	1 Unlikely	2 Neutral	3 Likely	4 Very Likely
2. How likely to use resources at work			1	6	3
Question	Participant Feedback				
3. What might prevent use?	• Two common themes emerged among participants: – Being too busy during the workday – Simply forgetting to use the resources				
4. Ease of understanding/practice	• One participant noted that some resources were easier to use than others and that applying them during the workday would be more challenging than in the workshop setting. • The other nine participants found the resources easy to understand and practice.				
5. Most useful/applicable	• Most participants (8) identified two or more useful resources. • 'Shaking' and 'Supporting self' were the most popular, each chosen by five participants. • 'Physiological sigh breath' and 'Humming' were each selected by four participants. • 'The flash', 'Shifting from tunnel vision to panoramic vision', and 'Letting go of client material' were each selected by two participants. • 'Letting go' was not mentioned by any participants.				
6. Suggestions for improvement	• Two participants provided feedback: – One noted feeling "tired" by the afternoon break, which impacted their ability to access body awareness. – The other suggested offering fewer resources, although they personally found four useful and applicable.				

Qualitative feedback revealed that common barriers to applying the resources included time constraints and forgetting during the workday. One participant specifically noted the contrast between using the resources in the workshop and using them in the workplace. These barriers are not uncommon in workshop-based learning and were anticipated in the design of the five-week online follow-up, which aimed to support ongoing integration and reduce the drop-off in practice. A range of body-mind resources were identified as useful, with 'shaking' and 'supporting self' emerging as the most chosen. Although suggestions for improvement were limited, a

participant commented on experiencing fatigue, and another participant commented on the number of resources, suggesting that refining the pace and quantity of resources could further support integration and accessibility.

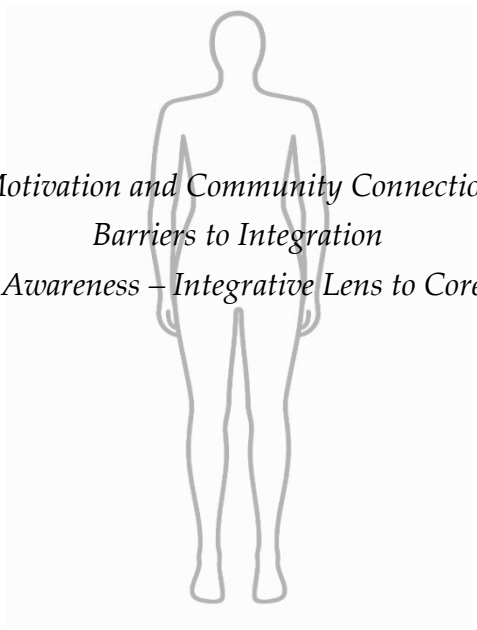
Combined data from both sessions suggest that the workshop was mostly useful in supporting participants' understanding, experience and application of embodied awareness and body-mind resources. The emphasis on experiential learning appeared to foster meaningful engagement with participants reporting increased awareness, confidence and practical takeaways. While most practices were well received, individual responses varied, which shows the subjective nature of embodiment. There were minimal suggestions for improvement, yet noted was the importance of pacing, clarity and safety. These insights show the value of experiential methods while also indicating areas for refinement in workshop design and delivery. Importantly, these findings suggest that embodiment and body-mind resources hold potential as tools for self-care.

Phase Two

The intention for this phase of the research was to encourage participants to continue exploring and utilising their body-mind resources while exploring their embodiment. The five-week online follow-up offered participants opportunities to integrate workshop learnings into daily practice. Figure 4.7 shows the three themes that emerged from this data:

Figure 4.7

Phase Two Emerging Themes



Motivation and Community Connection

This theme highlights how the flexible five-week online follow-up fostered a sense of community and increased participants' motivation to explore embodiment and the body-mind resources. Several participants shared that the sessions offered a form of accountability and continuity. For example, Ann noted that the sessions encouraged her to stay engaged and missing one disrupted her momentum:

> I'm still in the practice of bringing it into my day-to-day world. Not having the catch-up last week meant that maybe I was a little more lax or not as frequent in terms of bringing in some form of practice into my day-to-day other than in comparison to the previous weeks, where it was. It was there [brought hands close to her face] it was kind of I was aware of it (Ann).

Similarly, Sarah and Lyn found the reminders each week as beneficial. Sarah spoke of how she enjoyed the workshop, yet it was the follow-up that embedded the learning:

> If we didn't have this connection, I would have gone to the face-to-face session and thoroughly enjoyed that as well, and hand on heart, don't think I probably would have gone back and looked at it if, I didn't have these sessions, I have found it so helpful (Sarah).

Lyn also acknowledged that the online follow-up directly motivated her. She said, "It's the reminders that have encouraged me to practise, honestly, it would have dropped off because life's busy and stuff happens". These reflections highlight the importance of ongoing support for integration.

Ava found that the regular sessions strengthened her learning. She said, "I think it's a good idea because it's that positive reinforcement isn't it, a constant reinforcement. We're creating that pathway in our brain." The collective learning also offered a space free from work tensions, which played a key role in Kim's integration. Hearing how others were using the practices encouraged her own exploration:

> It's so easy to get caught up in the grind in the system, having a platform to experiment and come back and check in and revisit, you know, we tried this, do you remember that? Helps us to then integrate it or figure out what fits for us, and I guess that piece resonates with me (Kim).

Although most participants could not attend all of the weekly online sessions, the

process still appeared to support a deepening of practice and integration. Several participants clearly stated that, without the online follow-up, they may have lost what they gained from the workshop, or there would have been less integration. Hearing how others applied the resources motivated participants to use them, and the group provided encouragement. It could be suggested that the ongoing support and shared practice held value and were beneficial in exploring this novel approach to self-care.

Additionally, the online approach fostered a sense of community connection, and this sense of community increased motivation. Kim spoke repeatedly about how the collective space supported her integration, describing it as being "more powerful with this sense of community around you". Kim reflected on how the online format renewed her energy to continue exploring the practices and created connection she suggested that it "supported us, to consolidate or to keep that sense of community, like instead of it being a cup emptier it is a cup filler." When Kim shared these reflections, others in the group visibly affirmed her by nodding their heads yes, smiling or mouthing the word "yes".

The significance of this shared experience had Kim consider how she might create a community to continue exploring the practices:

> For me, it's that sense of community again, like where people could drop in or drop out, that fluidity that comes with, I want to say support groups

> generally, but you know, I want to say an embodiment support group, I've really gone to the how? How could we create a community where people could come in and out? (Kim).

Ava supported Kim's idea of creating a community group as she felt the only way to maintain growth would require mutual accountability. She jokingly suggested this in a tongue-in-cheek way, saying, "Let's nag at each other, we're good at nagging, most of us have got this nailed down. Sticking at it and, just when we talked about the support group and yeah, that could be it, couldn't it?" Emma also expressed the importance of a shared learning environment, contrasting it with learning in isolation. She commented, "It's always interesting to me how different it can be to have the collective, like having a group of people doing the same thing as opposed to doing it on your own."

Emma expanded on this idea, reflecting that hearing others share their experiences gave her new insights into how the practices could be applied. She recognised that the resources could be adapted by participants to suit their individual needs:

> Listening to you, Kim, you can hear that you've taken different things from it, like, looked at embodiment, but then thought about it in different ways of how you might use it, use grounding techniques every day. Or think about your routine and ways in which you want things to be different to help you out in your workday, yeah, so people are using these ideas creatively, I guess is what

I'm saying, not necessarily what they look like on the page (Emma).

The value of a shared social work community was reinforced by participants who worked together. Some found motivation through collective practice, for example, while in their office, Ava noticed Sarah's slumped posture and shared her observation, which prompted Sarah to be aware of what she was feeling. In response, she straightened her posture, and this supported her in moving forward in her day. The follow-up sessions became a space where participants could continue exploring embodiment and body-mind resources together, with some sharing adaptations and insights that encouraged others to try new approaches. Overall, the five-week online follow-up appeared to offer a space to reflect and foster a sense of camaraderie that supported motivation, integration and new learning. However, despite this connection, several barriers still hindered participants from fully implementing their learnings.

Barriers to Integration

Though the five-week online community provided participants with a space to slow down and reflect on their workshop learnings, integrating these new insights into their workday proved challenging. The most significant barrier was the ongoing demands of their work environment, which often led them to forget or overlook the practices. This intensity was illustrated by Sarah, who described having limited control of her work calendar; "everybody else can put meetings in your calendar, so

five meetings back-to-back. I can relate to that because that's a usual day for me". Similarly, Kim described the urgency she experiences in her workday, "It's so easy to get caught up in the grind, in the system, and you know, gotta get things done". The tension between work demands and self-care was congruent with several participants. Ava spoke about ignoring her own needs, "but when you get into the workplace, you're just so full on you actually forget to do this stuff just like morning tea." Lyn also highlighted this internal tension:

> They're all sitting in the to-do box [work requests] for me, and it might just be my way, but I've got to get them sorted into some order before I can then think 'right', and then if in that process the next thing comes as well, that's barriers for me (Lyn).

It appeared to be difficult for participants to prioritise their wellbeing over work demands. Continuing this concern, Emma acknowledged that the demands she faced often caused her to slip into an autopilot mode, during which she ignored her own needs. This realisation highlighted her difficulty in maintaining an embodied presence in the moment. As she reflected:

> I think that it's hard, especially on a workday, to sometimes do it, you have to stop really consciously, go hang on a minute! I'm walking really fast, why am I doing that? Or hang on a minute! I've just told somebody I can't stop for a lunch break (Emma).

The barrier of work demands was evident in this phase and reinforced the findings

from Phase One, which identified workplace busyness as a potential obstacle. Although participants joined the study with a clear intention to refocus on self-care, the realities of their work environments often hindered their ability to fully engage with the practices. Despite these challenges, where possible, they continued to explore and apply the workshop learnings. This ongoing tension between workplace demands and personal wellbeing emerged as a recurring theme throughout the five-week follow-up.

In addition, both Kim and Emma identified the online format itself as a barrier to their experience of embodiment. Kim described how her home environment competed for her attention during online sessions:

> I think it's easier to be pulled away as well, like when you're trying to be in that embodied space, of trying to be in the here and the now, like it's quite easy to be distracted from the screen (Kim).

While Emma found that her embodied experience was accessible during the in-person workshop, this was not the case online, where she felt a sense of disconnection:

> I was thinking today that there's something disembodied about doing it on screen as it feels literally almost, you know, you feel a wee bit, it's hard. It's so much harder than it was in the workshop, where I completely felt like I was really immersed in it (Emma).

Despite these concerns, both Kim and Emma acknowledged that the online format also supported their integration. Kim reflected on how the repetition supported her learning, "the platform to experiment and come back and check in and revisit, kind of helps us to then integrate it". Though Emma experienced the online format as somewhat "disembodied" she also noted that it increased her awareness of applying the practices she had gained from the workshop:

> It is a different experience and at the same time I think that it meant that I have been more yeah, been more conscious of it, you know, during my work time and, trying things out when I probably wouldn't have tried them out (Emma).

While the online format did not replicate the immersive nature of the in-person workshop and, for some, hindered the experience of embodiment, it appeared to still support embodied awareness and the integration of the body-mind resources. Attendance varied across the five weeks, with only the first session attended by all, as family and personal commitments often took priority, suggesting that self-care remained secondary. However, the flexibility of the online format allowed participants to drop in when possible, and as noted under the theme of Motivation and Community Connection, this likely supported greater integration of the workshop learnings. Although participants explored a variety of body-mind resources, their use gradually narrowed to one dominant body-mind resource, with embodiment becoming a core resource.

Embodied Awareness – Integrative Lens to Core Resource

During the workshop, eight body-mind resources were introduced (see Appendix B). However, during the five-week follow-up, participants' use of the resources narrowed significantly, despite most participants (9 out of 10) in Phase One noting that the resources were easy to understand and easily practised. The most frequently used resource was the Physiological Sigh Breath (PSB), followed by some use of the Shaking Resource (SR). Both were identified in Phase One as being among the four most chosen techniques. The PSB offered accessible and immediate benefits, particularly in calming the nervous system during times of stress or transition. Lyn discovered that it offered her centring between demanding sessions:

> Between cases close together, and I haven't got debrief time. I haven't got 'put it somewhere else' time. So just to centre myself, to go into a completely different conversation, I've found it useful. I have felt it calming (Lyn).

Like Lyn, Ann found that it also supported transitioning from one task to another, "it's a really nice way of just slowing down, stepping from, yeah, one client to the next or, phone call to e-mail or, whatever."

Other participants shared how the PSB helped them release tension from their bodies. Emma expressed this simply, "Yeah, I find it immediately relaxes my body completely, yeah". Kim spoke about using the PSB to prepare for a presentation that made her feel anxious:

> Different kind of context, I was delivering a 15-minute segment in a trainer's

> hui and felt quite nervous, it took a little bit of time to settle, yeah, I didn't lose my head, so I found that really helpful (Kim).

Additionally, the PSB supported Ava to be responsive rather than reactive towards a colleague whose behaviour can be challenging:

> Taking a different approach, more calm approach, I think it enabled me to still have those good working relationships. I think it was a biggie as not being as reactive and it's hard because he will [work colleague] push your buttons (Ava).

These reflections illustrate the accessibility and practicality of the PSB. It was easily integrated into participants' workdays and could be applied across a variety of professional and interpersonal situations, making it the most consistently used resource.

While the SR was used less frequently than the PSB, participants still found it supportive in specific situations. Emma commented on how it offered a sense of rejuvenation, "but it really did energise, when I looked to my notes from the workshop, I'd said that too, more energy". Sarah recalled how she used the SR to support letting go of a challenging experience: "So quite a stressful situation, on the last 200 hundred metres coming back in, just shaking it off just through my hands, my arms as I'm coming back in and that worked really well". This use of the SR for letting go of stressors was also reflected in Kim's experience when using it; she said, "I was kind of like, I don't even know how I'm going to leave this behind and jump

into the next thing, so kind of, yeah, was doing a bit of shaking, yeah, that felt helpful."

Participants described the two resources as useful for managing transitions, regulating stress responses and fostering a sense of calm. Several noted feeling more centred and less reactive, particularly when shifting between tasks or challenging interactions. Others highlighted how the SR helped release tension and reenergise in stressful moments. Participants found the PSB to be easily integrated, even during interactions with others and applicable across various work contexts. Though the SR was also seen as helpful, it was used less frequently due to its more visible shaking component, which was difficult to apply in shared or public spaces.

Though the other six resources were explored during the online follow-up, some were not applied and others occasionally. Sarah, however, demonstrated a more integrated approach. She combined the resources of PSB, Supporting Self and an adapted version of the Shifting from Tunnel Vision to Panoramic during what she described as "crunchy moments" in a meeting:

> What I found myself doing was moving from one to the other, it was so useful even in a really difficult situation where I addressed some quite bad behaviour, this time I just stood my ground and said, 'well actually that's not ok' and doing some of the exercises in between the discussion helped me get through that, without losing the point to why we had met, I just thought it

was really powerful (Sarah).

Sarah's reflection shows how, with intentional use, the resources not only supported self-care but also empowered her to confront unprofessional behaviour, which in the past she would not have addressed. Unlike other participants who used the resources selectively, Sarah demonstrated deep integration by adapting them into her work practice.

Interestingly, embodied awareness was initially introduced in the workshop as an integrative tool, intended to help participants foster a deeper connection to their body, and in turn, this deeper body connection would support them to assess the effectiveness of the body-mind resources when used. However, what had been recognised by participants in Phase One as a potential resource began to emerge as a core and versatile support strategy in practice. Over time, participants began drawing on embodied awareness in varied and meaningful ways throughout their workdays.

Like Sarah's reflection regarding the body-mind resources helping her address inappropriate behaviour with a colleague, Kim described how embodiment supported her as a stabilising anchor when in a meeting with other professionals. She described how remaining connected to her body allowed her to stay present and ask the necessary questions:

It's been really interesting because it's meant some really difficult

> conversations, I feel like I had the tail of a slippery eel, not in an aggressive way, but actually in a solid way, I was able to hang on to the conversation but not let it drag me around because, I was in my body, I was able to look out and see and both hang on to myself but hang on to the conversation as well (Kim).

This reflection demonstrates how embodiment supported Kim during challenging interactions, allowing her to remain engaged. Kim also noted that being embodied helped her to not become overwhelmed, "It kind of feels like that if you're embodied then you're able to weather the storm and not join in the storm". Additionally, embodiment appeared to help Kim maintain equilibrium while witnessing the many traumas and hardships clients faced, allowing her to avoid "getting tipped out and not getting freaked out and you know bad things happen and sometimes in our roles we are hearing about the worst things that humans can do to one another." Kim also identified that the practice of embodiment has made her more aware of the importance of fuelling her body properly. She has been intentionally packing her own lunches, although she admits that she does not always eat them. It represents a shift from her previous habit of purchasing convenience foods if she stopped to eat.

On one occasion, Ann described the busyness of her days, often having up to five back-to-back appointments. She shared that embodied awareness helped her to shift inward, creating a sense of internal slowing that allowed her to feel more present, grounded and intentional in her work. Despite the fast-paced nature of her

workdays, tuning into her body increased her ability to remain centred and to better support both herself and her client:

> Powerful tangible for me to take away is the practice of slowing down, not only in between appointments, but even in appointments, I can kind of regulate where I need to be, to try and support her [speaking of a client], so I think that has been helpful as well (Ann).

Several participants noted that embodied awareness supported their self-awareness, which in turn increased their focus and enabled them to take deliberate, purposeful action. Clair spoke of the challenges she experiences with administrative tasks and how tuning into her body beforehand helped her to focus and complete them. She described her approach:

> It's really hard for me to sit down and do my actual mahi [work] - the written stuff. I want to be out with the people and do it. So, I've been doing that sitting down at my desk, calming myself down, putting both my feet on the ground, getting ready to actually do the mahi [work], and it's been working. (Clair)

For Ava, embodiment created awareness of how she physically held herself. By changing her stance, she noticed an improvement in her wellbeing and an ability to release a difficult experience:

> I think it's listening more to your body and being more aware. Coming out of

> a crappy meeting, it doesn't go how it was planned, square your shoulders up, and you actually do feel slightly better. I did feel better, and I let it go faster. (Ava)

Embodiment offered Lyn a sense of 'coming home' to herself, so she was emotionally grounded and knew she could rely on herself when attending an appointment, she explained:

> There have been times for me when it's given me more confidence. At times, when I know I'm going into an appointment, and I've just got my body sorted before I go. So, instead of just 'oh' that appointment, it's like I'm taking myself as a friend into the appointment, rather than being surprised by who I am when I get there, if that makes sense (Lyn).

These reflections demonstrate how embodiment evolved into a core resource for participants. Whether grounding themselves before or during challenging conversations, regulating emotional responses with clients, or preparing for administrative tasks, participants found that bodily awareness provided a reliable and accessible form of support. Embodiment appeared to enhance therapeutic presence, support self-regulation and build workplace confidence. This reconnection to their body was often immediate and easily applied compared to the structured body-mind resources, offering practical in-the-moment support.

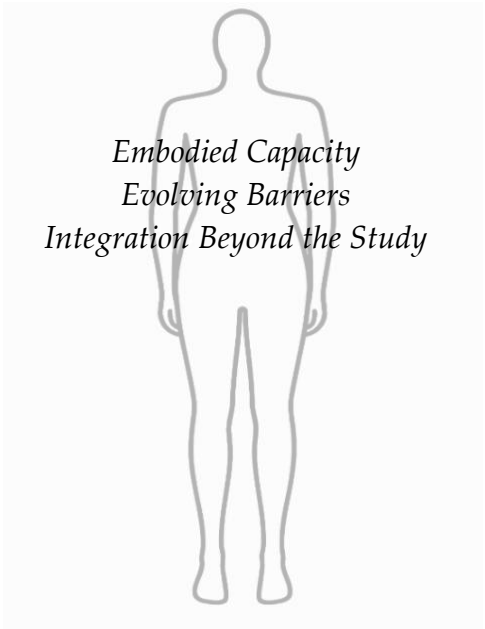
These findings build upon insights from Phase One, where participants recognised the potential of embodied awareness as a meaningful source of support. In this phase, the early recognition and the possibilities it offered began to deepen into integration. What was initially identified as a potential resource became an embodied practice. Participants drew on embodied awareness in real time throughout their workdays, applying it as an accessible and actionable strategy to support their wellbeing and manage the ongoing demands of work roles. The embodied awareness that was fostered in the workshop became further integrated into their workday experience during the five-week online follow-up.

Phase Three

Four participants who attended the online follow-up chose to take part in the one-on-one interviews exploring their evolving subjective experiences (see Appendix D), from which common themes were identified. Figure 4.8 represents the three themes that arose from this data.

Figure 4.8

Phase Three Emerging Themes



Embodied Capacity

The theme of embodied capacity highlights how, through embodiment, participants integrated their learning by uniting body and mind. This integration seemed to enhance their self-awareness and resilience. Embodied capacity appeared to foster a deepened sense of internal self-confidence, which was outwardly expressed through a stronger presence, increased effectiveness across varied work demands, and adaptive engagement in the workplace. For some participants, this embodied capacity also extended into their personal lives. While the body-mind resources were used less frequently, they appeared to enhance the development of embodied capacity in diverse ways.

Prior to the study, Kim had been introduced to embodiment and had completed

several trainings. However, she noted that she did not have a consistent practice instead describing herself as being on "a journey of experimentation". Lyn shared that she did use embodiment prior to the study, though not consciously. She found that the study provided her with a theoretical grounding, which increased her awareness and intentional use of embodiment "after the workshop, I had more in the way of theory and strategies to use and practice".

In contrast, Sarah and Clair had no specific prior experience with embodiment and joined the study to develop self-care strategies. Sarah shared that during Phase Two, she discovered that embodiment "could be a real gift, to take this forward and use this, not just in work, but in my everyday life at home, in all aspects really". Clair, meanwhile, experienced a significant health concern that led her to focus more on her own wellbeing, which prompted her to join the study. Phase Two identified that the fostering of embodied awareness developed into what appeared to be a useful resource itself. Participants' experiences of embodiment were further explored in the interviews. Their developing embodied capacity, resulting from increased embodiment, contributed to a sense of inner confidence. This is illustrated in Lyn's comments below:

> It's having had an increased experience of conscious application of ways of being aware of my body and just being more aware of how it is, and how I've used it that has helped me feel more confident in things or more, 'I've got it' (Lyn).

Lyn found that 'tuning in' to her body increased her sense of trust in herself and her ability to do her work.

Sarah's experience of embodied capacity resulted in increased self-confidence, which led her to actively use the body-mind resources as support:

> I felt like I was empowered to be able to recognise myself, when I actually need to think 'oh this is impacting me, this situation', I can do something about this and then put in one of those techniques in place (Sarah).

Sarah's embodied capacity strengthened her confidence by providing her with a sense of agency, knowing she could take steps to support herself. Clair spoke of the ongoing challenges she has faced since her health concern, and how embodiment has helped her express her needs more confidently to her family:

> I was meant to go up town with my son, and he came out for brunch. I said: "Son, I'm no good", so I sat on the sofa and slept on and off for the next four hours, and he sat there and waited for me (Clair).

Since participating in the study, Clair shared that she has become more aware of and confident in meeting her own needs. Previously, she would ignore the signals from her body, telling herself, "Suck it up buttercup".

Kim also described how this increased embodied capacity enhanced her confidence, particularly in being able to differentiate between what was hers and what is not. She reflected that embodiment encourages her "to ground myself to not fly away or not

to get caught up in stuff that might not necessarily be mine, you know what belongs to me, what doesn't belong to me". Through these participant reflections, embodied capacity appeared to support a variety of experiences of increased self-confidence among participants. It appears that embodied capacity enabled participants to approach various aspects of their work with a renewed sense of capacity.

Embodied capacity encapsulates how, through this increased inner confidence, participants also became more present, effective and proactive in the workplace. Taking care of oneself through embodiment has the potential to increase responsive practice. This embodied capacity translated into various new ways participants approached their work. For example, Kim described how, at times, she can be "a little like a dog with a bone". However, by practising her embodiment before a meeting she anticipated would be challenging, she was able to express herself clearly throughout:

> In that hui [meeting], I feel like I was able to articulate myself much more; it still has created some ripples, but I equally feel like I was better prepared, and I was better able to stay in that space (Kim).

Responding in the meeting whilst being embodied left Kim feeling positive about her approach. A colleague who also attended the meeting later indicated that the way Kim addressed her concerns potentially offered "a way forward from that conversation". Kim believes that embodiment can support social workers, "the greater the awareness or the more capacity we have to be aware of what is going on

for us and having the tools to support ourselves to be more responsive as opposed to reactive".

Like Kim, Sarah's experience of embodied capacity also helped her manage challenging conversations. For Sarah, however, it increased her confidence to respond instead of avoiding a challenging situation:

> Whereas before I probably would have thought, 'oh, I'm feeling really uncomfortable,' I need to make an excuse to leave here, I'm going to get a glass of water or something and leave. Now I'm more mindful of being ok, how can I ground, how can I work through this moment, to settle myself again, to respond in a more measured way (Sarah).

Sarah's new approach to managing discord was recognised by her supervisor, who Sarah said had referred to this saying, "I've noticed a real shift in you, you're able to articulate yourself and hold your own, so you have come into your own, in your space". Sarah attributed this shift to embodied capacity, she reflected "I can see the improvement myself and I've been on a journey in my role anyway and this [embodiment] has been an asset".

Embodied capacity also supported Lyn in resolving a conflict that occurred between two clients in a meeting she was leading. By staying embodied and noticing her own nervous system becoming activated, she was able to regulate herself, which in turn enabled her to support the clients to remain engaged in the meeting, resulting in a

positive outcome:

> They were talking with each other, getting quite animated and a bit grouchy, bit grumpy, potentially starting to lose their connection to their pre frontal lobes and so I was just sitting back feeling the chair doing some breathing, then when I pulled it back together, it's like I had myself sorted in a calm enough spot to say 'right guys I need you to talk to me now', because I'm calm that helped them as well and they were able to kind of settle as well I guess. We ended up in a resolution so that was good (Lyn).

Developing embodied capacity led to an increased awareness for Clair regarding the needs of the people she supports. This awareness allowed her to recognise when a client was not ready to engage and to offer a simple embodiment technique, which appeared to increase the client's ability to engage:

> One mum came in and I could see she wasn't in a learning space, she needed something, once we did it [embodiment practice] you could almost see her, [Clair gestured her hands lowering down calmly] 'ok I'm ready now', not that she knew that, but you could see that, by looking at her (Clair).

Clair went on to explain that her embodied capacity gave her the willingness and confidence to use embodiment with male clients as well "I had two dads on that course, and they actually did it because it wasn't namby-pamby, it was tangible, so I think it worked for them". She elaborated that the men were, in her words, "manly

southern men", yet they still engaged in the embodiment practice. Clair also reflected on how her own embodied capacity supported her to facilitate the program, "It centres me to be in the course as well". As noted in Phase Two, in Phase Three Clair continued to apply her embodiment practices for administrative tasks that had previously challenged her concentration she explained "I go through my body parts and then I go 'now are you ready to do the mahi [work] on the computer', sometimes I'm not, I have to go through it twice, but usually I'm ready after that".

Like Phase Two, the use of the body-mind resources was again reduced in number; however, those that were used or adapted continued to benefit participants, and this use appeared to further strengthen their embodied capacity. Sarah described how her embodiment practice caused her to make small, meaningful changes in how she sat in her chair while preparing to write reports. These adjustments supported her focus. She also adapted the body-mind resource Shifting from Tunnel Vision to Panoramic Vision. Instead of broadening her view, she narrowed it down to maintain focus on administrative tasks:

> I had five reports to write, and I knew the other practice lead who works alongside me, it's her day off, and I knew if anybody needed anything on the floor, they would be coming to me, and by two o'clock, I was finished [report writing] (Sarah).

It appears that embodied awareness prompted the use of the body-mind resources, which in turn increased Sarah's embodied capacity to complete tasks such as report

writing.

Sarah stated she consistently uses several body-mind resources, and she described how the Physiological Sigh Breath supports her in creating space to check in with herself:

> Oh, I do it all the time, so I'm finding if I'm moving from one task to another, even if it's just the double breath and the exhalation, it's just again it's a check in, do I need to stand up now? Do I need to go and get a drink of water? (Sarah).

This breath practice appeared to support Sarah's self-care, which in turn contributed to increased embodied capacity, enabling her to establish a more effective workflow "I finished that task, now onto this task and it helped me be more productive in work".

Lyn similarly found that embodied awareness and the resources worked synergistically to support her embodied capacity:

> I'm more aware and settled in my body because of using the resources, I don't see them as separate, I see them as linked, the resource pathways, the embodiment, it helps me to be calm and confident in whatever's coming up (Lyn).

Lyn discussed the specific resources she found most beneficial, offering examples of how they supported her. For instance, Shifting from Tunnel Vision to Panoramic

Vision strengthened her self-belief. Unlike Sarah, she did not adapt the use of the resource, and she described how using it increased her embodied capacity:

> Some of that looking peripherally, because I am a great one for going down the street with my tunnel vision on a mission, but widening the focus, it's just 'no, this is sorted, I can do this', not that I thought I couldn't previously but it's just an increase of confidence somehow (Lyn).

Lyn also used the Physiological Sigh Breath for centring herself. She used it as "a strategy to help me relax to bring the whole self back into a calmer space, it definitely works, that's why I keep using it". In contrast, Lyn adapted the Shaking resource to suit her needs by shaking just the upper body in a slow rhythmic movement. This intentional movement helped her release tension and reconnect with her body "I'm using it for feeling how my muscles are feeling, I'm using it for feeling the stress and what needs to let go. How do I need to move to get that twinge that tightness moved?".

While Lyn used several resources that supported her embodied capacity, both Kim and Clair primarily focused on increasing embodied awareness. Kim mentioned sporadic use of the Physiological Sigh Breath; however, she described embodiment as her key resource, "I would say on and off the physiological sigh, but probably more often the intentionality of kind of dropping in". Kim also identified music as a supportive resource that she had used in the past. As her embodied awareness

deepened, she became more purposeful in using music to prepare herself for appointments. She would 'tune in' to her body and ask, "do I want something that's kind of quite fast paced and has me moving or is it something where I feel like, actually, I need some slow rhythmic more settled energy?" in doing this Kim felt better prepared to engage in her work.

Clair, who experienced cognitive fatigue related to her health concerns, noted that this limited her engagement with the full range of resources. However, Clair found value in the Supporting Self resource and shared it with a client. She recalled how the client later returned and shared her experience with Clair: "One of my mums came back and said, 'I did this one' [Clair wrapped her arms around her body] and she said it worked, so I was really stoked about that". In her personal life Clair also used the Supporting Self resource, in particular when she needed to have an uneasy conversation with her partner "before I started [the conversation] I sat there and I did this [wrapping her arms around her body], yeah I did this because I wanted to talk to him without me being grrrrrr", Clair found that using the resource helped her communicate calmly, and she reflected on a broader emotional shift at home "I'm probably not so growly at home to be honest".

The usefulness of embodiment and the body-mind resources in participants' personal lives was also expressed by others. Sarah shared how embodiment and the body-mind resources supported her in all areas of her life:

> In my workday, it's reduced the stress dramatically. My own wellbeing has benefited from it, as well as at home it's been super useful as well, so holistically in every setting I've benefited from using one or more of these techniques (Sarah).

Sarah also described using embodiment to support herself through grief after the loss of a family member. Unable to attend the funeral, she turned to embodiment to support her:

> I've just found it really good to be able to just sit in my own space and just check in with my body to understand how it's impacted me. Just giving myself a break and allowing myself to be myself and going through what I need to go through, but understanding that I'm staying centred, I'm breathing and releasing, yeah, it's been great (Sarah).

Her reflection suggests that embodiment increased her embodied capacity to be present with her grief without being overwhelmed by it.

Personally, Kim noted a shift in how she spent time with her grandchildren. She chose to take them to places that fostered her embodiment, enhancing her own capacity and the quality of their time together:

> When I'm having my grandchildren, kind of doing the things that, you know that take a little more effort. So, you know, going to a particular place, like to be in, the bush or you know, be at the river and have some intentionality (Kim).

Kim also noted that being embodied supported her self-care and she has started to make conscious changes “I'm just a little bit more structured myself and just you know 'oh actually’ I need to not scroll on my phone or I need to get home and have a shower and go to bed”, this increased intentionality in self-care may also support the ongoing development of her embodied capacity.

Embodied capacity appeared to develop organically for participants through their ongoing embodiment practices. Although the body-mind resources were used less frequently, when they were engaged, they appeared to further support and enhance embodied capacity. In Clair’s case, the initial use of the body-mind resources created space for her to then explore embodiment. Several participants transitioned their learning into their personal lives, which appeared to strengthen their embodied capacity beyond the workplace. Interestingly, unlike in Phase Two, the busyness of work was less commonly identified as a barrier to integration, particularly in relation to embodiment. Instead, participants described more personal or subjective barriers regarding the integration of the body-mind resources.

Evolving Barriers

The barrier of work demands appeared to play a less prominent role in integration during this phase. Instead, participants identified more individualised and subjective barriers, which seemed to hinder the integration of the body-mind resources more than embodiment itself. When asked about current barriers to integration, Lyn was

the only participant who continued to identify work demands:

> In our days where lots and lots of things happen and are coming in and there's lots of demands, it's the capacity to actually think right now, the priority is 30 seconds, checking in of 30 seconds or doing some breathing or five minutes walking around the block (Lyn).

Lyn found that time constraints interfered with integration and described this as "the barrier of the tyranny of the urgent". She also spoke about her personal struggle with prioritising herself over work requests:

> I need to be more conscious about when I need to say 'no' to things it's very easy for me to say 'I can do that, yep I can do that, no it's not a problem, I can do that, yeah I'll do that later', I think if I was quicker to be less quick, that would be a good thing (Lyn).

Hindering Lyn's integration appeared to be a self-imposed barrier, which made it difficult for her to consistently apply what she gained from the study. She reflected, "I haven't got yet, the kind of conscious set apart time of day just to check in on me and give it enough time to actually do some self-work". However, she did acknowledge that consistent integration might not require large chunks of time, and that "maybe it's more the little bits, little wee bits to focus on".

In contrast, Kim spoke about her personal barrier regarding her mind and how it shifted quickly between thoughts or tasks, which she felt affected her ability to

engage consistently with the body-mind resources. She likened this to having "ADHD type tendencies where I'm kind of onto the next thing, or I've got fifty things and good intentions, but something will get in the way". It appears the time and focus required to read and apply the resources presented as a challenge for Kim. Although she had participated in various body-based trainings, she acknowledged a lack of continuity in her own practice, describing it metaphorically, "it's like picking up a book, putting it down, picking up a book, putting it down, no consistent practice really".

Despite these challenges, Kim demonstrated a desire to deepen her embodiment practice, and this was evidenced by her attending all five follow-up sessions in Phase Two. She reflected on how this supported her embodied awareness and self-care at work: "I feel like I've got more intentionality about checking in and just to even make sure I have kai [food] with me, which [prior to the study] wouldn't have been something". Kim also recognised the risk of losing momentum without ongoing support, "that'll be the challenge moving forward, to carry on or maintain and grow without the structure".

Like Kim, Clair also found it challenging to focus on reading and practising the body-mind resources. However, for Clair, this difficulty stemmed from the past health condition that continued to affect her ability to engage with new learning: "To be fair with my brain, the way it is, I probably wouldn't use other stuff at the

moment, just a couple of things, it's all I can cope with at the moment". Due to her health concerns, Clair was only able to attend one of the Phase Two follow-up sessions. She reflected that had she been able to attend more, her level of integration may have increased:

> If I had been to all of the follow ups, I might have done more justice, like anything, it's always good to do the whole thing, isn't it? Not just bits and pieces. Yeah, I think I would have got more if I had done the whole lot (Clair).

When asked whether there were any further barriers beyond her health, Clair stated there were none and emphasised the accessibility of the practices "no, because it's a really private thing, even if I was in a room full of people no one needs to know what I am doing".

Initially, Sarah identified certain environmental constraints that occasionally impacted her ability to use specific resources, "Sometimes the setting can be a bit of a challenge because if you feel like 'oh, I just need to release' and you know be physical if you're in a meeting, you can't do that". However, it appears that Sarah's strong demonstration of integration in Phase Two supported further reflection regarding this barrier. She noted that there was the ability to substitute one resource for another, depending on the situation she was in:

> But what I really love about this is that you can change 'oh I can't do that in this setting, but I can do the focusing' so if there is a challenge or something preventing you from doing what you wanted to do, you can change it and

think ‘oh I can do this one instead’, so yeah the barrier is overcome (Sarah).

Overall, Sarah found the practices accessible and were not limited by time “I love them because timewise they can be two minutes, or they can be half an hour, so time is not a barrier or a challenge”.

The barriers participants identified in this phase reflected a shift from those previously reported in Phase Two, where work demands were a dominant barrier. In this later phase, barriers were more nuanced, shaped by personal and subjective experiences. In the final theme, Integration Beyond the Study, participants began to consider how they might navigate some of these barriers and sustain or expand their use of the practices.

Integration Beyond the Study

All participants spoke of the benefits gained from their learnings, which were evident in their intentions to continue integrating embodiment and the body-mind resources. They recognised that integration was an ongoing process. Some participants expressed interest in sharing their learnings within their workplace, suggesting further personal integration while also supporting embodiment among colleagues.

Due to a tendency for Lyn to prioritise work demands over herself, she identified the need to carve out specific time to increase her integration:

> I think moving forward I am actually going to try and do more of the just check in on myself sitting at my desk, and I've wanted to do this for a long time and it just hasn't happened but, I think it would be really good to kind of have that quarter of a hour or whatever just a mindful space, connecting with me at the start of the day (Lyn).

When asked whether she would continue to practice the body-mind resources, Lyn said, "yes, I am planning to keep using them, certainly the quick ones". She identified a need to be more intentional with using what she had gained "I want to be more deliberate" and again emphasised the importance of creating space for this to occur "I wanna try and give myself a focused check in with myself, like ten or fifteen minutes chunk of time early in the day for connection. I am planning to do that". Lyn had also developed a deeper awareness that being in nature supported her embodiment "I do my best connecting with myself when I'm outside, when I'm going for a walk". Therefore, this appears to be a place where she will continue to foster her embodiment. She acknowledged the value of embodiment and believed it could be of benefit for her colleagues, "maybe I need to present something to my colleagues, let's do this thing more and more, we need to do it!".

Kim identified the value of embodiment for colleagues. Even though Kim had been using aspects of embodiment within her own team prior to the study, she reflected on how she might expand this further across the organisation "I'm in a privileged position of being part of a leadership team for an organisation, it's kind of like seeing

some real value and how do we help support our team to grow?". Kim spoke about her role in practice education for social workers, including supporting students on practicum placements and delivering professional supervision. These experiences confirmed her belief that embodiment is a missing skill set, "this is something that we should be talking about across the spectrum, anybody who is to come into social work". On a personal level, Kim wanted to continue to explore the practices and noted a desire to maintain the sense of community that supported her with integration "It kind of feels that intentionality of the follow-up and sense of community, I want to keep saying increases the scaffolding or provides more of a solid foundation to spring from". With this awareness, Kim and Sarah, along with a participant who completed Phase Two, are planning for a regular "informal connection" for further integration.

Ongoing integration was occurring for Sarah, so much so that it was happening more organically, while she also expressed a desire to delve deeper into how the practices might support her further:

> It's becoming second nature now, as I said earlier, I'd really like to progress it, I'm really interested to see what's next, where it can go, and is there anymore that I could possibly adapt? Yeah, so still a bit of research myself, really, into what else I can do (Sarah).

Sarah spoke of the benefits of having a colleague who completed Phase Two, noting how this potentially increased integration due to sharing an office space where they

could practice and remind each other, "that's the greatest advantage as well, being able to work with somebody who's also done this". Sarah and her colleague hope to use some lunchtimes as opportunities to practice further, and she felt this could support further integration, "We keep planning to incorporate some walking activities in our lunchtime, so I can really see this really taking off and a group developing".

As a team leader, Sarah reflected on the value of exploring these practices with a wider group of social workers:

> I can see merit in sharing with social workers who haven't been on this course, people are missing a trick here, there are so many people here with burnout and don't know how to take some time out for their own wellbeing and I just think this is the answer really (Sarah).

When it was suggested that, as a team leader, she had a platform to share these skills, she replied, "yeah, one hundred per cent". Throughout the study, Sarah showed a great deal of enthusiasm, consistently spoke of the benefits and demonstrated significant integration. It appears that her experience of embodiment has the potential to support other social workers in exploring the practices.

A significant concern regarding social workers' wellbeing was shared by Clair, who reflected, "because we don't look at how many social workers [pointing at herself] get sick or burnt out". She elaborated further, speaking of a large organisation she

had worked in, “when I was there, we had two staff members that died the same day, a year apart”, alluding to the work demands contributing both to her own health concerns and the deaths of her colleagues. Clair’s own illness prompted her to take part in the study and reinforced her commitment to integrating embodiment. When Clair was asked if she would continue to use the practices, she responded “yeah, I do, because it's working well. I think it's working with my parents on the parenting course”. It appears the benefits Clair experienced for herself and her clients encourages her to continue exploring the practices. However, she felt ongoing support would further increase her integration “you need to do a top up, even if it wasn’t an all-day thing, just a couple of hours to just remind us of some of the techniques”.

Overall, it appears each participant saw value in continuing to integrate the practices and in particular, embodiment. For some, the idea of bringing the practices into their workplaces added an additional layer, supporting not only their own growth but also potentially creating space for others to engage with embodiment and the body-mind resources. It became clear that embodiment was not seen as having an endpoint, rather, it was understood as a way of ‘being’ that required ongoing cultivation in order to be fully realised which, in turn, could increase their embodied capacity.

Reflections on Findings

Phase One

The findings for this phase highlighted several important themes. Participants identified the need to address self-care within their work and the desire to do so by increasing body awareness, deepening self-understanding, and gaining practical resources to support their self-care journey. Although embodiment is a subjective experience, it appeared that prior to the workshop, participants' experience of their bodies was mostly linked to emotional and physical discomfort. However, through embodiment practices, their embodied awareness deepened, resulting in more frequent positive bodily experiences such as feeling "calmed" or "relaxed". This shift led participants to recognise the important role their body plays in self-care and how 'tuning in' offered a new way to support themselves, suggesting that embodiment could be a useful resource in their work. Further contributing to the potential of embodiment as a self-care resource, the practical body-mind resources may also enhance participants' ability to care for themselves. These resources were largely well received, with most participants (9 out of 10) intending to utilise them in their work. However, anticipated common barriers to implementation were related to work demands and the need for further integration.

Nevertheless, this brief one-day workshop, which prioritised experiential learning over cognitive approaches, led to a deeper sense of embodied awareness and

enhanced self-understanding. These outcomes highlight the role embodiment could play in supporting wellbeing for social workers and suggest that body-mind resources may offer an additional layer of practical support. As participants engaged with these practices, I noticed a parallel shift within myself; my own embodied state softened and opened. This reciprocal experience demonstrated the relational nature of embodiment and deepened my connection to the process. Through Phase One, I navigated the dual roles of embodied social worker researcher (ESWR) and embodied social worker facilitator (ESWF). Initially, as an ESWF, I experienced the added tension of being both a facilitator and peer, which caused unease about being 'observed' by fellow social workers. This internal feeling was physically felt as pressure in my chest. Rather than analysing this sensation cognitively, I chose to drop into my body, creating space around the pressure, which allowed me to move through the discomfort and share wholeheartedly.

An additional layer of pressure arose from my strong desire to provide a workshop that honoured the 'felt sense' of embodiment. I was aware that any failure on my part to facilitate effectively could risk skewing the research findings regarding embodiment, due to my own limitations as a facilitator. At the same time, I was conscious of my own investment in embodiment and the need to maintain awareness of this to avoid influencing participants' experiences excessively. To support this, I chose not to have participants put their names on the evaluation forms, hoping this would encourage them to share their experiences freely and openly. This measure

was intended to help reduce my influence and create a safer, more honest space for feedback.

The challenge of balancing multiple roles became evident during data collection. I handed out one reflection form later than intended and initially worried this might confuse participants. In that moment, I again dropped into my body, centred myself, and created space to acknowledge and accept my error, which allowed me to move forward with the day. On review of the data, it indicated participants understood the purpose of each form, so the error was not detrimental to the study. As the day progressed, I oscillated between my ESWF and ESWR roles. While I cannot be certain whether this dual positioning enhanced the research, introduced limitations, or both, my intention was to deliver a workshop that fostered embodiment and enabled participants to fully engage with their bodies. The data suggests this aim was achieved. Being embodied supported my presence and facilitation.

Several participants expressed the value of sharing with others in the profession, and I also felt that sense of connection in the room. As participants relaxed into their bodies and shared openly, I felt a growing camaraderie and mutual warmth that eased my earlier fears of being 'observed'. I would suggest that this community connection further supports the positive experience of embodiment that emerged from the data. By the end of the day, it felt like the embodiment practices left a stronger impression than the body-mind resources, reinforcing embodiment's

potential as a meaningful resource in social work practice. My own embodiment supported me through the day, even when I made an error in my ESWR role. Being embodied allowed me to release the worry, maintain presence and move forward with the day. My experience of embodiment as a resource appeared to correlate with that of the participants.

Phase Two

The five-week online follow-up data suggest there was a benefit in supporting participants to continue integrating the practices. Several participants noted that without this ongoing process of exploration, the workshop learning may have diminished or remained surface-level. A significant factor supporting this was the value participants placed on gathering as a social work community. Sharing experiences of embodiment and how the body-mind resources were used, and at times adapted, appeared to encourage and motivate others to keep practising. This mirrored my experience, as I have been engaging in embodiment practices for a large part of my life. As I observed participants sharing and deepening their embodiment, my personal sense of embodiment also expanded each week. This phase both reminded me and deepened my understanding that embodiment is a way of being, rather than a destination; it is an ongoing process. This sense of collective exploration helped sustain my commitment and reinforced the importance of learning in community.

The online sessions were semi-structured (see Appendix C) with more time devoted to practising body-mind resources alongside one repeated embodiment practice. On reflection, I can see that the proportion of the body-mind resources to embodiment could have been adjusted. Participants appeared to find embodiment itself more impactful than the resources alone. If I were to deliver this phase again, I would reduce the number of body-mind resources and increase the range of embodiment practices offered. Two participants also expressed that the online format felt less connecting and reduced their 'felt sense' of embodiment compared to the in-person workshop. This led me to consider ways to adapt the online delivery to potentially enhance connection, possibly incorporating more embodiment practices, which could support this.

The timing and duration of the sessions, being one hour in the evening, seemed to work well for most participants. However, it became evident that workplace demands were the most significant barrier to integration. While participants identified that continued online sessions would help maintain momentum, I recognised that offering them indefinitely would not be sustainable for me. This led me to consider other possibilities, such as creating an ongoing peer-led group or offering weekly follow-up emails with short, audio or video practices. These could provide regular, accessible prompts without requiring live facilitation.

One surprise during the phase was the high level of integration Sarah achieved; she

skilfully applied multiple body-mind resources within her work. Her experience suggested that with continued support, a broader range of body-mind resources could be effectively embedded in practice, even though most participants found two resources more manageable. On a facilitator level, this phase taught me to become more comfortable with sitting in silence and allowing participants to simply 'be'. By further releasing the structure, I could support a more organic unfolding of experience and sharing, rather than having the process overly managed by me.

Overall, the follow-up sessions appeared to provide a valuable window for ongoing integration. Community connection played a significant role in encouraging practice, and the space became a springboard for new learning and real-world application. While the body-mind resources supported participants when used, it was embodiment itself that emerged as the key resource. On reflection, adapting future programs to focus more strongly on embodiment, supported by fewer yet accessible body-mind resources, could enhance both the depth of learning and the sustainability of practices.

Phase Three

The individual interviews offered deeper insight into how embodiment was experienced by participants, showing its growth from a self-care practice into a broader embodied capacity. Participants described this capacity as fostering an inner confidence, which led to more intentional and proactive engagement in their work

and relationships. I noticed that their sharing felt powerful and was experienced in my body as tingling and spaciousness. Embodiment was more than a coping tool, it was an internal anchor shaping their responses to stress, presence with others and their ability to advocate. For some, these effects extended into their personal lives, highlighting embodiments wider impact. While the body-mind resources were used more sparingly during this phase, when utilised, they appeared to further strengthen participants' embodied capacity.

Unlike the external work pressures that limited integration in Phase Two, the barriers now felt more internal and subjective. For example, Kim was challenged by her busy mind, hindering her ability to focus on learning and practising the body-mind resources, while Clair's health issues impacted her engagement. This contrast deepened my understanding of how embodiment integration is complex, shaped by the environment and by inner experience. This observation aligns with the definition of embodiment outlined in the literature review, which brings together Merleau-Ponty (2002) philosophical perspective and neurobiological science for understanding (Porges, 2009; Schwartz & Maiberger, 2018). Together, these two definitions honour the uniqueness of embodiment while simultaneously demonstrating the connection we share as people. Embodiment is an ongoing, relational process shaped by external contexts and internal subjective experience.

Participants expressed the intention to continue embodying their learnings, and some

reflected on how they might share these practices more widely in their organisations. This highlighted the possibility of embodiment shifting from an individual self-care tool into a resource supporting collective-care building at work. These participant reflections had me consider the potential for embodiment to influence organisational culture if supported at a systemic level. This phase led me to consider ways of sustaining engagement beyond the individual level. Building on the concept of follow-up emails from Phase Two and the value participants placed on community support, this had me consider a three-month follow-up refresher after the workshop, which could provide further opportunities for community connection and deepen practice. I also reflected on strategies for fostering organisational buy-in, including education, partnerships with groups such as ANZASW, accessible online tasters that culminate in workshops, and the use of social media to extend and build practice through online community connection.

On a personal level, facilitating this phase caused me to reflect more deeply on my own self-care journey. Witnessing participants' growth in embodied capacity reminded me of the importance of 'walking the talk', to 'tune in' to my body and not only listen to what it had been telling me but to take action. I had been pushing too hard within my private work while completing this study, and in that process, was not attuning to my body. This listening in through embodied awareness resulted in my pulling back on work commitments and nurturing myself more intentionally. In doing so, I supported my own wellbeing.

Findings Conclusion

When exploring the three phases of this study alongside the purpose of the research: An exploration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources as support for social workers, the findings revealed an overarching theme of growing Self-Care. This theme, first emerged in Phase One, and appeared to motivate most participants (7 out of the 10) to continue into Phase Two, recognising the need to integrate their workshop experiences further. As I facilitated these phases, I reflected more deeply on my own self-care journey and experience of embodiment. Through this process, I became further attuned to the signals of my own body, actively nurturing my overall sense of balance and wellbeing. This personal insight to my own embodiment became intertwined with the action research process, and I believe this supported the authenticity and integrity of this embodiment research.

Phase One had three additional subthemes, Phases Two and Three each revealed three further themes, yet across all phases, embodiment consistently emerged as a multifunctional resource for self-care. By Phase Three, participants demonstrated the development of embodied capacity, which appeared to support the unification of body and mind. Enhancing their effectiveness at work and in relationships, this progression paralleled my own deeper understanding that embodiment is not simply a technique but a lived, ongoing way of being. This unification created a symbiotic experience in which both the body and mind were equally valued, offering a holistic, whole-person approach. Each phase built upon the last, highlighting a

developmental journey that offered participants a new way of 'being'.

This three-phase developmental journey could be understood metaphorically: Phase One as the germinal/fertilisation stage, Phase Two the embryonic/shaping stage and Phase Three as the foetal/developing stage. This metaphor captures the gradual understanding, growth, and birthing of embodiment as a potential resource to support social workers. Additionally, I observed that learning within the community played a critical role in deepening the integration of these practices, offering a collaborative space for reflection, encouragement and mutual learning. This mirrored my own experience of how connection supported embodiment, prompting me to consider how ongoing community engagement could be sustained beyond the study. Simultaneously, participants' reflections about sharing embodiment practices more widely within their organisations led me to consider systemic factors that might hinder or support the actualisation of embodiment.

While embodiment shows promise as both a personal and professional resource, its broader organisational uptake requires education, organisational cultural change and ongoing supportive structures. These insights have me ask: How might embodiment be integrated into social work environments in ways that genuinely value it, create space for it, and move beyond individual self-care toward a collective approach that is both feasible and embedded within everyday practice?

Chapter Five Discussion

Introduction

In this section, the study's findings from each phase are woven together, exploring how embodiment might support social workers. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature reviewed. During the discussion process, a further reflection emerged regarding the theme of Motivation and Community Connection in Phase Three, specifically the role embodiment played within it. I will also explore how writing the discussion contributed to my own shift in perspective and prompted a reframe of self-care. Finally, the limitations of the study are considered, followed by the conclusion. Before discussing these findings in detail, I will reflect on an additional insight that arose while writing the discussion regarding the action research process. This reflection prompted me to revisit the action research spiral of Stringer and Ortiz Aragōn (2021), (see Figure 3.1, p. 32) and led to the suggestion of introducing a fourth element.

Action Research in Motion

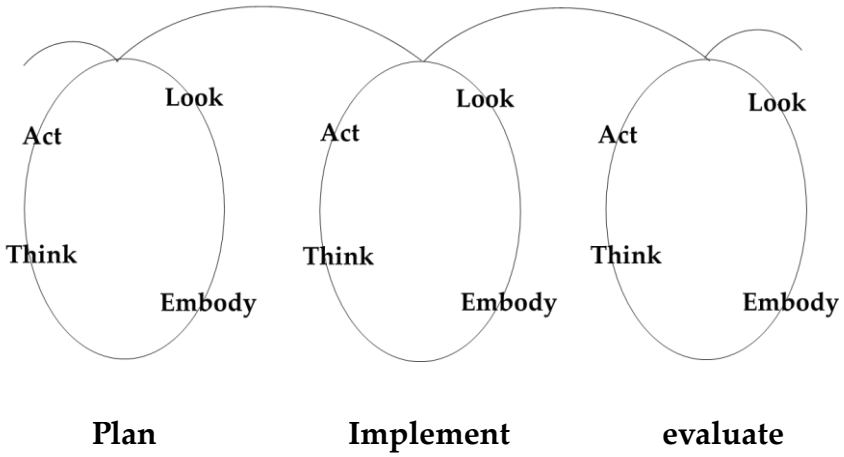
Each phase of the study showed an evolution of participants' experiences, reflecting the organic and cyclical nature of action research (McNiff, 2017). Learning occurred in real time through embodiment, reflection, and experimentation, leading to a deeper integration of embodiment over the course of the study. Phase One

introduced participants to embodiment. They engaged in the Look (experiencing embodiment), Think (considering how it might support them), and Act (although at this stage they could only suggest potential applications rather than enact them). The actions anticipated in this phase were then actualised in Phase Two. In Phase Two, participants applied the Look–Think–Act cycle more fully during the weekly online sessions. Their experiences and understanding were developed through collaborative sharing, which led to further integration. Phase Three invited participants to Look (by reflecting on how they had used embodiment in their work), Think (by identifying what had hindered integration) and Act (by considering how they could continue to integrate embodiment beyond the study).

Additionally, I suggest that embodiment itself supported this organic action research cycle. Vaartjes and Goff (2008) highlight embodiment as a natural process of action research, and my findings indicate the value of making this element more explicit. In doing so, embodiment can be seen not only as something that might naturally occur but also as a step that can be intentionally engaged in to enrich the action research cycle. Building on Stringer and Ortiz Aragōn (2021) interacting spiral action research diagram (see Figure 3.1, p. 31), I propose incorporating embodiment as an explicit dimension to create a more holistic approach to action research, one that recognises and intentionally involves the whole person in the research process. Figure 5.1 demonstrates what this might look like:

Figure 5.1

Proposed Development of Action Research Interacting spiral



Adapted from: *Action research* (5th ed., p. 10) by E.T. Stringer & A. Aragōn, 2021, SAGE. Copyright 2021 by SAGE Publications

As described in the Reflections (Chapter Four, p. 118), the metaphor of a three-phase developmental journey captures the gradual emergence, growth and consolidation of embodiment as a potential resource to support social workers. This metaphor conceptually reflects the iterative and emergent nature of embodied action research.

Stress a Whole-Body Experience

Phase One's overarching theme of self-care reflected my own motivation for completing this research, stemming from past experiences of teetering on burnout and witnessing colleagues navigate these challenges. Participants mirrored these concerns, openly sharing the stressors in their work, and some recounted near-burnout experiences. These accounts reflect the literature, which identifies stress and

burnout as significant concerns in the social work field (Giménez-Bertomeu et al., 2024; Maddock, 2024; Travis et al., 2016). While self-care is often proposed as a strategy to mitigate these concerns, its use remains moderate, and there is limited evidence demonstrating its effectiveness (Collins, 2021; Miller et al., 2020). Bloomquist et al.'s. (2015) study considered the role of the body in self-care; however, they measured bodily engagement predominantly in physical and functional terms. In contrast, this embodiment-focused study adopts a more holistic and novel approach to exploring the body in self-care, emphasising the additional benefits of embodiment and the critical importance of preventative practices so stress does not accumulate, as I have observed that recovery from burnout is often a prolonged and challenging process.

The opportunity to explore a novel approach appeared to motivate participants, reflected in the Phase One subthemes: Increasing Body Awareness, Understanding Myself and Developing Resources, all explored through embodiment and body-mind practices. The subtheme of Increasing Body Awareness suggests participants were interested in expanding their use of the body, moving beyond the traditional application of the body for self-care, which is commonly focused on maintaining physical health (Bloomquist et al., 2015; Collins, 2021). Phase One's pre body outline asked participants to depict their personal experience of embodiment. Most participants (7 out of 10) describe their bodies in terms of discomfort (See Figure 4.2, p. 60). The remaining three participants did not explicitly report discomfort but

appeared to have a limited sense of embodiment. Participants' initial focus on bodily discomfort or a narrow awareness of their body may have in the past, limited their ability to draw on the body as a supportive resource, potentially increasing susceptibility to stress which could correlate with the Pfluger et al. (2023) study.

Pfluger et al. (2023) found that negative interpretations of bodily sensations can heighten stress, whereas more neutral or accepting interpretations may reduce it. This idea is further illustrated by Sabbagh et al. (2023), who observed that social workers sometimes suppressed bodily discomfort, actively creating disembodiment and this disconnecting from their bodies was used as a maladaptive resource. While intended as a coping strategy, this approach contributed to exhaustion and increased risk of burnout. Together, these findings suggest that a narrow or negative engagement with the body can transform it from a potential source of support into a source of strain. In contrast, embodiment may offer a new way of relating to the body, moving beyond the narrow functional view often applied in self-care, and fostering a more integrated bodily awareness that supports wellbeing.

Interestingly, after the morning embodiment practices in Phase One, participants' post self-reflection body outlines showed notable shifts. They used words such as "ease," "mobility," "soft," "no-pain," "settled," and "grounded" (see Figure 4.3, p. 64). When asked how embodied awareness might support them in their work, participants described their bodies as a source of information, noting that embodied

awareness could help them shift out of challenging emotional states, ground and support calm. It appeared that fostering embodiment could offer a further way to incorporate the body into self-care, moving beyond more common approaches focused on nutrition, exercise, and sleep (Bloomquist et al., 2015; Collins, 2021; Gallagher & Cooper, 2023).

Phase Two data from the five-week online sessions had participants acting and extending on the Phase One findings. Participants applied embodiment in their everyday work, Clair used it to support focus on administrative tasks, Ava noticed her physical posture after a difficult conversation and adjusted it to feel better, Lyn 'tuned in' to herself to prepare her for appointments, and Ann found it helped her slow down during and between appointments which she described as "Powerful tangible" (Chapter Four, p. 86). These examples suggest that embodiment can provide practical, in-the-moment support for self-care and wellbeing.

Taken together, the findings from both phases suggest that while initial bodily discomfort or narrow awareness may predispose social workers to wellbeing concerns as identified in the Sabbagh et al. (2023) study, actively fostering embodiment may develop greater attunement to self, allowing the body to function not merely as a site of discomfort but as an important source of information. In this way, the body becomes an active partner in life experience, which aligns with Merleau-Ponty's (2002) philosophical stance. Embodiment supported emotional

regulation, self-care, and responsiveness in work contexts. Cultivating embodied awareness might therefore offer a more sustainable and beneficial approach to managing stress when compared to strategies that involve disconnection from, or a narrow focus on the body. This study contributes to the limited research in Aotearoa/New Zealand on embodiment practices and builds upon Sirs and Meek's (2021) experiential and reflective account of using a body resource to support their wellbeing.

Embodied Awareness – Diverse Support

In Phase One, the intentional fostering of embodiment was to better prepare participants to engage in the body-mind resources. I took this approach as I felt exploring the potential benefits of these resources required participants to first build their embodied awareness. What became evident was that embodiment itself was perceived as a potential resource alongside the body-mind resources. This potential was further realised in Phases Two and Three, where embodiment emerged as the most frequently used and beneficial resource. Embodiment's contribution to self-care is evident in other studies, although embodiment was not always the primary focus. Nevertheless, dimensions of embodiment played a role, suggesting that it has the potential to be used as a further element to support wellbeing (Freeman et al., 2022; Grabbe et al., 2020; Maddock et al., 2024; Pyles et al., 2021).

The body-mind resources and embodiment appeared to extend beyond self-care,

supporting participants in managing challenging work environments. Although the use of body–mind resources was narrower than embodiment itself, they appeared to enhance embodiment's effectiveness when utilised. In contrast, Maddock et al. (2024) focused primarily on mindfulness, supplemented by body-based home exercises, and reported positive effects on wellbeing. In the present study, embodiment emerged as the core mechanism of support, enabling participants to regulate their state, maintain presence, and build personal resilience, with body–mind resources further strengthening these effects, suggesting that embodiment can contribute to wellbeing just as mindfulness does. As highlighted in Phase Two's theme, Embodied Awareness – Integrative Lens to Core Resource, embodiment can be seen as the foundation, with body–mind resources building upon it to enhance wellbeing and professional capacity. This aligns with Mensinga and Pyles (2021) who suggest that developing embodied awareness is necessary and can provide a basis from which multiple applications in practice can emerge.

Phase Three showed how participants' deepening embodiment extended beyond self-care, emerging as the theme Embodied Capacity. Here, embodiment appeared to foster inner self-confidence, resulting in increased presence and effectiveness in the workplace. While Ng et al's (2024) program incorporated the body through the more common functional approach of physical exercise combined with meditation and reflection to enhance wellbeing, this current study suggests that embodiment itself, beyond physical activity, can similarly support wellbeing and practice effectiveness.

This represents a shift from viewing the body functionally for wellbeing, to experiencing it as an active source of information and regulation, a kind of 'information highway' through which awareness, balance and wellbeing can be cultivated, further reiterating Merleau-Ponty's (2002) stance on the body as the primary site of knowing and being in the world.

The benefits of embodiment identified in this study align with previous discussions linking embodied awareness with self-regulation, self-awareness, and empathy (Katz et al., 2024; Mehling et al., 2011; Pyles et al., 2021). These qualities were evident across Phases Two and Three. Participants described using embodiment to remain grounded, discern what emotions or challenges belonged to them, and approach difficult situations with clarity and composure. These findings resonate with van Rhyn et al's (2021) theoretical framing of embodied empathy, which proposes that bodily awareness enables workers to connect with clients while still distinguishing between their emotional experiences. In this study, embodied awareness helped workers stay present with clients without becoming overwhelmed. Additionally, Clair's embodiment enhanced her awareness of clients during group sessions. She recognised when a client was not in a space to learn so, she shared an embodiment technique to help prepare them. This outcome reflects Kimmel and Gockel's (2018) finding that facilitators became more responsive to clients' needs, which in turn supported a more effective program delivery. Collectively, these accounts illustrate how embodiment nurtured a centred and responsive professional presence.

Taken together, the literature and findings from this study suggest that embodiment, by incorporating the whole person, has the potential to offer social workers more than self-care. It supported participants' wellbeing while also fostering self-awareness, presence and effectiveness in their work. This, in turn, increased self-confidence and enabled them to navigate difficult conversations, support clients more effectively and feel more connected in their practice. By 'coming home' to their bodies, participants experienced benefits that addressed diverse needs, with community connection playing an integral role in developing these benefits.

Embodied Community Connection

Using the previously proposed action research cycle of Look–Embody–Think–Act, a further development emerged from reviewing the research findings as a whole. In Chapter Four (p. 73) the theme Motivation and Community Connection appeared to understate the significance of embodiment. Consequently, I suggest reframing this finding as Motivation and Embodied Community Connection, reflecting the pivotal role embodiment played in the online format. Embodiment was intentionally practiced at the beginning of each session and discussed by participants throughout Phase Two. Engaging in these experiential practices and conversations within each session appeared to strengthen participants' sense of embodiment, which in turn supported their ability to 'tune in' more effectively within their workplace context.

Both Emma and Kim described difficulties in connecting with their bodies during the online sessions compared to the in-person workshop. The virtual format appeared to limit their sense of embodiment. Nevertheless, both participants also recognised that the online sessions facilitated ongoing exploration of embodiment through the sense of community connection. Therefore, although their embodied experience was constrained in the virtual environment, the opportunities for sharing and connecting with others appeared to counterbalance this limitation and supported the continued development of their embodiment within the workplace. The significance of the collective was further demonstrated when participants who worked together supported each other in the workplace. For example, when Ava shared her observation of Sarah's posture, Sarah was prompted to 'tune in' to her body and make changes to support herself (Chapter Four, p. 77). The potential benefits of community are also reflected in studies by Freeman et al. (2022) and Grabbe et al. (2020), where cohorts participated in one-off workshops that supported wellbeing and had effects sustained beyond the initial sessions. This suggests that sharing within a community may contribute to sustained positive change.

While Phase One did not provide specific data on the significance of community, the reflections I made indicated its value "many commented on how comforting it felt to be within a community of social workers who really understood the challenges this profession holds" (Chapter Three, p. 48). Phase Three findings further demonstrated participants recognition of the importance of community as they reflected upon how

they might further extend this sense of embodied community within their own organisations. Furthermore, three participants decided to continue meeting after the study was completed to maintain practice. This highlights the important role of community that can often be lost within organisational structures, and the findings would suggest there is value for social workers to come together to support one and another. Participants' awareness of the significance of community connection is also reflected in Pyles et al. (2021), where participants valued sharing and learning from one another. The weekly follow-up sessions, combined with the embodied community experience, appeared to be a key factor supporting ongoing learning and practical application. Therefore, it appears that not only was community impactful, but embodied community connection might offer additional richness and support for integration of the learnings whilst increasing the benefits of embodiment.

Shifting Perspective Through the Cycle of Action Research

I have been transparent about why I initiated this research and my position as a social work researcher whose intention was to explore embodiment as a novel approach for practical and intentional support for social workers. I also wanted to address stressors in the field, which is also a concern identified in the literature (Maddock, 2024; Tan & Yeap, 2022; Travis et al., 2016). When exploring the findings from each phase, it became clear that the most significant barrier to actioning self-care was organisational demands, constraints and limited support, which, from my own experiences and reviewing the literature, was not surprising.

While re-exploring the data and writing this discussion, using the action research process with the added element Look-Embody-Think-Act, I noticed a hollowness in my chest and pressure in my throat. I came to understand that these bodily responses reflected the critical role organisations play in supporting staff, particularly regarding self-care in the workplace. However, the scope of this study did not allow me to fully explore the organisational role in wellbeing, which emerged as a key finding. This limitation left me feeling powerless to influence a system that appears to fall short in caring for carers, highlighting an important area for further research.

Importantly, when I speak of systemic issues, I am not suggesting that responsibility rests solely with organisations, it extends to the government, which continues to demand more for less while failing to recognise the value of social work. This reflection brings me back to my question that arose in the findings:

> How might embodiment be integrated into social work environments in ways that genuinely value it, create space for it, and move beyond individual self-care toward an embodied collective approach that is both feasible and embedded within everyday practice? (Chapter Four, p. 118).

My thoughts regarding this follow, however, I am fully aware that currently it is more a hope than actionable steps.

Reframing Self-Care to Embodied Collective-Care

The most significant barrier to integration was first identified in the Phase One afternoon questionnaire, where participants noted that work demands could interfere with embedding the practices. This concern became the most prominent barrier in Phase Two. The semi-structured online follow-up sessions, which specifically explored barriers, highlighted how work demands continued to impede integration. Participants described diminished self-agency and ongoing pressures arising from organisational structures. These findings were consistent with existing literature identifying stress and burnout as critical issues in social work (Maddock, 2024; Travis et al., 2016). Research in Aotearoa/New Zealand by Tan and Yeap (2022) suggests that if organisations provide the needed resources this can be a protective factor against job burnout among social workers. This aligns with participants' reflections and underscores the tension between the necessity of self-care and organisational structures that can either undermine or support it.

In Phase Three, the barriers shifted from being primarily associated with external work demands to more internal, self-imposed barriers. While Lyn continued to acknowledge workload as a barrier, she reflected more on her own limits, particularly her difficulty in saying no to additional tasks, which reduced her ability to explore the brief embodiment practices. Similarly, Kim described the challenge of managing multiple work streams but attributed the barrier to her own difficulty maintaining focus, rather than to workload alone. Despite framing their challenges as

personal, both Lyn and Kim spoke consistently of high workloads, indicating that organisational structures continued to impede their capacity to practice embodiment. This raises the important questions about what safeguards exist within organisational structures to prevent overload and increase opportunities to explore wellbeing.

Clair identified her barrier with integration was related to her recovery from a significant health concern. However, she also implied that her past workplace may have negatively contributed to her ill health. Therefore, it could be suggested Clair's prior workplace may have in fact contributed to this barrier, resulting in the barrier being both internal and environmental. While participants often located barriers within themselves, these accounts indicate that organisations still hold some responsibility. As Collins (2021) notes, the very term self-care implies the responsibility rests solely with workers, which may explain why participants internalised these barriers. However, individual wellbeing cannot be separated from workplace contexts, and organisational structures can either enable or constrain self-care. Additionally, educational environments can also play a role in supporting embodied collective-care, this study offered a experiential approach to embodiment, which could build upon Martin et al. (2023) conceptual embodied educational framework, by encouraging students to experience their 'felt sense' of collective embodiment.

In contrast, Sarah reported no barriers in Phase Three, she suggested this was because the practices were quick and brief. Yet, in Phase Two she had spoken about the challenge of back-to-back meetings in her calendar. The simplicity of the practices may have allowed her to benefit without fully recognising the ongoing organisational pressures. While the practices supported her wellbeing, they may have temporarily buffered her from feeling challenged by persistent work demands. This illustrates the importance of looking beyond individual strategies and questioning the workplace conditions that create stress. This aligns with Collins (2021) who identified a need for organisational and educational institutions to promote self-care.

Bloomquist et al. (2015) found that workers were rarely supported to translate self-care into practice; this lack of preparation may explain the limited application of self-care identified by Miller et al. (2020). Similarly, Pyles et al. (2021) observed that engagement with wellbeing practices often decreased over time, linking this decline to workplace barriers and isolation. Taken together, these studies highlight the limits of treating self-care as an individual task. The findings of this study appear to support Collins (2021) call for a more collective stance, demonstrating the role of community in sustaining embodied wellbeing. I would suggest that organisations and educational institutions have the potential to embody community dimensions; therefore, they may provide valuable contexts for fostering these practices. An embodied collective-care approach could offer a way forward, recognising wellbeing as a shared responsibility across organisations, educational environments, workers

and students.

Limitations

Due to the scope of this study as a master's thesis, the sample was small and progressively reduced in each subsequent phase, due to participation being optional. As a result, the participant group was not diverse: seven were New Zealand European, one identified as Māori/Tongan/Samoan, and one each as South African and British. All participants were female. Consequently, the ability to generalise the findings is limited. Further research could include a broader range of participants to determine whether these findings hold across different groups. No student participants were included, which constrained recommendations regarding the involvement of education providers. However, the literature suggests that the use of embodiment is limited within Aotearoa/New Zealand, indicating that similar limitations may exist in educational contexts.

Because this research used an action research methodology, my role as both researcher and practitioner was central. In Phases One and Two, I acted as an embodied social work researcher and embodied social work facilitator, and in Phase Three as an embodied social work researcher, informed by my personal engagement with embodiment as a self-care practice and professional approach. This involvement enabled empathy with participants and richer insight into embodied practice. At the same time, my presence and prior knowledge may have influenced participants'

responses and my interpretation of data.

Reflexivity was used through embodied self-awareness, intentionally dropping into my body to notice assumptions and biases as they arose. While complete neutrality was not possible, this conscious embodied reflection helped to reduce potential influence. These dynamics illustrate the dual nature of action research, where the researcher's involvement provides both insight and a source of potential bias (Stringer & Ortiz Aragōn, 2021). Additionally, both my supervisors for this study, Professor Kieran O'Donoghue and Associate Professor Ksenija Napan are embodied. At each meeting, we would begin with an embodiment practice to bring us into the space together. Sharing the space in this embodied way supported me to continue to 'tune in' to my own body as I shared and explored the research with them. I also benefited from the guidance of my work practice supervisor, Rianda Gunter, who offered me embodied supervision, she encouraged me to engage with my body and notice whether my physical sensations and thoughts were congruent. Having all three embodied supervisors supported authenticity of this research and supported further embodied reflexivity to reduce bias.

Discussion Reflections

While the study's limitations, including the small and relatively homogeneous sample and my dual role as an embodied researcher-practitioner, should be acknowledged, the findings remain hopeful. The research demonstrated that

embodiment has the potential to support social workers' wellbeing and practice. While the body-mind resources, when used, further enhanced this support. Both were actioned during participants workday, rather than being an additional self-care practice undertaken after work. Participants described feeling more grounded and composed, particularly when moving between tasks or managing challenging situations. I would suggest that the potential to embed these practices within the workday makes them more accessible and more likely to be adopted, as they do not depend on finding additional time or energy outside of work.

For some, embodiment extended beyond self-care, fostering connection with others and a renewed sense of balance and confidence in their work. Although organisational pressures persisted, these findings highlight that embodied awareness can enhance wellbeing, presence and sustainability in social work. These outcomes suggest practical possibilities of embedding embodiment more intentionally within social work practice, offering a pathway toward embodied collective wellbeing that could benefit both individuals, teams and organisations.

Phase Four

The data gathered from the findings and discussion informed the refinement of the embodiment program. A key insight was participants' development of embodied capacity and how embodied community connection played an important role in this development. Further, the discussion suggested that adopting an embodied

collective-care approach has the potential to further strengthen wellbeing and increase the integration of embodiment. Therefore, additional practices and processes have been incorporated to further support the development of both embodied capacity and embodied collective-care.

The focus of the workshop will continue to be experiential, as this approach was found to support participants in cultivating embodiment. Phase Three findings demonstrated how embodiment evolved into embodied capacity, with the body and mind working synergistically to support participants beyond self-care. In response, the workshop will place particular emphasis, both verbally and experientially, on the important role of the body, enhancing awareness of the dynamic, bidirectional connection between body and mind. By increasing recognition that the body is more than a container for the mind and is instead an active partner in shaping lived experience, it is hoped that participants will engage with the experiential practices more intentionally, potentially facilitating a more direct pathway to embodiment following are the refinements made to the program:

Key Focus Embodied Awareness

Given the significant role embodiment played in the findings, the program will place a primary focus on fostering embodiment. This led to the introduction of five new embodiment practices (See Appendix Q). Collectively, these embodiment practices can be understood as forming a conceptual progression, beginning with individual

embodied awareness, extending into relational and collective experience and concluding with a practice that cultivates balance and possibility. The intention is that the workshop would begin with the new practices, and the original practices would follow. However, flexibility will be central to the program; not all practices, whether original or newly introduced, will necessarily be used in every context, and their application will depend on situational relevance and the needs of participants:

Grounding in the Body

1. Self-Touch and Tactile Exploration: Developed in response to a participant's suggestion, this practice incorporates tactile awareness and self-touch. The intention is to foster connection to self and support a deeper embodied experience.
2. Body Positioning: This practice invites participants to explore posture and its impact on internal states and thoughts, increasing awareness of how physical positioning influences both personal experience and relational presence.

Expanding into Relational Awareness

3. Self in Relationship to Others: Arising from the discussion around shifting from individualised self-care to embodied collective-care, this practice invites participants to notice how they experience their body in relation to others.
4. Shared Humanity: This practice invites participants to notice the presence of others and the collective energy of the group. It recognises that, while each person's challenges are unique, facing difficulties is a shared human experience.

Participants are encouraged to remain grounded in their own bodies while cultivating empathy, connection and relational awareness without taking on others' experiences.

Integrating Balance and Possibility

5. Experience of Goodness: Findings from Phase One revealed that most participants initially connected with their bodies through discomfort. This practice counterbalances that tendency by fostering experiences of comfort, ease, and goodness within the body, with the intention of creating a supportive space that enhances participants' capacity to move beyond discomfort and explore the full possibilities of embodied capacity. This practice was adapted from Miller (2015).

Simplifying Body-Mind Resources

In the initial workshop, the resources were presented as a separate component and were shared in the afternoon (see Appendix B). In the refined program, they will instead be integrated throughout the day, complementing embodiment practices rather than being separate from them. Participants' reduced use of the body-mind resources, alongside the barrier of work demands, highlighted the need for accessible and easy to use resources. Therefore, just three resources will be retained:

- Physiological Sigh Breath: In Phase Two, it was the most frequently used

resource and was effective in helping participants regulate their nervous system.

- Shaking: The second most frequently used resource in Phase Two and one of the most popular in Phase One, it offers an opportunity to move 'stuck' energy through the body, it supported some participants to release stress and transition between various roles.
- Supporting Self: In Phase One, it was one of the most suggested resources for use outside of the workshop; it promotes caring for self and supports embodied awareness.

Managing Sensitive Experiences

In Phase One, a participant suggested providing a warning of possible triggering when engaging with each embodiment practice. As noted in Phase One findings, there were several instances prior to the workshop and at its outset where forewarning was provided. Upon reflection, continuously voicing warnings could potentially limit participants' experiences by inducing anticipatory fear. Therefore, forewarning will occur only at the beginning of the workshop, and participants will be informed that they can take a break from practices or leave the room if they feel the need. At the same time, they will be encouraged to approach any heightened experiences with curiosity, recognising them as signals from the body that can offer valuable information and opportunities for learning.

Online Community Connection and Follow-up

The online component of the program still consists of a five-week follow-up, as findings suggest that this structure effectively supports the ongoing integration of practices and facilitated embodied capacity. Its focus will intentionally be on fostering embodiment by revisiting workshop practices while also promoting embodied collective-care and exploring how embodiment might be further realised in participants' workplaces. Following this component, an additional four-week follow-up could be considered, delivered as fortnightly emails containing brief video or audio recordings to encourage continued engagement with embodiment practices. On completion of the workshop, participants will be invited to join a Facebook page, providing a space to explore connection and collaboratively share embodiment practices and experiences. Over time, the aim is for more participants to engage, creating a hub for embodied community connection and embodied collective-care, both of which were explored in the discussion.

Expanding Workshop Reach

As noted in the Reflections on Findings, there is the potential to run a workshop through the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers to generate interest in embodiment within the social work field. By introducing an awareness of the embodiment experience, it might lead to the facilitation of workshops within organisations. In doing so, this may encourage wider awareness and recognition of

embodiment among social workers. Potentially supporting and encouraging the development of embodied capacity and fostering embodied collective-care.

Phase Four Reflections

Taken together, these refinements position the program to more effectively respond to the needs identified in the findings. By prioritising embodiment while simplifying the use of the body-mind resources, the program aims to increase its potential for cultivating embodied capacity, embodied community connection and embodied collective-care. The incorporation of new embodiment practices is intended not only to deepen individual embodied awareness but also to expand relational and collective dimensions of practice. The study's use of an embodied collective approach highlighted the importance of learning in community, as it supported new embodied learnings, adaptations and integration of embodiment and the body-mind resources. This approach has the potential to support social workers in both personal and professional contexts.

Chapter Six Conclusion

This final chapter brings together what has evolved throughout the research process, revisiting what this study set out to understand and how embodiment and body–mind practices were explored as a source of support for social workers. It outlines the methodology, summarises the key findings, and reflects on how the program was developed and adapted in response to participants' experiences. The chapter then discusses the implications for social work practice, education, and organisations, before offering recommendations for how embodiment might be further integrated and sustained within the profession.

The aim of this research was to explore how embodiment, together with body-mind resources, might support social workers' wellbeing. The inquiry was motivated by my observations and conversations with colleagues who had experienced high levels of stress and, for some, burnout, as well as my own experiences of near burnout on several occasions. In both my personal life and my work as a therapeutic social worker, embodiment and body-mind resources have provided a sense of support and stability.

This study provided an opportunity to explore a novel, embodied approach to wellbeing through the delivery of a program that combined a one-day workshop

with a five-week online follow-up. The program intentionally engaged the body as a source of information and support for wellbeing, with the hope that such practices might offer additional, practical support for social workers within the demands of their workday.

Methodology

This study engaged an action research approach, utilising the Look - Think - Act framework of Stringer and Ortiz Aragōn (2021). As the research evolved, it became clear that embodiment itself played a critical role in informing the research process. Therefore, embodiment was intentionally added into the framework, resulting in: Look - Embody - Think - Act.

A four-phase approach was used.

Phase One

A workshop explored embodiment and the body-mind resources. Data was collected through pre and post workshop self-reflections, along with participants evaluations to support further development.

Phase Two

A live, five-week online follow-up was conducted, with each session video recorded. The sessions followed a semi-structured approach, allowing participants to explore the practices and share their experiences.

Phase Three

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to further explore whether embodiment and/or the body-mind resources were supportive and to gather additional feedback to guide the program development.

Phase Four

Phase Four represented the culmination of the first three phases, bringing together insights and feedback gathered throughout the study. It followed the discussion phase and focused on redeveloping the program, integrating participants' reflections and the learnings from the workshop, the five-week online follow-up sessions, and individual interviews.

Key Findings

Findings suggest that fostering embodied awareness has the potential to support participants in their workday and that body-mind resources can further enhance this support. Embodiment was not simply a coping strategy but a practical resource that strengthened social workers' professional stance. Participants integrated embodiment into their workday, making it accessible and enabling them to remain composed and responsive when navigating challenging situations. The workshop itself appeared effective in fostering embodiment amongst participants. While the five-week online follow-up encouraged participants to apply embodied practices in their work, and the embodied collective approach supported this.

As this study followed an action research process, the program evolved in response to data gathered across all phases of the research. Phase Four was in response to the discussion and was the redevelopment of the embodiment program as a whole. It was informed by the insights from participants' reflections from each of the three phases, resulting in adaptations to the program's content and structure. In this way, the program became an embodied expression of the research itself. Two significant findings that informed the adaptation of the program were that embodiment became a key resource, providing multifaceted support, and that embodied community connection played an instrumental role in supporting participants' learning and integration of practices. Consequently, the program now positions embodiment as its central focus, incorporating new practices that promote embodied awareness in relationship with others.

However, despite the benefits of embodied community connection and the flexibility of applying embodiment in the workday, full integration was hindered by ongoing work pressures, organisational demands and limited structural support. Over time, participants began to interpret these barriers as personal rather than systemic, reflecting Collins (2021) concern that the term self-care implies a solo endeavour, placing full responsibility on the individual to support themselves. Interestingly, several participants reflected on ways to share these practices with colleagues and three participants intended to continue meeting to further consolidate their learnings. This suggests that participants found embodiment beneficial while also recognising

that sharing practices with others could enhance both sustainability and continued development. These findings further highlight the importance of community connection in the development of embodiment. They also suggest that the intentional participation of organisations and educational institutions may play a crucial role in supporting integration, shifting the focus from an individualised self-care approach to an embodied collective-care approach.

Implications

These findings have several implications for social work practice and wellbeing. First, embodiment practices have the potential to serve as a useful resource for self-awareness, presence and resilience while also increasing capacity for work-related challenges. Yet for embodiment to be fully realised and sustainable, it requires organisational involvement where workplaces recognise their role in social workers' wellbeing. Second, if embodiment were introduced within the structure of social work education, there is a greater possibility that it would become embedded through ongoing practice, which could create an embodied educational community, potentially shaping a culture of embodied collective-care.

If educational and organisational environments were to shift from simply being defined as institutions and instead were seen as living communities, places where connection, responsibility, and care are shared, there could be a shift from the isolating term of self-care to embodied collective-care, where wellbeing is the

responsibility of all. Embodiment in this sense invites a reimagining of how wellbeing and care are experienced, not just as individual responsibilities, but as shared practices that sustain both social workers and the profession as a whole. Finally, both organisations and educational institutions need to recognise the embodied nature of social work and create conditions that allow space for reflective and experiential practices. With this understanding, embodiment holds the possibility to bring even greater benefit and become more deeply integrated into the social work field.

Recommendations

Embodiment in the social work field is under-researched, and the absence of a consistent definition limits its development and application (Gardner et al., 2023). In this study, embodied awareness is defined as the integration of body and mind, supporting the sense of self, adaptive action, relational attunement, and engagement with the environment, as defined by using both Merleau-Ponty (2002) philosophical explanation and a neurobiological perspective, as noted by Schwartz and Maiberger (2018). To enhance clarity and coherence in social work research and practice, this study, like Gardner et al. (2023), recommends using a shared definition of embodied awareness as a foundation for further studies. Future research could include a broader range of participants, particularly in relation to gender, ethnicity and varied practice settings, to understand how embodiment and embodied collective-care practices are experienced across diverse groups of social workers.

This study contributes to the literature by illustrating practical experiential applications of embodiment in social work and by identifying directions for future development. While systemic challenges persist, embedding embodiment as a collective-care model could support practitioners, organisations and the communities they serve. It could be advantageous for social work education and organisations to intentionally include embodied reflective approaches as part of wellbeing and professional development frameworks. Creating spaces for embodied experiential learning and collective reflection may help normalise embodiment as part of everyday practice. Further research exploring the use of an embodied collective-care framework within social work education and organisational settings could deepen understanding of its impact on wellbeing, retention, relational practice and sustainability.

Concluding Reflections on this Embodiment Journey

Embodiment practices have long played a significant role in both my personal and professional life, yet through this research process I have experienced a deepening of my own embodiment. Completing this research was challenging, as I navigated work commitments, family responsibilities, and my own health challenges alongside the demands of the thesis. However, I would suggest it is my embodiment that carried me to the conclusion of this work, without it I am unsure of how I would have fared. It has become clear to me that embodiment is not something with an end point, rather it is an ongoing practice of coming home to our body. Embodied awareness is

an experiential practice, and through this embodied experience, beneficial, practical actions can arise. Therefore, embodiment is a process that supports making actionable change. A significant learning for me is that the continual development of embodiment is more powerful when it is shared within community. As participants shared their experiences and insights, my own sense of embodiment expanded, and I found myself 'tuning in' with greater consistency.

My body played a pivotal role in informing and shaping this research. However, I believe that this deepening would not have occurred to the same extent had I not been in the supportive container of the embodied community that surrounded me, which consisted of my research supervisors, my supervisor for my practice work and the participants who took part in the research. This process has strengthened my belief in the transformative potential of embodiment, while also highlighting that it is most powerful when nurtured and experienced collectively.

To conclude this embodied work, it feels appropriate to invite you to …… notice your breath for a moment …… notice your thoughts for a moment ……... and now 'tune in' to your body, dropping down from the mind into your heart space ……... experiencing your body in this moment ……. explore a sense of expansion from your heart space into your whole body ……. experience your whole body in this moment, experience your embodiment ……

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Appendices

Appendix A: Plan for the Day – Participant Copy

Plan for the day:

Morning

9 am – 10.30 am

During the morning, we will focus on exploring practices that foster/cultivate/grow embodied awareness

10.30 am – 10.45 am morning tea break

10.45am – 12pm

Continue exploring practices that foster/cultivate/grow embodied awareness

12pm – 1pm lunch break

Afternoon

1pm – 2.30pm

Exploring body-mind tools that could support you during your working day

2.30pm – 2.45pm afternoon tea break

2.45pm – 4pm

Continue exploring body-mind practices that could support you during your working day

Appendix A: Fostering Embodiment Worksheet – Participant Copy

Embodiment definition:

In this research, embodiment refers to the connection between the body and mind: each influences the other. It is about being consciously aware of how internal emotions, thoughts and sensations, as well as external experiences and interactions, are perceived through our body. This awareness is a practice of tuning into our body to understand how we respond to life and to determine how we can best support ourselves through action.

Why bother with Embodiment?

Embodiment gives us the experience of life by gathering data through three sensory components, which inform the brain. Interoception is the process by which our internal body communicates with us through the sensing of signals originating from within, such as hunger, temperature, thirst, heartbeat, and feelings of comfort or discomfort. At its most basic, interoception enables us to perceive the internal states of our body, and these bodily signals play a crucial role in shaping our emotions, mood, and overall sense of wellbeing. Exteroception is information that is gathered externally through the five senses: eyes, skin, nose, tongue and ears. Proprioception is how our body parts are in relation to each other and the environment, and it doesn't need eyesight to inform it. For example, if you were blind folded, you would still know whether you were sitting down or standing up. Embodied awareness increases our understanding of ourselves and how we respond; it can support us to take the needed action to manage all aspects of our life. It supports our ability to maintain wellbeing in what can be a challenging and stressful profession.

What to expect from the morning workshop

We will explore various skills to grow/develop our embodied awareness so we can strengthen our connection to self. The following practices will be shared for exploring embodiment:

- Noticing the outer arm to noticing the inner arm
- Body sensing through stillness
- Body sensing through movement
- Shifting between states
- Noticing your breath: 3-way breath
- Body awareness via sound

- Embodied walking
- Embodied awareness with smell

Please note that throughout these embodiment practices, you cannot get it wrong; your experience is unique to you. Some participants may have similar experiences, some may not, and this is ok, it is all about how you experience your embodiment, not how another person experiences theirs. We are all unique; therefore, our experiences can also be unique to us. These practices are all choice-based based you do not have to take part in any of the practices, you make the decision for your body.

Sometimes growing awareness of our body may bring up varying emotions like sadness or joy, or past stories that are unsettling or settling. Whatever arrives, we want to just notice and be curious about what might arise rather than becoming stuck in any emotion or story. Please know that during breaks, you can approach me if you are feeling it is too much, and I can support you to decide if you want to continue or leave the workshop. If you choose to leave, you are encouraged to make contact with someone you view as a support person to be with you.

On the day, there will be a sheet that you can take with you. It offers contacts if you would like further support beyond this workshop. I would also encourage you to take the opportunity in your monthly supervision to reflect on your experience and the outcome of attending, as another way to process and integrate the new learning. If you have a kaumatua or another elder leader you are comfortable speaking with please do. My email is also on the support sheet if you would like to contact me directly.

I also want to remind you all that for this workshop and the 5-week follow-up, there is a need to maintain confidentiality of other participants' experiences. You can share your personal experience with others however; it is important that together we maintain each other's confidentiality.

Thank you for your willingness to join the study, and I look forward to our sharing this time together 😊

Appendix A: Embodiment Practices Morning Session - Facilitator Copy

Shifting Between States

Checking in: find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while exploring shifting between states, and how you feel at the end of the practice to explore any changes in your experience with your body.

External Awareness:

- Take your awareness outward into the room. Notice what you can see, hear, or sense: colours, objects, noises. Then bring your attention back into your body and notice how it responds.
- Shift your focus to a specific object in the room. Explore its shape, texture, and colour. Notice how your body responds as you observe it.
- Bring your attention to the overall feeling of the room. How is your body responding?

Inner Body Awareness:

- Move your focus inward to your whole body. Notice any emotions or sensations present.
- Narrow your attention to a specific area where sensations feel strongest. Take a moment to notice and describe your experience.
- When ready, expand your awareness back to your whole body.

Practicing Shifts Between States:

Move between these states while checking in with your body and mind:

1. Broad noticing of the room, feel your body as you take in the space around you.
2. Narrow focus on a specific object, feel your body as you focus on one thing in the room.
3. Whole inner body, feel your body internally as a whole.
4. Specific area of the inner body, feel a specific area or sensation.

Reflection:

You can write or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of each state did your body feel different when focusing on the external environment compared to when you were focusing solely on your internal body?
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way? If so, how?

Adapted from Schwartz and Maiberger (2018)

Noticing the Outer Arm to Noticing the Inner Arm

Checking in: find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while exploring the outer arm and inner arm, and how you feel at the end of the practice to explore any shifts or changes in your experience with your body.

1. **Find a Comfortable Position**: Perhaps sitting with your spine straight and you can close your eyes if it helps you focus inward.
2. **Start with the Outer Arm**: Begin by bringing your attention to your outer arm. Notice any sensations you feel on the surface of your skin, such as temperature, texture, or pressure. Observe any tingling, warmth, or coolness.
3. **Move to the Inner Arm**: Shift your awareness gradually toward the inner arm. Notice the sensations deep within your arm, such as muscle tension, pulsing blood flow, or subtle movements. Be curious about any sensations you encounter without judging or analysing them.
4. **Explore the Transition**: As you transition from the outer to the inner arm, pay attention to how the sensations change. Notice any shifts in intensity, location, or quality of sensations. Stay present with each moment as you explore.
5. **Stay Present**: If your mind wanders, gently guide your attention back to the sensations in your inner arm. Use your breath as an anchor to help you stay grounded in the present moment.
6. **Reflect and Integrate**: Reflect on your experience. You can either write down and/or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of transitioning from your outer arm to your inner arm?
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way and if it did, how?

Adapted from various embodiment learnings

Body Sensing Through Stillness

Checking in: Find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now, to how you feel while exploring body sensing and how you feel at the end of the practice, to explore any shifts or changes in your experience with your body.

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position where you can relax and focus

without distractions. You could either close your eyes or soften your gaze if this helps you to focus on your body.

2. Begin by focusing on your breath. Take a few light, slow, deep breaths to centre yourself.
3. Now take your attention to your feet, not needing to do anything with your feet, just feeling into the soles of your feet in this moment … your toes on both feet
4. Shift your focus to your ankles … shins ... calves … knees, back of the knees … top of your thighs … back of your thighs … feeling into instead of thinking into
5. Taking your attention to your pelvis … hips … bring your awareness to your pelvis and hips at the same time
6. Feel the core of your body … notice the expansion and contraction of your ribcage with each breath … feel the movement created by the breath in the core of your body
7. Shifting your attention to your arms … feel your left arm … feel your right arm …is there movement, sensation or stillness … feel the left palm of your hand … your thumb … index finger … middle finger … ring finger … little finger … feel your left palm and fingers at the same time … feel your right palm … your thumb … index finger … middle finger … ring finger … little finger … feel your right palm and fingers at the same time … feel both hands at the same time
8. Sense your throat … top of the face … your head … feeling instead of thinking
9. Now notice your whole body … your whole body in this moment … is there sensation … stillness … energy moving … feeling your whole body … now release that practice
10. This practice is now complete, so in your own time, when you are ready, start to wiggle your fingers and toes, maybe moving your head from side to side and making any other body adjustments/movements you need to bring yourself up and out of the practice

Reflect and Integrate: Reflect on your experience. You can either write down and/or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of body sensing in stillness
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way if it did, how?

Adapted from Miller (2015)

Body Sensing Through Movement

1. **Checking in:** Find a comfortable standing position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now, to how you feel while exploring body sensing and how you feel at the end of the practice, to explore any shifts or changes in your experience with your body.
2. **Settle into stillness**: Begin by finding a comfortable standing position. If it feels okay, you can close your eyes or soften your gaze. Taking some slow breaths in and out through the nose to support centring.
3. **Body Scan**: Start with a gentle body scan to check in with different areas of your body. Notice any areas of tension, discomfort, or ease. Bring your awareness to your feet and gradually move upward through your legs, the core of your body, arms, neck, and head.
4. **Connect with Your Breath**: Pay attention to your breath as it moves in and out of your body. Notice the rhythm, depth, and quality of your breath.
5. **Set Intention**: perhaps setting the intention in your mind of growing body awareness.
6. **Start Moving Mindfully**: Begin to move your body slowly and mindfully. You might start with gentle stretches, slow and deliberate movements, or simply swaying or rocking back and forth.
7. **Notice Sensations**: As you move, tune into the sensations in your body. Notice the feeling of your muscles stretching and contracting, the sensation of your feet contacting the ground, and any areas of warmth or coolness.
8. **Follow Your Body's Guidance**: Let your body be your guide as you move. Pay attention to any signals or messages it's sending you. If something doesn't feel right, adjust or choose a different movement that feels more supportive allow this to be directed by your body instead of the mind.
9. **Explore Range of Motion**: Gradually explore the range of motion available to you in each movement. Notice any limitations or restrictions and gently explore them with curiosity and compassion.
10. **Embrace Fluidity**: Allow your movements to flow naturally, without judgment or expectation. Embrace the fluidity of your body as it moves through space and let go of any need to perform or achieve a certain outcome.
11. **Stay Present**: Keep your awareness anchored in the present moment as you move. Let go of any distractions or thoughts about the past or future and simply be with your body as it moves and breathes.

Reflect and Integrate: Reflect on your experience. You can either write down

and/or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of body sensing through movement?
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way if it did, how?

Created from personal experience/exploration

The Three-Part Breath - Dirgha Pranayama

1. **Checking in**: Find a comfortable seated position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while exploring the breath practice and how you feel at the end of the practice to explore any shifts or changes in your experience with your body.
2. **Find a Comfortable Position**: Sit or lie down in a comfortable position with your spine straight yet relaxed. You can place your hands on your tummy or ribs to help you connect with your breath.
3. **Maintain Relaxation**: Throughout the practice, maintain a sense of relaxation and ease in your body. Avoid any strain or tension and allow your breath to flow naturally and in an easy way.
4. **Relax Your Body**: Take a few moments to relax your body and release any tension. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable or soften your gaze and allow your body to soften with each breath.
5. **Begin with low tummy Breathing**: Start by bringing your awareness to your tummy. As you inhale, allow your lower tummy to expand fully, like a balloon filling with air. Feel the breath moving downward into your tummy, allowing it to rise and fall with each breath.
6. **Expand into Ribcage Breathing**: After a few tummy breaths, expand your awareness to include your ribcage. As you inhale, into the lower tummy, then expand into the ribcage, expanding outward to the sides, front and back of your body. Notice the expansion of your tummy and ribcage as you breathe in deeply.
7. **Complete with Chest Breathing**: breathe into your lower tummy, then to your rib cage, and now include the chest. As you inhale, feel your chest rising gently upward. As your chest expands, try to keep your shoulders relaxed.
8. **Exhale Fully**: Exhale slowly and completely, firstly releasing the breath from your chest, then ribcage, and then tummy. Feel your chest contract, your ribcage and then your tummy.
9. **Repeat the Cycle**: Continue this three-part breath cycle for 4 x, allowing each inhale to be smooth and full, and each exhale to be slow and complete. Focus on

the continuous flow of your breath and the sensations in your body as you breathe.

Reflect and Integrate: Reflect on your experience. You can either write down and/or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of your body with the breath practice?
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way? If it did, how?

Adapted from classical yogic breathing practices - Hatha Yoga from India

Body Awareness Through Sound

This practice is to explore body awareness with the use of sounds

1. **Checking in**: Find a comfortable seated position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now, to how you feel while exploring the sound practice and how you feel at the end of the practice, to explore any shifts or changes in your experience with your body.
2. **Sound Exploration:** This is an exploration of how your body responds to sound. The sounds will consist of squeaking engines, birds singing, low deep music, bright upbeat music, river sounds, typing on a computer, heavy thudding, crackling, rhythmic music and melodic music.
3. **Body Mapping:** As each sound is played bring attention to your body where do you feel the sound in your body. How is your body responding, is there tension, softness, an urge to move or be still and now notice how is your mind responding to the sounds.

Reflect and Integrate: Reflect on your experience. You can either write down and/or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of body awareness through sound
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way? If it did, how?

Created from personal experience/exploration

Embodied Walking

Exploring different ways of walking can be a fun and effective way to encourage embodiment and deepen your connection with your body.

1. **Checking in:** Find a comfortable seated position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while exploring the embodied walking, and how you feel at the end of the practice to explore any shifts or changes in your experience with your body.
2. **Mindful Walking**: Begin with a simple mindful walking practice. Walk slowly and deliberately, paying close attention to each step you take. Notice the sensations in your feet as they contact the ground, the movement of your muscles and joints, and the rhythm of your breath.
3. **Walking with ease**: Experiment with walking in an easy way with lightness and softness, notice how this is experienced by your body.
4. **Variations in Pace**: Explore variations in your walking pace to see how it affects your embodiment experience. Walk slowly, taking small, deliberate steps, and notice how it allows you to connect more deeply with your body and surroundings. Then, try walking at a faster pace and notice how it energises you and engages your muscles differently.
5. **Walking in confidence**: Imagine you have just advocated for a client, and they have been given the resources they needed because of your advocacy. Walk with confidence and notice how your body responds to this.
6. **Walking to avoid someone**: imagine you have gone to the supermarket after a long day at work, and you see someone you know who likes to talk a lot, you decide to avoid them. How would you walk to do this? What is the experience in your body?

Reflect and Integrate: Reflect on your experience. You can either write down and/or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of embodied walking?
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way? If it did, how?

Created from personal experience/exploration

Body Awareness Through Smell

This practice is to explore body awareness with the use of smells.

1. **Checking in:** Find a comfortable seated position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while exploring the smell practice, and how you feel at the end of the practice to explore any shifts or changes in your experience with your body.
2. **Introduce different smells:** gradually, one at a time. Have participants focus their attention on each smell as they smell it. Invite them to notice how their body responds to the smell — do they tense up, soften or does the body want to move.
3. **Body Mapping:** As they smell the different smells, guide participants to mentally map where they feel it in their bodies do they feel it in their chest, stomach, limbs or somewhere else.

Reflect and Integrate: Reflect on your experience. You can either write down and/or draw your experience:

- What was your experience of body awareness through smell
- Did this affect your embodied experience in any way? If it did, how?

Created from personal experience/exploration

Appendix B: Body-Mind Resources - Participant Copy

Afternoon Session - Exploration of Body-Mind Resources

This afternoon, we are exploring various body-mind resources. Each resource will be explored as an experiential exercise so that you can experience for yourself whether this is a resource that will be of benefit for you in your daily work.

Centring Resource

If you would like, you can join me in a centring practice before we begin today. This practice will be a repeated practice for the 5 weeks we meet online to further support embodied awareness.

You can choose to have your eyes open, a soft gaze or closed for the practice:

- You might notice any thoughts, emotions and body sensations that are present
- If you like, you could move your attention to your breath and just allow yourself to notice your breath, no need to control it, just notice your breath coming in and out of your nose
- You have an opportunity now to find balance in your body, so making any necessary adjustments to support your body to feel balanced in this moment
- You could now soften through the eyes, mouth, throat, chest and abdomen

Adapted from aspects of: Schwartz, A., & Maiberger, B. (2018). *EMDR therapy and somatic psychology interventions to enhance embodiment in trauma treatment.* W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Shaking Resource

Dr Peter Levine is a pioneer of this form of practice. He created Somatic experiencing, which explored healing via the body rather than focusing on talk therapy. Today we are to explore shaking to support the body to calm after experiencing stressful situations, such as having a challenging home visit or experiencing organisational pressures. The theory behind this is that we often trap stress/tension in our body, and this can accumulate, leading to body ailments and increased stress/tension. To shake offers us a way to release the stress/tension in our body, bringing us back to balance.

Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor, take your

attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while inducing shaking and how you feel at the end. You can either be seated or standing

1. **Begin by noticing your breath:** not needing to do anything with the breath, just noticing.
2. **Take a moment** to scan your whole body from head to toe. Notice if there are any areas of tension, holding or discomfort. Simply observe these sensations.
3. **Create an intention** with the practice, such as "I am releasing" or "I am letting go"
4. **Begin shaking (up to three minutes)** start by gently shaking one hand, let the movement be loose with no restriction, and then allow the other hand to follow. Gradually allow the shaking to spread to both arms. You could let the shaking continue to spread into your body, including your torso, legs and feet. Allow the shaking to be organic and spontaneous, feel into the body and see how and where you need to shake.
5. **Return to your breath (one minute):** as you are shaking, come back to noticing your breath, ensure you are breathing and not holding your breath, allow it to flow naturally and freely with the movement of your body. Allowing each exhale to support the release of any further tension/stress.
6. **Release:** gradually slowing down the movement until you come to a stop. Take a moment to rest in and notice any sensations in your body.
7. **Grounding:** Now take some breaths and gently bring your awareness back into a broader focus of where you are now.

(Please note this resource can be modified depending on time available or where you are, such as when in the work office, you may want to reduce the shaking and remain in your chair, ***or*** *you may want to explore shaking when you return to your stationery car after a challenging offsite experience)*

- **Please write down or draw your experience of the shaking resource what did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be

here, breathe into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body to feel more balanced.

Adapted from: Levine, P. A. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma: The innate capacity to transform overwhelming experiences*. North Atlantic Books.

The Physiological Sigh Breath

This breath resource has been researched and seen to be effective for reducing stress. One of the researchers of its effectiveness is the neuroscientist Dr Andrew Huberman. His podcast *Huberman Lab* is where he shared this breath resource, and it has grown in popularity by supporting people to reduce stress through breath.

Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while using this breath practice and how you feel at the end.

1. **Take a deep inhale** through the nose (with no exhale in between), followed quickly by another inhale through the nose (the second inhale will not be as deep as the first, you are fitting the 2nd inhale in) - if *you cannot inhale through the nose, then inhale through the mouth*
2. **Take a long exhale** through the mouth with a sigh until your lungs are empty of air

You can repeat this cycle for up to 10 - 15 times to support a calming of the nervous system

- **Please write down your experience of this resource. What did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be here, breathe into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body to feel more balanced.

Evidenced research: Balban, M. Y., Holl, G., Huberman, A. D., Neri, E., Kogon, M. M., Nouriani, B., Jo, B., Zeitzer, J. M., Spiegel, D., & Weed, L. (2023). Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal. *Cell Reports Medicine*, *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xcrm.2022.100895

The Flash Resource

This technique has been used by therapists to help clients quickly and effectively reduce the impact of distressing memories or events, which in turn supports the calming of any intense emotions you might be experiencing.

Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while using this technique and how you feel at the end.

Steps for using the Flash technique to reduce stress:

1. **Contain and distance the target memory**: Without engaging in the challenging memory symbolically (without actually writing it down), place the memory on a sticky note, or piece of paper, fold it over and place it in your desk drawer, in the rubbish bin or under some files.
2. **Find and access a positive engaging focus**: Engage in an activity or recall a memory that brings positive feelings and engages your senses. This could be playing a game like Tetris on your phone, listening to music, looking at happy photo memories on your phone, or imagining a peaceful place. Actively involve yourself in this focus, experience the positive feelings in your body.
3. **Sets of triple blinks**: Now blink rapidly three times while doing your positive activity. Continue to do the set of 3 rapid blinks randomly for 10x while varying the intervals for the duration of 60 seconds (you may want to put a timer on your phone for 60 seconds).
4. **Check the target memory**: After the first 60-second round of various triple blinks, briefly pause the positive activity and ask yourself if there's anything different about the target memory now. There is no need to overthink this or go deeply into the memory, just observe if the target memory feels different eg, if it feels less intense.
5. **Continue sets until no further change is felt with the memory**: Keep repeating sets of triple blinks and checking the target memory until no further

changes are felt, and the memory's distress/sting has reduced and feels more manageable.

- **Please write down or draw your experience of this resource. What did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be here, breathe into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body to feel more balanced.

Evidenced research: Philip, E. M., Graham, T., Edie, D., Lewis, E., & Ricky, G. (2024). Preliminary evidence for the acceptability, safety, and efficacy of the flash technique [article]. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, *14*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1273704

Letting Go Resource

This resource is a way to explore letting go of the challenge/s you might have experienced while in a work meeting, with a client, or colleague, or simply letting go of a busy moment at work. It can also be about being kind to yourself and releasing the pressures we often place on ourselves. Particularly when we feel we didn't get it right and are inclined to be hard on ourselves.

Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while using this technique and how you feel at the end.

1. Standing or sitting in a chair, simply fold forward, allow your head to gently let go
2. As you fold forward breathe out with a quiet sigh, and in your mind or quietly say to yourself " I am letting go".
3. You decide how long you want to stay in the forward fold and how many times you would like to state the intention of "letting go"

- **Please write down or draw your experience of this resource. What did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be here, breathe into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body to feel more balanced.

Adapted from: Walsh, M. (2020). Embodiment: Moving Beyond Mindfulness. Unicorn Slayer Press.

Shifting from Tunnel Vision to Panoramic Vision Resource

This is a further resource shared by the neuroscientist Dr Andrew Huberman on his YouTube page, *Huberman Lab*. Research has shown that tunnel vision can increase adrenaline through activation of the sympathetic nervous system, leading to a reactive fight or flight response. In contrast, taking a broader view of one's surroundings can down regulate this reactive state. Therefore, when we feel stressed, we can use our vision to help the mind recentre by consciously widening our visual field. This practice can help to reduce or deactivate the stress response.

Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while using this technique and how you feel at the end.

1. Without moving your eyes, narrow your focus by placing your eyes on a specific object. Notice how this feels in your body.
2. Maintain a relaxed body while keeping your head and eyes still, soften your gaze slightly and expand your visual sight. You are widening your view, attempting to see yourself in your environment, so increasing your panoramic view to your left, right, above and below just as much as your eyes will allow without moving them.

- **Please write down or draw your experience of this resource. What did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be here, breathe into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body to feel more balanced.

(This can be used if you experience stress while at your computer attempting to get paperwork completed, causing a narrowing of view, are off-site and have experienced a stressful situation which has caused a narrowing of your view or if you are experiencing a difficult conversation with a manager/supervisor/colleague/client. By bringing in a panoramic view, it could support a reduction in feeling stressed.)

Adapted from: Huberman, A. [Huberman Lab]. (2021, March 8). *Tools for Managing Stress & Anxiety* You Tube.

Letting Go of Client Material Resource

This resource is to support you to intentionally let go of any material that might be related to a client/s. By doing this practice, you are consciously deciding not to take it home with you. You may also choose to use it during your workday after leaving a particular client/s, which has involved some heavy emotional work.

Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while using this technique and how you feel at the end.

Begin sitting in a chair, eyes can be open with a soft gaze or closed. Feel the contact between your body and the chair. Notice your breath; the inhale and exhale. Notice if there is any tension in your body. Notice thoughts and emotions. Now take a moment to visualise these thoughts, emotions, tensions, or sensations releasing out of your body. They might move out of the top of your head, out of your arms and hands, or out through your legs and feet. Imagine gently releasing this energy using the following statements:

- I let go and release anything that doesn't serve me.
- I have given my support to my clients today.

- Clients' emotions, thoughts, feelings, and sensations are not to be carried in my body.
- I respectfully return anything that I am holding consciously or unconsciously that belongs to them."
- **Please write down or draw your experience of the resource. What did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be here, breathe into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body to feel more balanced.

Accessed from: Schwartz, A., & Maiberger, B. (2018). *EMDR therapy and somatic psychology interventions to enhance embodiment in trauma treatment.* W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. Pg314

Supporting Self-Resource

The following method aims to teach you how to calm yourself and relax your nervous system by drawing on your own inner strength. This technique involves using touch to promote both physical and emotional soothing and a sense of calm.
Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while using this technique and how you feel at the end.

1. Sit in a chair
2. Place your left hand just below the opposite armpit and place the other hand on top of the opposite arm, between the elbow and the shoulder, holding yourself
3. Notice the feeling of containing yourself, that you are offering yourself support
4. Observe the physical feelings in your body and the parts of your body you are touching
5. Feel the sensations under your armpit, noticing temperature and pressure.
6. Feel the sensations on the skin and muscles of the hugged arm.

7. Feel your arms across your chest.
8. Notice any emotional responses, such as feeling safe and contained.
9. Continue exploring your physical and emotional experience, connecting with any pleasant sensation
10. Once you feel connected, you might say in your mind a supportive comment like: *"I can manage this", "I have all I need within me to get through this"*

- **Please write down or draw your experience of the resource. What did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be here, breath into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body to feel more balanced.

Adapted from Levine, P. (2008). Healing Trauma: A pioneering program for restoring the wisdom of your body. Canada: Sounds True

Humming Resource

According to Stephen Porges' Polyvagal Theory, humming can be a beneficial practice to help regulate the nervous system, particularly through stimulating the vagus nerve. Here are the steps for a humming resource based on his theory to support calm:

Check in practice: Find a comfortable position in your chair or floor, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions that are currently present. This practice offers a reference point for how you feel now to how you feel while using this technique and how you feel at the end.

1. **Find a Comfortable Position**: Sit or stand comfortably in a quiet space where you won't be disturbed.
2. **Take a Few Deep Breaths**: Inhale deeply and lightly through your nose, allowing your abdomen to expand, and exhale slowly through your mouth. Repeat this a few times to relax and center yourself.
3. **Begin Humming**: Start humming softly at a pitch that feels natural and

soothing to you. You can hum with your mouth closed or slightly open, whichever is more comfortable. You might hum a tune you know or just hum without any particular tune.

4. **Focus on the Vibration**: Pay attention to the sensation of the humming vibrations in your chest and throat. This vibration helps stimulate the vagus nerve, which plays a key role in calming the nervous system.
5. **Continue for Several Minutes**: Continue humming for at least 3-5 minutes, or longer if you feel comfortable. The prolonged humming can promote a sense of calmness and reduce feelings of anxiety or stress.
6. **Observe Your Body's Response**: Notice any changes in your body and mind as you hum. You may feel more relaxed, centered, or emotionally balanced.
7. **Finish Mindfully**: When you're ready to finish, gradually reduce the humming and take a few more deep breaths. Sit quietly for a moment to reflect on how you feel after the practice.

- **Please write down or draw your experience of the humming resource. What did you notice in your body and mind?**

Centring practice: Let's take a moment to bring ourselves back into neutral by noticing your body sensations, notice your breath, notice any tension that might be here, breath into any bodily tension to support the releasing of it and take any movement that supports your body.

Evidence of effectiveness: Trivedi, G., Sharma, K., Saboo, B., Kathirvel, S., Konat, A., Zapadia, V., Prajapati, P. J., Benani, U., Patel, K., & Shah, S. (2023). Humming (Simple Bhramari Pranayama) as a Stress Buster: A Holter-Based Study to Analyze Heart Rate Variability (HRV) Parameters During Bhramari, Physical Activity, Emotional Stress, and Sleep. *Cureus*, *15*(4), e37527. https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.37527

Appendix C: Online Five Week Follow-Up – Researcher Copy

An exploration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources as supports for social workers

Week 1:

Centring practice

If you would like, you can join me in a centring practice before we begin today. This practice will be repeated practice for each week to further support embodied awareness.

You can choose to have your eyes open, a soft gaze or closed for the practice:

- You might notice any thoughts, emotions and body sensations that are present
- If you like, you could move your attention to your breath and just allow yourself to notice your breath, no need to control it, just notice your breath coming in and out of your nose
- An opportunity now to find balance in your body, so making any necessary adjustments to support your body to feel balanced in this moment
- You could now soften through the eyes, mouth, throat, chest and abdomen

Remind participants about reflecting on their intention for taking part in the research, has it stayed the same or organically evolved?

1. Recap on the body-mind resources shared
2. Explore what resources participants have been using – ask if there is a resource that any participants want to explore in this session
3. Explore any barriers to using the resources or ways they may have changed/modified to meet their needs
4. Opportunity for participants to share their experience thus far

Week 2:

If you would like, you can join me in a centring practice before we begin today.

You can choose to have your eyes open, a soft gaze or closed for the practice:

- You might notice any thoughts, emotions and body sensations that are present
- If you like, you could move your attention to your breath and just allow yourself to notice your breath, no need to control it, just notice your breath coming in and out of your nose

- An opportunity now to find balance in your body so making any necessary adjustments to support your body to feel balanced in this moment
- You could now soften through the eyes, mouth, throat, chest and abdomen

Remind participants about reflecting on their intention for taking part in the research, has it stayed the same, or organically evolved

1. Recap on the body-mind resources shared
2. Explore what resources participants have been using – ask if there is a resource that any participants want to explore in this session
3. Explore any barriers to using the resources or ways they may have changed/modified to meet their needs
4. Opportunity for participants to share their experience thus far

Week 3:

If you would like, you can join me in a centring practice before we begin today.

You can choose to have your eyes open, a soft gaze or closed for the practice:

- Notice any thoughts, emotions and body sensations that are present
- Move your attention to your breath and just allow yourself to notice your breath, no need to control it, just feel your breath coming in and out of your nose
- An opportunity now to find balance in your body, so making any necessary adjustments to support your body to feel balanced in this moment
- You could now soften through the eyes, mouth, throat, chest and abdomen

Remind participants about reflecting on their intention for taking part in the research, has it stayed the same, or organically evolved

1. Recap on the body-mind resources shared
2. Explore what resources participants have been using – ask if there is a resource that any participants want to explore in this session
3. Explore any barriers to using the resources or ways they may have changed/modified to meet their needs
4. Opportunity for participants to share their experience thus far

Week 4:
If you would like, you can join me in a centring practice before we begin today.

You can choose to have your eyes open, a soft gaze or closed for the practice:

- You might notice any thoughts, emotions and body sensations that are present. If you like, you could move your attention to your breath and just allow yourself to notice your breath, no need to control it, just notice your breath coming in and out of your nose
- An opportunity now to find balance in your body, so making any necessary adjustments to support your body to feel balanced in this moment
- You could now soften through the eyes, mouth, throat, chest and abdomen

Remind participants about reflecting on their intention for taking part in the research, has it stayed the same or organically evolved?

1. Recap on the body-mind resources shared
2. Explore what resources participants have been using – ask if there is a resource that any participants want to explore in this session
3. Explore any barriers to using the resources or ways they may have changed/modified to meet their needs
4. Opportunity for participants to share their experience thus far

Week 5:
If you would like, you can join me in a centring practice before we begin today.

You can choose to have your eyes open, a soft gaze or closed for the practice:

- You might notice any thoughts, emotions and body sensations that are present. If you like, you could move your attention to your breath and just allow yourself to notice your breath, no need to control it, just notice your breath coming in and out of your nose
- An opportunity now to find balance in your body, so making any necessary adjustments to support your body to feel balanced in this moment
- You could now soften through the eyes, mouth, throat, chest and abdomen

1. Recap on the body-mind resources shared
2. Explore any barriers to using the resources or ways they may have changed/modified to meet their needs
3. Have participants noticed any changes in how they experience their work

Appendix D: Individual Interview – Researcher Copy

Before we begin the interview, if you're willing, let's take a moment to centre ourselves here together, you can choose to have your eyes open, a soft gaze or closed for the practice:

- You might notice any thoughts, emotions and body sensations that are present
- If you like, you could move your attention to your breath and just allow yourself to notice your breath, no need to control it, just notice your breath coming in and out of your nose
- An opportunity now to find balance in your body, so making any necessary adjustments to support your body to feel balanced in this moment
- You might now soften through the eyes, mouth, throat, chest and abdomen

1. Could you share your experience of embodiment by using any of these approaches: descriptive words, sound, body movement/ body language, drawing?
   Before the workshop?
   After the workshop?
   And on completion of the 5-week follow-up?

2. What have you noticed or felt since exploring the fostering of embodied awareness?
   When did you notice or feel this?
   How often?

3. If you have been incorporating the body-mind resources into your workday, how have you done this?
   What do you use?
   When?

4. Could you share any times you used the body-mind resources where they made a noticeable difference in how you are feeling?
   What happened?
   What changed?
   What was the outcome for you?

5. Have you had any challenges or barriers while trying to integrate the resources?
   Personal?
   Work-related?
   Time?

6. Have any work colleagues, supervisors or peers noted any shift or changes with you

since integrating the body-mind resources?
What have they noticed?
When?
What was your response?

7. Do you see yourself continuing to use the resources, and if you do, how might you move forward with their use?
What will you do?
When?
How often?

8. Have you adapted or changed the resources to better meet your needs?
If you have, how?

9. Have you shared any of the resources with your colleagues?
If you have, how was this received?

10. Do you have any feedback/suggestions regarding the 5-week follow-up?

11. Overall, what difference has your experience of embodied awareness and body-mind resources had on you?
Your workday?
Your stress-management?
Your overall sense of well-being?

12. Is there anything else related to embodiment, your experience of body-mind resources or thoughts you have about the value of body-mind resources for social workers in their workday that you would like to share?

Thank you for sharing your experience regarding your embodiment before, during and after the workshop, along with the use of the body-mind resources during the 5-week follow-up period. Is there anything you would like to clarify or add before we finish?

I am truly grateful for your time and willingness to take part in this research. Your contribution is significant, so thank you once again

Appendix E: Ethics Approval

13/08/2024

Dear: Katrina Collie

Re: Ethics Application - OM3 24/26 - An exploration of embodied awareness and bodymind resources as support for social workers

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:

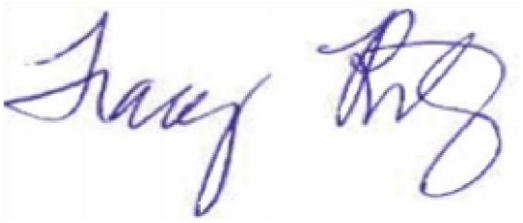
Ohu Matatika 3 at their meeting held on **Thursday, 11 July 2024**

On behalf of the Committee I am pleased to advise you that the ethics of your application are approved.

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Professor Tracy Riley,
Acting Chair, Research Ethics Chair's Committee

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise
Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841; 06 95106840
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz

Appendix F: Amendment Approval

Katrina Collie - Welcome Change
From: Patsy Broad <P.L.Broad@massey.ac.nz>
Sent: Friday, 20 September 2024 10:52 am
To: Katrina Collie - Welcome Change
Cc: Kieran O'Donoghue; Ksenija Napan
Subject: OM3 24/26 - Amendment One Approved
OM3 24/26 An exploration of embodied awareness and bodymind resources as support for social workers
Katrina Collie (HEC: OM3 Application 24/26)
Department: College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Supervisors: Professor Kieran O'Donoghue and Associate Professor Ksenija Napan

Minor Amendment to a previously approved application

Thank you for your email dated 13 September 2024 outlining the changes you wish to make to the above application.

The change(s) were approved and noted, as follows:

1. A request would made to the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) to include the research study information sheet in their newsletter, to have the information sheets available at the Invercargill ANZASW gathering that is to occur on the 25th September 2024 and to post the research on the ANZASW Facebook page.
2. Approach to PACT and Adventure Development Ltd to advertise the research.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee. If over time, more than one request to change the application is received, the Chair may request a new application.

Ngā mihi
Patsy Broad
On behalf of the Chair, Ohu Matatika 3
Patsy Broad (she/her) | Team
Leader Research Ethics Team

Graduate Research School and Ethics Massey University | Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North 4442 | New Zealand P: DDI 06 951 6840 ext. 83840 | www.massey.ac.nz

Appendix G: Participant Information Sheet

An exploration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources as support for social workers

Kia ora,

My name is Katrina Collie, and I am a social worker with 13 years' experience in therapeutic settings, and I am completing my Master of Social Work at Massey University exploring how embodied awareness coupled with body-mind resources can support social workers during their workday. I am also planning to assess if the workshop and five-week follow-up are useful approaches for the sharing of these self-care techniques. My own experience of near burnout caused me to seek new ways to support social workers whose well-being can be compromised in the often highly stressful environments we work in. I am passionate about supporting the supporters in their work. The research is being supervised by Professor Kieran O'Donoghue and Associate Professor Ksenija Napan.

Project Description and Invitation

This is an invitation for social workers to take part in a research study that has three phases, ***Phase Two & Three are optional:***

Phase One: *One day practical/experiential workshop from 9am – 4pm* **(7 hours)**

Participants will engage in experiential practices to foster/enhance embodied awareness (embodied awareness is the practice of being consciously attuned to sensations, feelings and movement within your body to deepen self-understanding and presence in the moment), explore and practice body-mind resources (body-mind resources are techniques that incorporate the body and mind to support wellbeing and can be used for self-care purposes), and integrate them with the purpose of offering a new approach to navigate work stressors and to deepen self-awareness.

- Starts with a brief demographic questionnaire, consent, and self-reflection.
- Morning session focuses on a variety of practices for developing/enhancing the conscious connection to your own body (embodied awareness).
- Afternoon session introduces various techniques (body-mind resources) to support self-care that involves both the body and mind.

- Ends with post workshop self-reflection and with participants offering feedback for further development of the workshop so it can be adapted to better support social workers embodied awareness and use of body-mind resources.

Phase Two: *5-week online follow-up group sessions (**5 hours in total**)*

- The **option to attend** 5-week online 60-minute follow-up sessions after the workshop which will be recorded for the research, the follow-up is to support strengthening your embodied awareness and integrating the body-mind resources, so they become familiar and accessible to use during your workday.

Phase Three: *individual interview (**1 hour**)*

The **option to attend a** 1:1 interview for participants who completed the 5-week online follow-up.

Selection criteria

- Social workers currently in practice
- Ability to attend a face-to-face workshop

Please know:

- Due to this research focusing on embodiment (which is unique to everyone) there is the possibility that emotions/thoughts may arise that might feel uncomfortable. If this occurs, you will be helped to decide if you wish to continue in the workshop or if you would like to leave and you will be encouraged to access a support person if you decide to leave. On the day a support resource sheet will be available.

Data Management

All data will be kept confidential. The data gathered on the workshop day will be stored in a lockable filing cabinet. Video recordings from the part two stage and any further data will be stored on the Massey University OneDrive. In the reporting and findings phase of the study, any participant names will be changed to a pseudonym. Quotes may be used as part of the reporting process; however identifiable information will be modified to maintain confidentiality. All data will be kept for five years as per the University Policy.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any question.
- Withdraw from the study before the approval of the 5-week online transcript.
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- Provide information on the understanding that your real name will not be used
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded and a full thesis when it gets examined
- Participants may request to turn off the recorder at any time during the 5-weeks of follow-up and individual interviews if they feel uncomfortable. We will discuss the discomfort, and with their agreement, the interview and recorder will re-commence, or they may choose to leave the online follow-up or end the individual interview. If the participant, no longer wants to take part in the research, any information they have given will be removed from the research and deleted.

Project Contacts
Contact people for the research

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Katrina Collie, [redacted] If you have any concerns about this research project please contact: Professor Kieran O'Donoghue, [redacted] and or Associate Professor Ksenija Napan, [redacted]

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3, Application OM3 24/26. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3, email [redacted]

Appendix H: Support Services – Participant Copy

Support Services

[redacted] - this is my direct email if you would like to make contact with me.

Need to talk? Free call or text 1737
Talk with a trained counsellor, anytime.

Mental health crises team: **0800 467 846 OR call the police 111**
Press 1 for **Southland**
Press 2 for **Otago**

- **Lifeline** 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or **free text** 4357 (HELP) - here to help
- **Samaritans** 0800 726 666 – for confidential support for anyone who is lonely or in emotional distress
- **Depression Helpline** 0800 111 757 or **free text** 4202 – to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions **www.depression.org.nz**
- **Healthline** 0800 611 116 – for advice from experienced health staff
- **Anxiety Helpline** 0800 269 4389 (0800 ANXIETY) - for people with all forms of anxiety and families and friends
- **Sexual Harm Helpline** 0800 044 334 or text 4334 or webchat at www.safetotalk.nz - to talk about sexual harm and find help for yourself or others
- **Alcohol and Drug helpline Freephone 0800 787 797 | Māori 0800 787 798 | Pasifika 0800 787 799 | Youth 0800 787 984**

Free-Text 8681, **Email** info@alcoholdrughelp.org.nz
Website www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz – web chat available
Hours 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Appendix I: Workshop Consent Form

An exploration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources as support for social workers

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during the one-day workshop
2. I understand that all the information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Note: There are limits on confidentiality as there are no formal sanctions on other workshop participants from disclosing your involvement, identity or what you say to others in the workshop. There are risks in taking part in this workshop for the research and taking part assumes that you are willing to assume those risks.

3. I agree to participate in the one-day workshop under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix J: Five-Week Online Consent

An exploration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources as support for social workers

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – 5-WEEK GROUP ONLINE FOLLOWUP

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study before the approval of the 5-week online transcript

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded.
3. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
4. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix K: Individual Interview Consent

An exploration of embodied awareness and body-mind resources as support for social workers

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study before the approval of the individual interview transcript.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded.
3. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
4. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix L: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic questions – please circle the answer that best fits you

Age range:

20-26

27-34

35-42

43-49

50-57

58-64

65 or over

How do you identify:

Non-binary

Female

Male

Prefer not to say

Other (please specify)

Ethnicity:

Māori

Samoan

Cook Islands Māori

Tongan

Niuean

Chinese

Indian

New Zealand European / pakeha

Other (please specify)

Year of experience in social work:

Less than 1 year

1-5 years

6-10 years

11-15 years

16-20 years

More than 20 years

Practice Setting:

Kaupapa Māori service

Healthcare

Social worker in schools

Mental health & substance misuse

Corrections

Child & Family Services

Private practice

Not-for-profit

Population you work with?

Adolescents/children

Whanau/family

Adults

Elderly

Individuals with disabilities

LGBTQ+ community

Refugees/immigrants

Other (please specify)

Appendix M: Morning Pre Self-Reflection

Embodied awareness pre course self-reflection

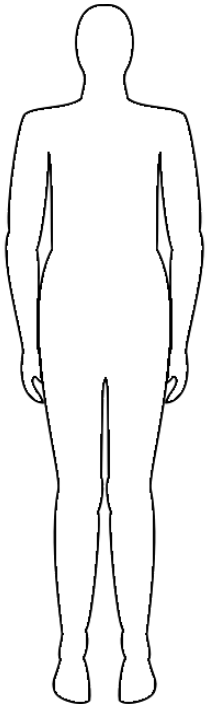
Morning session

With the given embodiment definition, can you please complete the following questions:

In this research, embodiment refers to the connection between the body and mind: each influences the other. It is about being consciously aware of how internal emotions, thoughts and sensations, as well as external experiences and interactions, are perceived through our body. This awareness is a practice of tuning into our body to understand how we respond to life and to determine how we can best support ourselves through action.

1. **Setting an intention:** What would you like to gain from attending the workshop today?

2. On the body below, using any of the crayons/felt tips/pens can you colour and/or draw, and/or use descriptive words to share your current personal experience of embodiment



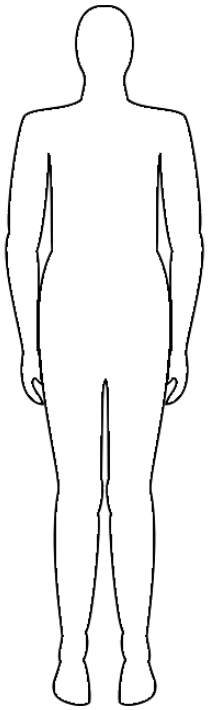
Appendix N: Morning Post Self-Reflection

Morning post course self-reflection

1. Was your intention met today? Did it change or evolve? Please explain.

2. How might embodied awareness support you in your work?

3. On the body below, using any of the crayons/felt tips/pens, can you colour, draw, and/or use descriptive words to share your current experience of embodied awareness



Appendix O: Morning Workshop Questionnaire

Questionnaire for workshop development

Morning Session (Embodied Awareness)

1. To what extent do you feel the workshop increased your understanding of embodied awareness?

0 None 1 Minimal 2 Moderate 3 Strong 4 Fully

2. Were the experiential exercises helpful in deepening your experience of embodied awareness?

0 None 1 Minimal 2 Moderate 3 Strong 4 Fully

3. Were there any practices that you found most beneficial in deepening your embodied awareness:

4. Was there enough guidance and understanding for practising the experiential exercises?

5. Was there enough time to explore the practices?

6. Please share any suggestions for improving the morning session

Appendix P: Afternoon Workshop Development Questionnaire

Questionnaire for workshop development

Afternoon Session (body-mind resources)

1. How confident do you feel in using the body-mind resources?

0 None 1 Minimal 2 Moderate 3 Strong 4 Fully

2. How likely will you use the body-mind resources at work?

0 Very Unlikely 1 Unlikely 2 Neutral 3 Likely 4 Very Likely

3. What might prevent you from using the body-mind resources?

4. Were the body-mind resources easy to understand and practice?

5. Were there any specific body-mind resources that you found most useful or applicable? (please explain)

6. Please share any suggestions for improving the afternoon session

Appendix Q: Phase Four Embodied Experiential Practices

Self-Touch and Tactile Exploration

Checking In: Find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions or thoughts that might be here. This is your reference point to notice any shifts or changes as you explore tactile sensations.

1. **Sit or stand in a way that feels stable.**
    - Close your eyes if it helps your focus, notice your contact with the floor, or chair.
2. **Bring attention to your hands**.
    - Notice your hands, do they feel warm or cold?
    - Rub your hands together slowly. Notice the feeling of friction, warmth, or movement.
    - Press your hands together. Does this cause a different sensation in your body compared to rubbing your hands slowly?
    - Explore how subtle changes in pressure or movement can change the sensations you experience. How are your body and mind responding?
3. **Explore Touch on Your Body**
    - If it feels ok, gently place your hands on your shoulders, arms, or legs.
    - Notice differences between lightly resting your hands versus applying more pressure or squeezing.
    - Observe how your body and mind respond. Are there any shifts in tension, relaxation, or alertness?
4. **Explore Body Awareness with Texture (have an object ready for this exercise)**
    - Pick up and hold the object. Feel the texture, weight, temperature.
    - Explore different ways of touching it; you might hold it lightly, squeeze, trace your finger around it, or roll it.
    - Notice how your body and mind respond to these subtle tactile experiences.
5. **Returning to Full Body Awareness**
    - Place the object down.
    - Notice the overall sensation in your body after this exploration.
6. **Reflect and Integrate:** If you like, you can write or draw reflections
    - How did focusing on tactile sensations affect your sense of presence in your body?
    - Were there differences in sensation when touching different parts of your body or objects? Did you notice any shifts in tension, comfort, or relaxation?

Derived from experiential exploration

Body Positioning

Checking in: Find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions or thoughts that might be here. This is your reference point for noticing changes as you move through the various shapes.

1. Curling Over

- Round your back, tuck your chin, and curl your body inward.
- Notice sensations in your spine, chest, and shoulders.
- Do you notice thoughts or mental states: do you feel protective, introspective, heavy, or something else? What is your experience of the room?
- Stay here for a few breaths, bringing awareness to your body and mind.

2. Straightening Up

- Slowly lengthen your spine, lift your chest, roll shoulders back slightly, and bring your head up.
- Notice changes in body sensations such as breath, energy, tension, or ease.
- Allow yourself to settle into a posture that is upright but comfortable, not rigid.
- Observe thoughts: do you feel more alert, expansive, or focused? What is your experience of the room? Does it feel different to the first position?

3. Bracing

- From your upright posture, gently add tension to either your shoulders, arms, jaw, or hands.
- Notice how bracing affects your body: is there engagement, or alertness? Do other parts of your body respond to this tension in a specific area?
- Observe your thoughts: are they more focused, protective, or activated?
- Keep the brace for a few breaths, noticing your experience**.**

4. Softening

- Slowly release the bracing, allowing shoulders, jaw, and chest to soften.
- Notice sensations of relaxation, openness, or ease.
- Observe your mind: are your thoughts calmer, spacious, or lighter?
- Stay in this softened state for a few breaths.

5. Reflect and Integrate: If you like, you can write or draw reflections

- How did your thoughts or emotions shift with curling, straightening, bracing, and softening?
- Did you notice patterns in how you habitually hold tension or ease?
- What awareness might you take into daily life about your posture and body awareness?
- Do different postures increase or decrease engagement with the external environment?

Derived from experiential exploration

Self in Relationship to Others

Checking in: Find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions or thoughts that might be here. This is your reference point for noticing changes as you move through this exploration.

1. Gently bring your attention to the person on your right. You don't need to look at them, just sense their presence and notice:
   - How does your body respond to the presence of this person?
   - Are there thoughts, body sensations just notice, don't get caught in them?
3. Now shift your attention to the person on your left. Again, just sense them, their presence, the space they occupy:
   - How does your body feel?
   - How is the mind responding?
   - Is there a difference in noticing the person on your left to your right?
4. Bring your awareness to both the person on your right and the person on your left at the same time:
   - How does your body feel when you experience both together?
   - Are there sensations or tensions here?
   - How does the mind respond?
5. Gradually expand your awareness to include everyone in the room. You don't need to look at anyone, just sense the presence of the group:
   - How does your body respond to sensing the group?
   - What's happening in the mind?
   - What might you notice about energy, space, or connection?
6. Bring your attention back to your own body in the chair. Feel the weight of your body, your breath, the contact with the chair and the floor:
   - Notice the sense of being here, in your body, aware of yourself and others in the room.
   - Observe any shifts in sensations, energy, or emotions since the beginning.
7. **Reflect and Integrate:** If you like, you can write or draw reflections,
   - What was your experience moving from self-awareness to neighbours to a full room?
   - How did noticing the presence of others affect your body or mind? Did this shift your embodied experience in any way? If so, how?

Derived from experiential exploration

Shared Humanity

Checking in: Find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions or thoughts that might be here. This is your reference point for noticing changes as you move through this exploration.

1. Bring your attention fully to your own body. Feel the weight of your body on the chair, your back against the chair, and the floor supporting your feet. Notice your breath and any sensations in your body. Observe any emotions or thoughts that arise without judgment.

2. Gently bring your attention to the person on your right. You don't need to look at them, just sense their presence.

- Silently acknowledge: Here is a human being, just as you are, navigating challenges and moments of difficulty.
- You do not need to take on their experiences, simply bring an awareness that life brings difficulties for everyone in different ways.
- Notice how your body responds and now notice how your mind responds to this awareness.

3. Shift your attention to the person on your left. Again, just sense them, their presence, the space they occupy.

- Silently recognise, this is another human being navigating life's challenges and joys, just as you are.
- Notice how your body responds and now notice how your mind responds to this awareness.

4. Bring your awareness to both neighbours at the same time.

- Silently acknowledge, here are two human beings navigating life's ups and downs, just as you are, without taking on their experiences, simply noticing this shared humanity.
- Notice how your body responds and now notice how your mind responds to this awareness.

5. Gradually expand your awareness to include everyone in the room.

- Silently acknowledge, everyone here navigates life's challenges and joys, just as you do. Here is this awareness of a shared humanity, it doesn't mean taking on anyone else's experiences, just noticing that we all navigate difficulties in our own lives in different ways.
- Notice how your body responds and now notice how your mind responds to this awareness.

6. Bring your attention back to your own body in the chair.

- Feel the weight of your body, your breath, the contact with the chair and floor.
- Notice the sense of being here — in your body, aware of yourself and the others in the room.
- Observe any shifts in sensations, energy, or emotions since the beginning.

7. **Reflect and Integrate:** If you like, you can write or draw reflections
    - What was your experience moving from neighbours to a full room?
    - How did noticing the shared humanity of others affect your body or mind?
    - Did this shift your embodied experience in any way? If so, how?

Derived from experiential exploration

Experience of Goodness

Checking in: Find a comfortable sitting position, take your attention to your breath, notice how your body feels inside and outside, and any emotions or thoughts that might be here. This is your reference point for noticing changes as you explore a sense of goodness.

1. Recall a memory, place, or experience that brings a smile to your face, something that offers ease, comfort, or a sense of goodness.
2. Allow this memory or place to come naturally; there is no right or wrong. Notice how your body responds as you connect with it.
3. Engage your senses to connect deeper into this memory or place of goodness.
    - **Smell:** Notice if any scents are connected to this experience.
    - **Touch/Feel:** What might you feel, sensations or textures in this memory
    - **Taste:** Are there any tastes that are connected to this experience?
    - **Hearing:** Notice the sounds related to this memory or place.
    - **Sight:** Visualise the colours, shapes, or images associated with it.
4. Notice how connecting with this sense of goodness affects your body.
    - Does your breath shift in any way?
    - Do certain parts of your body feel more open, lighter, or at ease?
    - What emotions or thoughts arise as you stay connected to this experience?
5. Stay with this sense of goodness for a few breaths.
    - Allow yourself to savour it, letting your body and mind rest in this feeling.
    - Notice how it feels to hold goodness within your embodied awareness.
6. Gradually bring your attention back to the present moment.
    - Feel your body resting on the chair, your feet on the ground, and your breath moving in and out.
    - Carry a thread of this goodness with you as you return to the room.
7. **Reflect and Integrate:** If you like, you can write or draw reflections
    - What was it like to bring up a memory or place of goodness?
    - How did engaging your senses shape the experience?
    - Did you notice any shifts in your body, emotions, or thoughts as you connected with this goodness?

This embodiment practice was adapted from: Miller (2015)