

The body: A phenomenological psychological perspective



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Introduction

The body has traditionally been treated as a biological object in psychology. However, some psychologists believe there is more to our bodies than that as they recognise that it is through the body that we relate to other people and the world about us. This free course, *The body: a phenomenological psychological perspective*, explores one particular theoretical perspective on embodiment: the phenomenological psychological perspective. This is an approach to psychology that acknowledges the social nature of embodiment, placing embodied experience centre stage in all psychological understanding.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of level 3 study in [Psychology](#).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of fundamental aspects of the theory and methodology underpinning phenomenological psychology
- critique simplistic mind–body, individual–social and agency–structure dualisms and appreciate how the body, self and society are interconnected
- describe how phenomenological psychologists conceptualise the body.

1 Embodiment

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage – he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body.

(Nietzsche, 1961 [1883], p. 62)

At first glance you might be curious about why we're including a course on bodies, or rather *embodiment* – the process or state of living in a body – in relation to social psychology. The body has generally been treated as a biological object in psychology, crucially important with regard to brain physiology or human development but not something that has been considered a key topic in social psychology. However, when you recognise that it is through the body that we relate to other people and the world about us, then perhaps it does make sense. Our body is the vehicle for communicating with others and for carrying out our everyday lives. It is impossible to separate our bodies from who we are and what we do in the social world. At all levels – individual, relational and cultural – we can see that something as apparently 'personal' and 'natural' as the body is also intensely 'social'.

In [Section 2](#) of this course we will consider connections between an individual's body, personal identity and social world. Here we intend to pick up on the dualisms between mind and body. In particular, we will show how the body has been thought of as an object separate from the mind, and how this dualism has led to a similar separation, until relatively recently at least, in psychology. In this section, you will once again find yourself encouraged to challenge approaches that present the world in terms of simplistic binaries (mind–body, individual–social, agency–structure). [Section 3](#) turns the spotlight on the phenomenological perspective. Many of the examples in this course concern health and illness. This is for two reasons: first, because a very great deal of psychological and sociological work on the body has – perhaps unsurprisingly – focused on this topic; and second, because health and illness have formed the site of a considerable corpus of literature that is critical of the ways in which the body has been constructed/positioned as the passive recipient of legal and medical interventions (but more on this below). Throughout the course we encourage you to move beyond seeing the body simply as a biological object in which the mind resides and, instead, challenge you to think of the ways in which this mind-body dualism may be overcome such that we might recognise the importance of bodies in our lived experience of the world.

After watching the following video clips, which will provide an introduction to the phenomenological perspective, work through the rest of the course to look at how this comes to be applied to a substantive topic: embodiment. This course therefore provides students with an accessible introduction to phenomenological psychology and its application to understanding embodiment.

Watch the following video 'The Phenomenological Perspective Part 1'.

Video content is not available in this format.

[The Phenomenological Perspective Part 1](#)

Now watch 'The Phenomenological Perspective Part 2'.

Video content is not available in this format.
[The Phenomenological Perspective Part 2](#)

2 Identity and the body

In this section of the course you will look at the idea of a body–mind–social split in relation to the theme of identity and the body. You will then use the case study of pop singer Michael Jackson to explore the ideas of the body as an ‘identity project’.

2.1 Resisting a body–mind–social split

To what extent are you your body? The seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes saw human subjective experience (including rationality, thought and spirituality) as separate and fundamentally different from the objective world of matter, that of our bodies and the physical universe. This idea of a fundamental divide between mind and matter (as two different kinds of ‘stuff’) set the stage for centuries of debate on what came to be known as *Cartesian dualism*. Critics of this way of understanding people point to the way that Western culture has soaked up this mind-body dualism and tends unknowingly to reproduce it.

Psychology, too, has not been free from dualist views and practices. Much of the last fifty years of psychology has been taken up with questions of the ‘mind’ and, in the process, the body has often been entirely ignored. Furthermore, where the body has appeared, although the mind-body dualism has disappeared, the psychological and social complexity of the body has also invariably been lost, as biologically-orientated psychologists have tended to reduce psychology to biology (most notably to the brain). That is, they adopt a *monist* position, where there is only one kind of ‘stuff’ – which, in this case, is physical biological stuff. Indeed, in recent years, there has been a strong focus on the genetic basis of human behaviour: what Joseph Schwartz (1997) rather scathingly referred to as a new ‘genetic fundamentalism’.

Many contemporary social psychologists would be critical of any *reductionist* account in which a person is ‘reduced’ simply to their body or biology or, alternatively, to their mind. Instead, they argue that people need to be viewed in a way that recognises the biological, the psychological *and* the social. From this point of view, mind-body dualism and simple physical reductionism emerge as both simplistic and unhelpful.

The sense of personhood we possess is at least partly based on the feel we have of our own bodies, as much as in the symbols which define our unique social identity ... if the body is not the person, then what is the person? The body image and self-image we develop is based on the sense of being embodied and the way in which this experience is mediated by culture.

(Burkitt, 1999, p. 147)

Although bodily experience is rooted in biology, Robert Connell (1987, p. 84) argues it is also imbued with the social world – a ‘life-history-in-society’. So, for instance, bodily differences between men and women, Connell says, are not just a physical given. Rather, as men and women, we are continually working with, and transforming, our natural, biological selves, intentionally and unintentionally. There is a personal dimension to this process. For example, we bring to it our own particular motivations and understandings. But larger societal influences – relationships, ideology, language, social structures – also play a part. However, there is disagreement about the extent to which our body and our

biology shape who we are. If our sense of self or identity comes from our body, to what extent can we choose our identities by changing our bodies? And furthermore, what role does society play in shaping both our bodies and our identities? These questions of individual-social and agency-structure dualisms form the basis of the next sub-section in which we consider the notion of the body as an 'identity project'.

2.2 Body as 'identity project'

In Western culture, television 'makeover' shows in which individuals opt for plastic surgery or are given advice on clothes, makeup, diet and exercise have gained considerable popular appeal. It seems that large numbers of people are buying into the idea that lives can be radically changed through such makeovers. Supposedly unattractive people who are unhappy with their lives are transformed into supposedly more beautiful and happy people leading satisfying lives. In reality, however, does reshaping or redefining the body radically change people's identity and experience of the world?

Box 1 Michael Jackson's body project

The pop singer Michael Jackson was an interesting example of someone who has focused on changing his body. In his autobiography *Moonwalk* (Jackson, 1988), he tells how he was deeply unhappy with his appearance, in particular his wide nose and dark skin. Although he denies he has deliberately lightened his skin and had all the surgery attributed to him, his body has radically altered. Jackson has turned his body into an active project, seemingly designed to blur his identity in terms of sex, race/ethnicity and age. Increasingly, medical and technological advances offer the means for more extreme reconstructions of the body. Jackson's apparently personal body project is both socially rooted and produces social effects. His choice, to become white skinned and narrow nosed, is not, therefore, only due to personal eccentricity, but is linked with the racialised power relations current in Western societies.

The fact that we can 'do' things with our body and present or display ourselves in different ways suggests that our identity is not entirely fixed or determined by our bodies. In the West, at least, people can make a conscious decision to change their bodies through surgery, dieting, drugs, exercise and the clothes they wear. As people change their bodies in these ways, you could say that they also change how they feel about themselves and their roles in society, and how they're perceived by others (all of which are aspects of identity). In Western societies, people appear to have some measure of freedom or opportunity to choose an identity:

Questions of identity, individual and collective, confront us at every turn ... We are interpellated and interrogated by a multiplicity of voices to consider and reconsider our identities. How we think of ourselves ... is up for grabs, open to negotiation, subject to choice to an unprecedented extent.

(Roseneil and Seymour, 1999, p. 1)

The sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) has noted how people 'use' their bodies – for example, through fashion and exercise – to help them pursue particular ways of life or lifestyles. Here, the body becomes part of an ongoing 'identity project'. Our body is both

something we are and something we have. It becomes the means of expressing our individuality and aspiration as well as our group affiliations. By focusing on our bodies and working on them for public displays, we turn ourselves into our own 'project' (Nettleton and Watson, 1998, p. 1).

An example of this process is the current Western preoccupation with constructing 'healthy bodies'. Westerners spend billions every year on gym or health club memberships, on over-the-counter medications, health supplements and on dieting manuals. Chris Shilling (1997) points out the contradictions here:

At a time when our health is threatened increasingly by *global* dangers, we are exhorted to take *individual* responsibility for our bodies by engaging in self-care regimes. These regimes promote an image of the body as an island of security in a global system characterized by multiple risks. Furthermore, they are not simply about preventing disease, but are concerned with making us feel good about how our bodies appear to ourselves and to others.

(Shilling, 1997, p. 70)

Body projects can be seen as a way for individuals to express themselves, to feel good and to gain some control over their lives. For instance, people may focus on their bodies in a more sustained way when they suddenly become ill or infirm. Body projects can also be a way to challenge accepted societal ideas about what 'normal' or 'natural' bodies should look like. In this respect, individuals celebrate their difference and create alternative identities through a range of body modification activities such as tattooing, piercing and bodybuilding (Holland, 2004). As one woman body-builder puts it: 'When I look in the mirror I see somebody who's finding herself, who has said once and for all it doesn't really matter what role society said I should play' (Rosen, 1983, quoted in Shilling, 1997, p. 71).

The speaker in the quotation above seems to believe she is making a 'free choice' and can resist societal pressures to conform to certain norms. However, is this really the case? To what extent are body projects expressions of individual preference? What of the powerful cultural influences all around us: for example, the fashion presented to us on the high street or the messages we get from the media and advertising industries?

Although most social psychologists would probably agree that bodies, identity and the social world mutually shape each other, they disagree over the respective weight of these factors. Phenomenological psychologists place the emphasis on our lived experience of embodiment, arguing that because we have the capacity to reflect on our choices, we have some agency to make decisions about who we want to be. Discursive psychologists, however, argue that body projects reflect the pervasive influence of society. They are social practices constrained by the ideals, meanings and identities available in culture. Our bodies are discursive in the sense that they both reflect and express cultural ideals and ideologies. 'Free' choices are not as free as they may seem. For instance, in the 1950s, Marilyn Monroe's curvaceous figure was considered the embodiment of femininity in Western culture. Nowadays, women's bodies are subject to the 'tyranny of slenderness' (Chernin, 1983) in which a youthful, athletic and slender body is equated with beauty and happiness (Bordo, 1993).

Feminist philosophers have been particularly concerned with these issues and have made some of the most important contributions to these debates. This is because, at least in part, where bodies have appeared in psychological and socio-political analyses, these bodies have generally been male – invariably presented through the cover of some notion

of universal humanity in which the feminine disappears. The aim for many feminist theorists is to focus on the female body, working with it centrally, in such a way that women's experiences, rather than those of men, are explored and realised.

Mind-body dualism, outlined above, crucially has also been associated with other binaries, such as reason and passion, self and other, psychology and physiology. And with all these binaries one element is always subordinate to the other (Grosz, 1994). One association critical to feminist thinking is the correlation of mind with man and body with woman, where man is associated with the rational and knowable intellect and woman the irrational and unknowable body. Feminist philosophers such as Elizabeth Grosz have, as a response, sought to articulate a *corporeal feminism*, where the female body is placed centre stage and recognised in all its difference as something both material and social. Grosz draws on a number of different philosophical influences to theorise a notion of sexed embodiment using as a model the Möbius strip – an inverted three-dimensional figure of eight (see Figure 1). With the Möbius strip, like the body, according to Grosz, there is no clear distinction between inside and outside and, instead, a unity in which there is an inflection of mind into body and body into mind.



Figure 1 The Möbius strip

The body is a most peculiar 'thing', for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. Thus it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects. Human bodies, indeed all animate bodies, stretch and extend the notion of physicality that dominates the physical sciences, for animate bodies are objects necessarily different from other objects; they are materialities that are uncontainable in physicalist terms alone. If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency.

(Grosz, 1994, p. xi)

Most social psychological theorists would probably agree with the need to resist the mind–body, individual–social and agency–structure dualisms discussed in this section. However, there are differences in the ways that various social psychological perspectives conceptualise the interpenetration of the body, psychology and the social world. Specifically, the views of discursive and phenomenological psychologists on the manner and mechanisms of this merging can be contrasted. This is the focus for the rest of this course.

2.3 Summary of Section 2

Mind–body dualism has been a pervasive problem since the seventeenth century. One consequence of this dualism is the way in which bodies have been treated in psychology. They have generally either been ignored or reduced to biology. However, our bodies are much more than simply biology; at the very least, they are the interface between the individual and the social world or, more radically, they are inherently social objects. There is growing recognition of the interaction between our bodies, our psychology and the society in which we live. Here, structure and agency, the individual and society are seen to interpenetrate and, as a result, there is now recognition that embodiment is a social psychological issue and not something that should be left to biology alone.

You will now go on to look at phenomenological accounts.

3 Phenomenological accounts

In this section of the course, you will look at how phenomenologists focus on the idea of a 'lived experience'. You will then go on to look at this in relation to multiple sclerosis (MS).

3.1 Lived experience

Phenomenologists seek to describe people's lived experience, meanings and consciousness (i.e. the way we perceive, think and feel). They focus on how bodies are experienced at a subjective and intersubjective (relational) level. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), an early existential philosopher, insisted on the primacy of the body, and resisted mind–body dualism, arguing for the unity of mind (or soul) and body:

I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body. The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman. Your little intelligence, my brother, which you call 'spirit', is also an instrument of your body, a little instrument and toy of your great intelligence. You say T and you are proud of this word. But greater than this – although you will not believe in it – is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say T but performs 'I'.

(Nietzsche, 1961 [1883], pp. 61–2)

There are many manifestations of the body and it is because of this that we often think dualistically – separating body and mind – when in reality all we have is an intelligent body: body and mind are one and the same, not simply biology; we are our body and, through this, perform selfhood. This bodily experience is often pre-reflective – we experience and use our bodies before we think. And it is through using our bodies in our everyday activities that we perceive the world, relate to others and, in the process, learn about ourselves.

'The body is the vehicle of being in the world', says the phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962 [1945], p. 82). It is integral to our perceptions and to any understanding of human experience. It is the 'horizon latent in all our experience ... and anterior to every determining thought' (p. 92). Our body connects us to the world and – if we tap into our bodily experience – offers us the way to understand that world (including ourselves and others).

Two key ideas are highlighted in phenomenological accounts of the body:

- bodily consciousness
- a body–world interconnection.

These are discussed in turn before being considered in relation to some phenomenological research findings on the experience of living with multiple sclerosis (MS).

3.2 Consciousness of the body

Phenomenological theorists distinguish between the *subjective body* (as lived and experienced) and the *objective body* (as observed and scientifically investigated). These

are not two different bodies as such (phenomenologists pride themselves on overcoming dualisms!); rather they are different facets of our experience and consciousness.

The *body-subject*, or subjective body, is the body-as-it-is-lived. I do not simply possess a body; I am my body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 [1945]). My lived body is an embodied consciousness which fluidly and pre-reflectively engages the world. So it is that, before I can even think about it, I find myself in the world of my daily activities, projects and relationships: these are encountered as a context for the body's possible action. Food is to be eaten, a child is to be played with, a pen is to be applied to paper, and a lover is to be touched. As we engage in our daily activities, we tend not to be conscious of our bodies and we take them for granted. This is the body that is 'passed-by-in-silence' (Sartre, 1969 [1943]).

In contrast, the *body-object*, or objective body, is the body that is known by others. We observe and objectify others' bodies. 'We can peer at, leer at, admire, criticise, probe, investigate and dissect another's body' (Finlay, 2006a, p. 21). In so doing, we become aware of it as a contained, material, physical thing. We also do this to our own bodies. We do this when we become ill and can no longer take our bodies for granted, since they no longer do what we expect them to do. Then we might find ourselves focusing on specific parts of our body: an aching head, an itchy scar or a tiny cut on our writing finger. As S. Kay Toombs (1993, pp. 70–1) explains: 'Illness engenders a shift of attention. The disruption of lived body causes the patient explicitly to attend to his or her body as body ... The body is thus transformed from lived body to object-body.'

Having distinguished between the subject-body and object-body, Jean-Paul Sartre draws our attention to a third ontological (i.e. to do with our sense of being) dimension of the body: bodily self-consciousness. Here, the body is constituted through others. This body comes into being when the person becomes aware of the regard of another. 'I exist for myself as a body known by the Other', as Sartre puts it (1969 [1943], p. 351).

As we become aware of the regard of another we begin to exist in a new bodily self-conscious way:

When the body is the object of someone else's gaze, it may lose its naturalness ... or instead it may happen that I grow enhanced in its modality of being. For example, under the critical gaze the body may turn awkward, the motions appear clumsy, while under the admiring gaze the body surpasses its usual grace and its normal abilities.

(van Manen, 1990, p. 104)

Here, Max van Manen is explaining how the objectification of the body results in a disruption of the unity of the pre-reflectively lived body. Our body is experienced as an object somehow separate from the self. At the same time, we are living our body in a more self-conscious way. It is through this kind of interactive relational process, Sartre says, that we gain an awareness and understanding of both ourselves and others.

Box 2 Pause for reflection

Are you aware of times when you feel your body is 'objectified'? How does this happen and what is the effect? Think also of different ways the bodies of men and women might be objectified.

3.3 A body–world interconnection

Our consciousness of our bodies remains fundamentally tied up with our everyday embodied activities and relationships. The body thus represents both our particular view of the world as well as our *Being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 1962 [1927]). Martin Heidegger (2001) draws a distinction between *corporeal things* and the *body*, questioning whether the sense of embodied selfhood that we all possess needs to coincide with the limits of a corporeal body. The corporeal thing stops and is bounded by the skin whereas our sense of embodied selfhood – our *bodiliness* – may extend beyond this ‘bodily limit’. Heidegger uses the example of pointing, where our sense of *bodiliness* does not stop at the fingertip but, instead, stretches out beyond the skin to the object captured in our gaze. Perception, action and interaction are interconnected as body and world merge, at least to a degree. Our bodies, phenomenologists argue, are not just contained by what is inside our skin; they reach out into the world.

Take, for instance, the experience of a footballer who has just kicked a long ball towards the net. As the ball swerves too far in one direction, the footballer leans in the other direction attempting to pull the ball back. The footballer's body and ball (world) are still in relationship. As another example, consider what happens when our arm (‘body’) reaches for a cup (the ‘world’) to have a drink: for a brief while we embrace the cup as part of our body. Or consider a young gang member getting the gang's symbol tattooed on his or her arm. Both the tattoo and the gang member's reason for getting tattooed tie their body to their social world. In these ways, through our actions, our bodies – our selves – are seen as being intertwined with the world: we are in the world and the world is in us. As mentioned earlier, Grosz (1994) – drawing on Merleau-Ponty – uses the concept of the Möbius strip to capture this interaction between body and world.

In his last incomplete and tantalisingly mysterious work *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1968 [1964]) offers a radical reworking of the nature of embodiment. He shifted his focus from embodied consciousness to a notion of intercorporeal being – what he termed *flesh*. Here, he says, we are connected to others and the world in a *double belongingness*. The example used by Merleau-Ponty is touching – for instance, our right hand with our left – and the way in which this is always reversible: when one hand is touching (that which is perceiving) then the other is touched (the object of perception) and vice versa. Neither is reducible to the other and both are of the same order of meaning. He draws on the metaphor of ‘chiasm’ – from *chiasma*, the crossing over of two structures – to show that the world and body are within one another, inextricably intertwined: ‘the world is at the heart of our flesh ... once a body-world relationship is recognized, there is a ramification of my body and a ramification of the world and a correspondence between its inside and my outside and my inside and its outside’ (1968 [1964], p. 136). Our embodied subjectivity is never located purely in either being touched or in the act of touching, but in the dynamic intertwining of these two aspects, or where the two lines of a chiasm intersect with one another. Grosz (1994) built on this idea – in her case using the Möbius strip as a visual analogue – to develop a corporeal feminism where the relationship between body and world (individual and social) is fully realised.



Figure 2 Tattooing: the intertwining of body and world

The idea of some kind of merging of body and world is counterintuitive and is not an easy one to grasp. The feminist-phenomenologist Iris Young offers the following account of the lived experience of being pregnant, which further elaborates this notion of an intertwining of body and world:

[Pregnancy] challenges the integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body ... [But also] the boundaries of my body are in flux. In pregnancy, I lose the sense of where my body ends and the world begins. The style of bodily existence, such as gait, stance, sense of room I inhabit, which have formed in me as bodily habits, continue to define my body subjectivity. My body itself changes its shape and balance, however, coming into tension with those habits ... I move as though I can squeeze around chairs ... as I could have seven months before, only to find my way blocked by my own body sticking out in front of me, in a way not me ... As I lean over in my chair to tie my shoe, I am surprised by the graze of this hard belly on my thigh. I do not anticipate this touching of my body on itself, for my habits retain the old sense of my boundaries ... The belly is other, since I did not expect it there, but since I feel the touch upon it, it is me.

(Young, 1985, pp. 30–1)

3.4 Experiencing multiple sclerosis: a case illustration

The idea of a body–world interconnection and distinction between objective and subjective body is explored further in the following extract, drawn from some phenomenological research Linda Finlay conducted on one person’s (Ann’s) lived bodily experience of having MS (Finlay, 2003). In the extract, the focus is on the process by which Finlay came to analyse what Ann’s body feels like subjectively. Her story – obtained via an in-depth interview (see Box 3 below) – emphasises the way her sense of embodied experience is both complex and ambivalent. Her body, experienced as both subject and object, is engaged in trying to operate in, and cope with, the world.

Box 3 An existential phenomenological method

In this research I used an *existent-phenomenological* method (Giorgi, 1985; Valle and Halling, 1989) aiming to describe the lifeworld. I assumed Ann’s expressions reflected her perceptions of her lifeworld. Throughout both the interview and analysis I tried to set aside previous assumptions and understandings I had of both Ann and MS. I strove to adopt an attitude of openness to her story as it unfolded.

I interviewed Ann, using an in-depth relatively non-directive approach, on two consecutive days. The interview began with a general question: ‘What is living with multiple sclerosis like for you?’. Thereafter, I prompted her to offer concrete examples: ‘Can you describe an example of an actual situation when that happened?’.

To analyse the interview, I first created a narrative drawing extensively on her verbatim quotes. I then undertook repeated, systematic readings of the transcript using the analytical method suggested by Wertz (1983). I focused specifically on seven ‘existential dimensions’ of the lifeworld: Ann’s sense of embodiment; selfhood; sociality; temporality; spatiality; project; and discourse. These interlinked ‘fractions’ (Ashworth, 2003) act like spectacles through which to view the data. Taking embodiment for example, I’d ask: ‘What is Ann’s subjective sense of her body? How does she experience and move in her body? Does she feel big, small, clumsy, happy tense, comfortable, disconnected, in pain?...’

(Finlay, 2006b, p. 190)

Activity 1

As you read the description of research findings in Extract 1 and the method used, note the way theoretical ideas about body–subject, body–object and the body–world ‘intertwining’ are applied. Reflect on the advantages of this method of researching the body, in terms of the findings as well as the theory and methodology. What do you think psychologists from other theoretical perspectives might say about the limitations of this type of research?

Read [Extract 1](#).

This brief extract from the analysis of Ann's story suggests that her sense of self-body unity, her daily life projects and her relationships with others (especially her children) are being threatened. Yet as her life is derailed, she is also seeking to reclaim it by attempting to connect with her alienated body. The split between the objective and subjective body is clear – though complicated through the way Ann seeks to reflexively reintegrate the subjective and objective in her morning rituals – and important here for Ann's own understanding of her illness and also the treatment of such conditions by health-care professionals. Importantly, Ann's illness is encountered in the context of her family and other relationships – that is, the intersubjective and social realms of her life. Her experience of having/being a body with MS cannot be separated from her world. 'Just as the multiple sclerosis is "in" her, it is "in" her embodied intersubjective relations with others' (Finlay, 2003, p. 172). As Merleau-Ponty has famously explained: 'There is no inner man [*sic*] ... Man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself' (1962 [1945], p. xi).

3.5 Summary of Section 3

Phenomenologists focus on how bodies are experienced at a subjective and intersubjective (relational) level. Phenomenological psychologists seek to transcend the mind-body dualism, arguing that all we have is an intelligent body, with the body and mind one and the same: not simply biology; we are our body and, through this, perform selfhood. This bodily experience is also often pre-reflective and extra-discursive – we experience and use our body before we think about it. And it is through using our bodies in our everyday activities that we perceive the world, relate to others and, in the process, learn about ourselves. More radically still, some phenomenologists argue on an ontological level that there can be no distinction between minds and bodies or subjects and objects, since the two are one and the same thing – inextricably intertwined as the flesh of the world.

Conclusion

This free course, *The body: a phenomenological psychological perspective*, provided an introduction to studying sociology. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

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Acknowledgements

The material below is contained in *Social Psychology Matters*, Wendy Holloway, Helen Lucey and Anne Phoenix, published in association with Open University Press, 2007. The content acknowledged below is Proprietary (see [terms and conditions](#)) and is used under [creative commons licence](#).

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Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources:

Extract 1 (edited): Finlay, L. (2003) 'The intertwining of body, self and world: a phenomenological study of living with recently-diagnosed multiple sclerosis', *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, vol. 34, no. 2, Brill NV.

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