

## Potential Challenges

Body maps allow participants to share their unique story and brings visibility to the issue of undocumented status. Yet several aspects of this technique as well the participants, may influence the engagement process. For instance, body mapping is useful for overcoming language barriers, yet varying levels of literacy may pose constraints when doing written exercises or when handling unfamiliar art materials. Varying levels of physical or artistic ability may also require modification of mapping activities to make them more accessible. For instance, clip art or magazine cut-outs can be used instead of drawing, or the facilitator can do the physical components of the exercises if the participant is unable to or feels uncomfortable. Using print media on the other hand, also raises concerns about inclusiveness, given that it is riddled with a culture of consumerism and often reinforces gender and cultural norms.

For facilitators, engaging in a such a personal and intimate technique such as body mapping also poses some challenges. We must constantly gauge the level of comfort/discomfort when doing mapping exercise and modify accordingly. Furthermore, we are also emotionally impacted and transformed by the co-constructed process of meaning making, often thinking about symbols/images in other contexts. Finally, as researchers, we are confronted with the challenge of how to move from a descriptive to analytical interpretation of body maps.

## Body Maps as Tools for KTE

One significant advantage of using body maps for dissemination is that they are clear illustrations of data and are more accessible to the general public. Body maps also give participants a sense of authorship over research products, and are made personal given that they are like totems, requiring an oral or written description of its meaning(s). Body maps allow the public to make connections with the emotions and life circumstances of participants, and most importantly, it gives voice and visibility to the participants themselves. Some potential uses of body maps include: art exhibits, short films, publications, or other creative mediums (e.g. social media).

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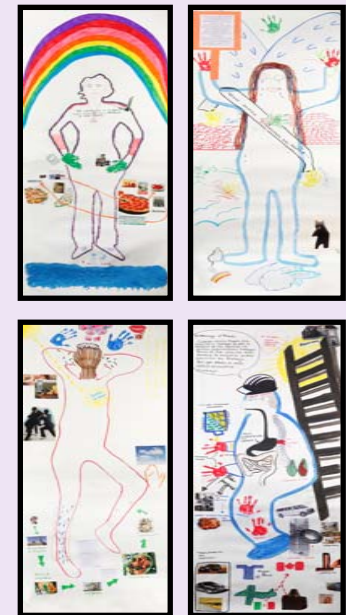
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More information on this and related projects can be obtained at [www.migrationhealth.ca](http://www.migrationhealth.ca)

# BODY MAPPING AS A TOOL FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

## A Short Guide



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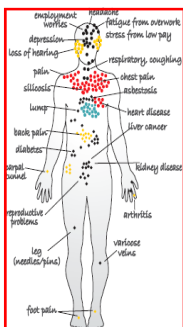
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# Body Mapping in Qualitative Research

## Background

Body mapping has traditionally been used in art therapy or as a consultation method among labour unions to explore occupational hazards and perceived health status. The technique is most often carried out in groups, where participants or workers share and document their



Example of the type of body map generated by labour unions (Barefoot Research)

knowledge or lived experiences using mapping methods. In our qualitative study with undocumented Latin American migrant workers in the GTA, we have created and used a one-to-one body mapping technique in order to explore the intersection of health, migration, gender, and contextual factors that influence the health and well-being of undocumented work-

ers. As a technique, body mapping has proven to be a reflexive approach to knowledge production, and as products, body maps offer a creative approach for knowledge translation and exchange. Body maps have the potential to illustrate the complexity of undocumented migrants' lives, including social, spiritual, cultural, economic, political, and transnational contexts. More importantly, body maps are ethically appropriate given that they maintain anonymity by not exposing the individual, but rather their hidden trajectories through art. Unlike other applications of body mapping which aim to provide therapy and/or identify solutions to problems, the purpose of using mapping in our study is to engage participants in a critical examination of the meaning of their unique experiences.



Example of the types of body maps generated by an HIV/AIDS therapy group (REPISS)

## Doing Body Mapping

Our one-to-one body mapping technique has been adapted from a group therapy model used with people living with HIV/AIDS in Africa. Specifically, our study has employed three two-hour interviews with undocumented workers,



Mock body map created by our research team to prepare for sessions with participants.

where the first hour consists of a semi-structured interview, and the second hour uses our body mapping technique. In total, participants engage in three body mapping sessions, where the interviewer acts as the session facilitator using imaginative activities which aim to complement interview themes. The body maps that are generated are participants' life-size body images representing their embodied migration histories, occupational contexts, resilience and agency, gender, and other factors shaping the health of this hidden population.

## The Role of the Facilitator

Unlike other applications of body mapping where trained artists guide the body mapping process, in our research, the interviewer acts as the facilitator by leading participants through a series of mapping exercise(s). The facilitator also assists with drawing, cutting, or brainstorming about potential symbols to use. Thus, body mapping is a co-constructed process both in relation to meaning making and visual representation. Given that body maps and mapping sessions are in and of themselves research data, the facilitator also keeps detailed notes of key images/symbols that emerge along with any descriptions about their meaning. Sessions are also recorded and transcripts are subsequently generated to be used as data for analysis.

## Preparation

- Private room with good workspace
- Large sheet of paper (8ftx4ft)
- Art supplies (e.g. markers, paint, brushes, pencil crayons, glue, scissors, etc)
- Clip art or magazines
- Voice recorder

*The mapping activities will depend on the nature of your research. Below are the ones which guided our research.*

## Body Mapping Activities

### Session #1: The Migration Experience

Introduction to body mapping

Exercise 1: Body tracing

Exercise 2: Migration journey

Exercise 3: Personal symbol and slogan

### Session #2: The Life of an Undocumented Worker

Exercise 1: Marks on/under the skin

Exercise 2: Self-portrait

Exercise 3: Message to others

### Session #3: Resilience and Coping

Exercise 1: Body scanning for strength

Exercise 2: Support structures

Exercise 3: Drawing the future

Exercise 4: Participant's narrative

Decorating/finishing off

## Ethical Considerations

Before doing body mapping, verbal or written consent must be obtained which outlines the rights of the participant, how the body maps will be used (i.e. exhibits, websites, etc), and how confidentiality will be maintained (i.e. pseudonyms, removal of personally identifying information, etc). Given the personal nature of body mapping, it is important to tell participants that it is up to them how much they want to reveal. Appropriate services/supports should also be made available if needed or requested.