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On The Cutting Edge?

Marking Gender, Embodiment and Knowledge.

Submitted to Trinity College Dublin, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Sociology.

Kay Inckle

February 2006

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university. It is entirely my own work, and I agree that the library may lend or copy the thesis upon request.

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Feb '06

Summary.

In this thesis I use creative methodologies - a "new writing" (Denzin, 2003: 118) strategy - to explore body marking practices ('self-injury' and body modification) in the context of gendered embodiment. The overarching question is framed in terms of whether sociological knowledge can provide a model of engaging with and understanding these body practices which avoids hierarchy, dualism and objectification. I aim to demonstrate that a feminist model of embodiment, which works through an ethics of both theoretical and methodological practice, as well as a relation to experience, can indeed facilitate this aim. Such a position engenders a radical shift in terms of normative research and representation practices and transforms the roles of the researcher and the reader, as well as the structures of evaluation and merit. It is precisely this refiguration of the norms of academic practice and its relationship to experience that connects with, and indeed emerges from, human embodiment.

Overall, my thesis explores and represents the ways in which a feminist position of embodiment can be effective as a sociological strategy, and in particular a strategy that is ethically salient and experientially grounded in both empirical and epistemological terms. From this position body marking is no longer a stigmatised or objectified spectacle of the other, but is a process that is social and subjective, symbolic and corporeal, gendered and transformative, and fundamentally embodied, not unlike the methodological strategies that I employ for its articulation.

Acknowledgements

Heartfelt thanks to my research participants - Ciara, Mary, René, Lucinda, Maeve and Elaine - for your courage, honesty and insight, and for trusting me with your journeys.

A big thank you to Andrew Finlay for undertaking my supervision and seeing this project to fruition.

Special thanks to Brid O'Farrel, fellow 'embodied sociologist' and constant source of love and support.

Deepest gratitude to Anne Byrne, for accompanying the other journey.

Finally, extra special love and thanks to Princess, precious being, who distracts me from pre-occupations of the mind and keeps my heart warm and smiling.

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Note on Terminology.

Most of the terminology which is applied to the bodily practices I discuss originates within problematic and contentious structures of knowledge and value. Such terminology fails to reflect the experience or the perspective of those described, and instead is located much more closely within the power, politics and values of those who occupy a position to define. Jane Kilby describes how there are,

> a profusion of officially recognised names for self harm including: 'deliberate self-injury', 'self-inflicted violence', 'self attack', 'self-cutting', 'deliberate non-fatal act', and 'symbolic wounding'. But many of these names are subject to dispute on the grounds that they fail to hear the voice of the self-cut skin [....] or that they represent a hostile response to it.
>
> (2001: 126)

The difficulty of articulating an alternative knowledge, experience and perspective of these experiences and the lack of linguistic means to do so, are not, I feel, incidental. There are political as well as representational issues in terms of the ways in which we name and describe experiences, particularly if making reference to 'others'. For these reasons the specific terminology adopted by myself and other writers in this area is very significant, and is clarified below.

Self-harm / Self-harming behaviour: I follow Babiker & Arnold's (1997) use of these terms to signify a very wide range of behaviours that have some kind of negative impact on physical or emotional well being. 'Self-harm' includes actions which are socially sanctioned such as drinking alcohol and smoking, as well as more pathologised actions such as non-safe IV drug use and 'eating disorders', as well as behaviour which more directly constitutes 'self-injury'. However, 'self-harm' is differentiated from 'self-injury' in that the 'damage' is indirect, and is not usually the primary motivation of the behaviour. Body modification is often cited as a succinct example of self-harming behaviour.

Para-suicide: Often confused with 'self-injury', this term is properly used to describe repeated but unsuccessful attempts to commit suicide, it is entirely different in motivation and action to behaviours that are considered as either 'self-harm' or 'self-injury', (Babiker & Arnold, 1997) and is entirely outside the remit of my work.

Self-injury / Self-mutilation: Babiker and Arnold (1997) use these terms interchangeably to describe actions which are both motivated by the desire for, and result in, physical damage. This includes behaviours such as self-cutting, burning, picking, scratching, rubbing substances such as bleach into the skin, as well as ingesting toxins and sharp objects.

Personally, I am uncomfortable with the use of the term 'self-mutilation' because of the negative, value-laden implications of 'mutilation'. Mutilation, which stems "from the Latin *mutilus*, ... has negative connotation[s] - to maim, cut off a limb, create a dysfunction or to make imperfect through excision" (Pitts, 1999: 293). As such, this term is often deliberately used by those who pathologise and stigmatise this form of bodily practice. However, I am not entirely comfortable with the term 'self-injury' either, and have used it out of descriptive necessity, rather than a category of choice. Because of my discomfort I place the term in inverted commas in order to continually disrupt an uncritical acceptance or reading of the term.

Body modification: This term is used to describe bodily practices which create a permanent alteration to the body. Common forms include tattooing and piercing, and less common but still quite widely practiced are scarification, branding, sculpting and amputation (Musafar, 1996; Pitts, 2003). Cosmetic surgery, is sometimes included under the heading 'body modification' and while I would certainly not dispute such a definition it is not something I have directly focused on in my research.

Body marking: Is a term I use to incorporate the bodily interventions that are normally described as either 'self-injury' or body modification. I use a single term in order to firstly, explore the links between embodied practices which are expressed through body alteration, and secondly, to critique the binaries of definition that are reiterated within normative terminology. Further, the term body marking is descriptive rather than evaluative, and continually challenges the assumptions and definitions which have formed the basis of many of the positions I critique. Nonetheless, it is important to note that when discussing different theoretical positions, quoting authors, or research participants, my use of terminology deliberately reflects their own. I do this for two reasons: firstly in order to represent their position as accurately as possible; secondly, using the preferred terminology of the author in the context of these definitions highlights the meanings and implications of such usage, and underscores the significant contrasts in perspective.

Introduction

It was my first day in a new job. The large residential project, where I would spend the next three years as a support worker, towered in front of me, daunting and unfamiliar. I entered the austere, grey, stone archway of the converted convent building[1] and stepped into the reception area. My first week was to be an induction and hand-over during which I would, for the most part, shadow Maggie[2] who I was replacing. Maggie was very popular in the project, not only with the people whom she directly key-worked, but also with the other residents and staff alike. Because of this her final days generated a lot of commotion, and I couldn't help feeling more on edge as a result. However, on this bright September morning, when I first set foot inside the building, an incident occurred which set in motion a whole process of reflection and learning, culminating in this PhD project.

As I hovered in the reception area, nervously waiting for Maggie to take me into the office, I was aware of two young women regarding me cautiously from the corner. When Maggie emerged from the office, the two rushed forward to greet her, bubbling with enthusiasm. Their attachment to her was very apparent, and Maggie equally enthusiastically responded to them. One of the two women was someone with whom I would work closely for the next year or so as she stabilised and then moved on from the project, but it was her friend who had such a profound impact on me. Maggie explained to the women that I was "the new staff" and was about to properly introduce us. However, before she could do so the second of the pair - who I will call Siobhan - rushed up to me exclaiming, "I'm so glad you'll be working here, you like pain too!"

I would like to describe myself as having responded in the most apt, cool and non-judgemental way, but to be honest I was both mortified and dumfounded by her

[1] At the time I worked there, there were suspicions that this building may once have been one of the Magdalene laundries.

[2] Not her real name.

words[3]. I felt exposed and embarrassed, not necessarily because I was making the same connections as Siobhan, but more so because in a public space she had traversed a boundary between what is defined as normal and what is pathological and associated me, like herself, with the latter. Siobhan was making direct reference to the fact that we both had multiple piercings visible, and that for her - through her relationship with pain - they were intrinsically connected to the ways in which she 'injured' herself[4]. She had also touched on what is for me a very personal issue, in that while I certainly do not enjoy pain, because of the nature of my disability my relationship with pain is very complicated, so that in order to function normatively I spend a lot of time both in pain and hurting myself.

At that time, and for a long while afterwards, I completely rejected the connections that Siobhan made between body modification and 'self-injury'. Indeed, because in that context the only available model for understanding 'self-injury' was the medicalised, psychiatric position[5], which defines body modification and 'self-injury' as forms of pathological body mutilation, I even more vehemently rejected any possible relationship between the two. Certainly I did not want to be identified as a 'self-mutilator', particularly in that kind of work environment where the boundaries between 'staff' and 'clients' are established on the basis of an assumed distinction and polarity of experiences[6]. However, as a feminist, I was also aware of

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[3] Mike Angrossino (1998) discusses some of the temptations and pitfalls of the ways in which we may wish to represent ourselves subsequent to an event we are describing, as well as the power inherent to the position of the author that makes this possible.

[4] 'Self-injury' was very common among the women I worked with in this particular project as well as in my previous job where I had worked in a 'care' facility for (female) teenagers.

[5] In the UK a social, harm-reduction model is increasingly available - although not within conventional medical practices around 'self-injury' (Babiker & Arnold, 1997). To date this has not really occurred in Ireland to the same extent, although the training workshops I have facilitated over the last couple of years have been based on this model, which is discussed in more depth in chapter five.

[6] It is interesting that while feminists have often described it as necessary to share the experiences of the women they are working with in order to be fully empathic, respectful and understanding of them (see chapter one), in contrast, in the social services sector up until very recently it was deemed as inappropriate for anyone to work with individuals with whom they shared common experiences.

the contradictions, as well as the issues of power and control that are enmeshed within medicalised diagnosis of gender and normalcy/pathology. And on occasion I couldn't refrain from making direct recourse to these issues, so that, for example, during one training session which was facilitated by a psychiatrist I probed her definition of 'self-injury' to the point where it became apparent that a woman who shaved her head would be considered a 'self-mutilator' but who shaved her legs would not. Indeed, normative feminine body practices are encouraged within psychiatric institutions as a means of demonstrating appropriate mental and emotional functioning (see chapter five). Further, that a psychiatrist, who apparently uncritically engaged with some 'damaging' (but culturally sanctioned) bodily practices such as wearing high heels, waxing her legs and plucking her eyebrows could define me, or someone else, as mad for not engaging with these practices or for adopting others such as tattooing and piercing, really was the final straw! Finally, on a more serious note, I worked with many women who had been in contact with psychiatric services at the same time as continuing to 'self-injure' in increasingly damaging ways, in one case for more than twenty years. Clearly, the medical model wasn't working[7]. From here on I was determined that there must be other possibilities for understanding the experience of body marking which avoided such deterministic, pathologizing and unhelpful responses.

Some time later, when the opportunity arose for me to give up my full time job and to work on a PhD via a scholarship, I jumped at the chance. It seemed the perfect means to focus on the issues that I had been thinking about for some time, enabling me to bring my experiences into the academic context and try and work them out. Further, I had some months prior to applying to work on my PhD, started my own therapy, and because of this it was becoming increasingly difficult for me to work in the 'support' environment. However, the experience of the various different therapies and healing practices with which I have engaged over the years has added

[7] The failure of medical interventions to constructively respond to 'self-injury' is noted by proponents of the harm reduction model (Babiker & Arnold, 1997) as well as survivors of the psychiatric system (Harrison, 1996; 1997; Pembroke, 1996; Strong, 2000).

a further dimension to my work here. Therapeutic practices necessitate opening up to a whole range of knowledge and experience that is closed out of normative paradigms. It is a process which fundamentally engages the embodiment of self, personal life history, feeling and emotion, and re-figures the cognitive processes by which we think and know. Experiential, feeling embodiment is pivotal to knowledge and understanding. Therapeutic ways of knowing and being contrast with the unemotional, disembodied and combative structures of academia and provide a means of engagement with embodied experience, which is crucial in moving away from diagnostic and pathologizing approaches to body marking. However, in the social sciences therapeutic practices are often only critically referenced and afforded a pathologised status (see, for example, Barbalet, 1998; Denzin, 1998; Furedi, 2004) despite having much to offer in this context (Craib, 1998; Ellis in Flemons & Green, 2002)[8]. Therapy not only challenges the ways in which we know ourselves but also the ways in which we interact with and 'understand' one another. These issues have become increasingly enmeshed within my work and have ethical and practical implications for understanding body marking in theoretical and methodological terms.

When I finally emigrated[9] from the residential sector into the academic environment the intellectual baggage that I brought with me - or at least that which I declared - was made up of three main strands: Firstly, the theoretical issues, largely framed in terms of a feminist critique of gender, bodily practices and medicalisation, and also as providing the initial political and ethical framework for my research practices; The second strand was made up of the experiential aspects of my relationship to body marking, both in terms of my own experiences as well as those of women who I had worked with and/or known; The final strand drew on my own personal therapeutic work and how this could be applied to understanding and engaging with body marking, in a non-judgemental person-centred position

[8] I discuss these issues in depth in a paper *Method in the Madness? A Reflection on Some Possibilities for Therapeutic Sociological Practices.*

[9] I use this word intentionally, the experience really was one of huge cultural contrast, and I discuss some of the impacts of this in chapter two.

which facilitated self-knowledge and transformation. Indeed this strand has also provided the basis for a series of training workshops I have facilitated for staff in the social/voluntary sector who are working with clients who 'self-injure'.

These three strands have twisted and turned over the last four years, and developed in many ways I had not, at the outset, anticipated. However, fundamentally, they have remained present, and are finally worked out through a theory, method and ethic of embodiment. This conceptualisation of embodiment also incorporates the complexity of lived, human experience and the means by which we represent and reflect upon it. Each of the three original strands is also present at a more direct level: The feminist perspective is captured within the theory of embodiment through which I ground my work in sociological discourse; The experiential strand is overtly present in the stories of the research participants, while the therapeutic strand is present within the ethics and aims of an embodied methodology which includes empathy, connection and transformation.

That said, it has by no means been a straightforward process to resolve these issues, or to come to understand them and their interconnections in this way. It was a long struggle before I finally reconciled what increasingly appeared as juxtaposed issues and experiences through the conceptualisation and understanding of embodiment. The thesis that follows documents this process in a way which, as much as possible, also reflects it. It enables the reader to experience the process of the culminating and reconciling of the various strands of knowledge and experience, rather than simply ingesting an account of it. In the remainder of this introduction I will provide a brief guided tour through the chapters in order to set out a preliminary map of my work. This map is intended to act more as a compass to aid the reader rather than to provide a detailed, explanatory travel-log to the journey ahead.

In summary then, my experiences have, in normative terms, straddled three distinct positions - that is the academic position, the practitioner's experience, and the

healing and therapeutic supports - where the knowledge forms are structured as discrete, exclusive and often contradictory to one another. These positions often appeared so contradictory and exclusive to one another that for some time I was unable to find any point of resolution between them myself, and certainly not within any of the literature or research I was reading. However, through experiencing and understanding embodiment I began to consider that this may be the very conceptualisation - in both lived and theoretical terms - through which I could reconcile my position. Embodiment also connects with the methodological ethics, issues and practices I had been developing, and which are addressed in chapter one.

I had, prior to commencing this project, strong allegiances to feminist methodological ethics and practices, which I intended to be central to my research. But, for some time, I struggled to understand how the methodological and theoretical dimensions of my work could be integrated, and indeed, they often appeared quite polarised. Analyses of body marking, both in structure and content, appeared at odds with the experience itself as well as the feminist ethics of engaging with it. Within both the mental health and academic genres I had searched for analysis and understanding of these practices that connected with my own knowledge and experiences. Yet as I read the literature I was - and continue to be - disturbed by how stigmatising, pathologizing and stereotyping of individuals it tends to be, and how it absents understanding and engagement with real people. I had much invested in this literature and yet found that it had little to offer in terms of effectively engaging with and representing the experiences it purports to explain.

Later on in my research, I discovered that I have not been alone in the search for meaning and explanation of my own experiences within academic literature, and also of being continually disappointed in this quest. For example, in the context of the "failed body", (Sparkes, 1997a: 116) Andrew Sparkes also found scholarly writing inadequate and unable to help him to understand and integrate his own

experiences (Sparkes, 2003)[10]. For me, this raises huge questions in terms of the purposes and methods of social research. If we cannot recognise, understand and explain our own experiences through these methodologies, then how can we ever claim such practices as a vehicle for accurately representing and understanding others? Is it not antithetical to the whole purpose of research if contradictions and ambiguities "arise when we seek simultaneously to serve an academic audience while also remaining faithful to forms of knowledge gained in domestic, personal and intimate settings" (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998: 2)? My question is, then, is it possible within sociological paradigms to reflect upon and understand these issues in a way that correlates with both lived experience as well as theoretical abstractions? In this vein my thesis is an exploration of some of the ways in which sociological knowledge may be framed so that this is indeed the case. This re-consideration of sociological praxis involves asking questions about not only the subject matter, but also the ways in which we generate and legitimate knowledge.

In chapter one I describe the development of my methodological practices along a path that led me to understand how embodiment could operate as a methodological ethic and practice of knowledge and representation. The chapter follows my journey through the different themes and issues as they became integrated into my work. My methodological journey begins with feminist politics and practices of research, which focus on issues of power, equality and participation in research practices, as well as the ethics at the heart of producing knowledge, particularly when that knowledge relates to issues of a personal or sensitive nature. Feminist research is premised upon goals of transformation and social change, as well as careful reflection upon location and relationship of the researcher to her participants and the issues she studies. These issues have also been developed in terms of an ethics of representation which I discuss through reflexive practices and creative methodologies. I use the discussion of reflexivity not only to address my presence and role as researcher, but also to consider the ways in which researchers

[10] These are precisely the reasons why many scholars researching unusual, sensitive or embodied issues have turned to autoethnography as a means of articulating and understanding their experiences (see chapter one).

often uncritically rely on interaction as a means of knowing 'another'. Drawing on work from therapeutic practices I problematise conventional research interactions, and in doing so take a further step towards the practices and procedures that have been adopted by 'creative' researchers. Here, an ethics of research emerges which begins to traverse dualistic borders upon which much academic convention is based. This enables a move into forms of representing, and a relationship with, knowledge which are expressed through creative practices, including poetry, fiction and performance. This approach fundamentally shifts the structure of not only of the research and writing practices, but also the relationship with, and the role of, the reader. The writing itself becomes a process of discovery (Richardson, 2000) and so the strands of my work unfold, loop back upon, and connect the themes and issues I address in a non-linear exploration. This strategy is intended to more closely reflect the ways in which as human beings we come to make abstract knowledge as well as to know one another. As such the reader is invited to be active, and to engage with not only the written text, but also the gaps and spaces, and the reflexive responses it invokes (Sparkes, 2003). In this way the methodology chapter (and to some extent the chapter which follows) also re-iterates the researching, writing, and reading strategies at the heart of my work and locates both the reader, and myself as researcher, within that process. Overall, I write with the hope that the reader will accompany my journey with the issues and the individuals who have been central to my life and work for many years.

For this reason, the second chapter provides an opportunity to both meet the research participants and to enter into the contexts in which my research practices have taken place. I introduce the primary research participants through the story of their first tattoo as a means of drawing the reader in to the complexity and diversity of the experiences and lives that have touched me and my work. Throughout this project my relationship with the people, issues and experiences that are at the heart

of my thesis mean that I have acted as my own 'key informer' in terms of accessing participants, locating contexts and highlighting the issues that I develop[11].

However, in many ways my research process has not altogether been a particularly happy experience, but rather, fraught with ethical and personal dilemmas. I highlight some of the difficulties that I have experienced in my work in terms of the ethnographic practices that I briefly pursued and quickly abandoned at the beginning of my research. Nonetheless, despite these issues, and as I hope becomes evident, I have been fortunate to have worked with six very forthcoming, articulate, and interesting key-research-participants, who have continually enabled me to process, question and move forward with my work. So that while the context and process of this thesis is inevitably shaped by me, the final analysis that develops here was not pre-determined or fixed at the outset. My early ideas about how my work would take shape were quickly challenged as my research progressed. And since a key part of my ethic was to remain open to and to honestly represent the full range of experiences which I encountered, the final themes and issues are very much emergent. They have developed as a result of my relationships with the research participants and the ways in which they impacted upon and transformed my relationship with, and understanding of, the issues at the heart of my research.

Likewise, the foundation of chapter three signalled a return to some theoretical issues that I had not set out to incorporate within my project. The origins of theorising the body within sociology did not seem particularly relevant to the ways in which I initially intended to think about body marking. Further, the much deeper connection of feminist work with the body appeared to provide a much more fruitful and relevant starting point[12]. Indeed, I saw a feminist position as relevant to

[11] I felt that undertaking a PhD provided an opportunity to focus on issues and experiences that I had been working with, on many levels, for some time, and that I was effectively coming in from 'the field' in order to formalise the learning and knowledge I had gleaned during the previous years.

[12] That is not to imply that feminist work in this area is wholly unproblematic. Indeed, in chapter five, I specifically consider the ways in which feminism, while addressing issues of gender and the body in terms of women's body marking practices, has often fallen into precisely the separation of self and body it sought to criticise.

my work in both theoretical and methodological terms, and I initially formulated my thesis solely in feminist terms. Feminists have not only considered the issues and implications of research methodologies but also the consequences of theorisation at both the individual and social level. In terms of body marking these consequences include the interpretation of such practices as being indicative of mental illness, or, oppression and the passive acquiescence to it (chapter five)[13], as well as deviance and perversion (chapter seven). In all of these contexts body marking is connected with the medicalisation of the body where the view of bodily practices and the diagnosis of disorder is inherently structured through gender norms. A feminist perspective enables the proposition that if 'self-injury', as with a whole range of bodily practices, is more prevalent amongst women than men then this may be due to the gendering of the body-self relation rather than an essential or pathological component of gender itself. However, even at this stage of the analysis I continued to feel that a fundamental link that connected the three key strands of my position was still missing. It was while preparing to teach a course which focused on sociology, the body and embodiment, that it became apparent that the journey into an embodied sociology provided precisely the link for which I had been searching between the theoretical, methodological and experiential positions. A theory, or rather a *position* of embodiment, which Thomas Csordas describes as a "radical empiricism" (1994: 10), reconciles the empirical, epistemological, and experiential strands of my work.

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[13] One of the issues that I have not developed here, and which has been considered crucial within the experience of gender (from a feminist position) as well as 'self-injury' (within both medicalised and feminist analysis) is the experience of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is quite commonly associated with body marking as 'self-injury' (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Favazza, 1996; Jeffreys, 2000; Strong, 2000) as well as body marking as 'body modification' (Favazza, 1996; Pitts, 2003; Strong, 2000). There are three main reasons why I do not directly address the issues of sexual abuse. Firstly, that sexual abuse is *so* prevalent – estimated to occur at a rate of one in three to girl children (French, 1992), and increasing into adulthood - that any female patterns of behaviour are going to include a significant percentage of those who have been sexually victimised. Further, causal relationships between sexual abuse and subsequent behaviours can be extremely problematic, misrepresentative and damaging (see footnote six in chapter one). Finally, sexual abuse can be understood in terms of the body-self relationship that it often creates, and thus connects with issues I raise in gendered embodiment (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Bass & Davis, 2002). However, that said, my PhD - as with much of my previous work - seems haunted by the spectre of sexual abuse and its implications in terms of researching, thinking about and understanding gendered experience.

That said, an embodied sociology is not without its problems and I address these in terms of the ways in which its disciplinary location has resulted in some significant lapses and omissions. These arise when issues of gender (as well as disability) are brought to the fore, and placed in contrast with the depth and range of feminist work. In this way I use a feminist position to build onto the sociological model of embodiment and to propose a theory of gendered embodiment in which I locate my understanding of body marking practices. In doing so I specifically consider the ways in which gender difference is materialised through the bodily practices which create normative femininity. This strategy not only establishes the purposefulness of a position of embodiment, but also lays a crucial foundation stone to the critique of normative, dualistic analyses of gender and body marking practices. I close this chapter with a reflection on the ways in which a feminist, embodied position offers an ethics, practice and theory that may be understood not only as fundamental to embodiment but also as a metaphysics of knowing and being.

At the conclusion of chapter three I hope the themes and issues of a feminist, embodied sociology and an ethics of embodiment have been raised in such a way as to clearly connect with the issues and ethics of research and representation that I addressed in chapter one, as well as the embodied experiences I began to explore in chapter two. Chapter four re-works the themes and issues of gendered embodiment, the ethics of representation, and lived experience within a 'fictionalised' group discussion. The conversation, which takes place between three of the research participants and myself, develops these themes on many levels. As a creative piece it raises issues around representation, knowledge, and the engagement with women's experiences both within and outside the research process. It also begins a critique of the omissions and assumptions that arise from normative, disembodied theorisation, and specifically addresses the lived experience of non-normative femininity within the imperatives of gendered embodiment. This conversation takes place in two halves, the first here in chapter four, located around issues of gendered embodiment, and later in chapter six, where we connect our experiences with body marking practices.

Chapter five forms the initial location where the three strands of my work begin to explicitly merge and I draw together some of the themes for an embodied understanding of body marking[14]. My position emerges from a critique of the dualisms of agency and mutilation which are commonly operationalised in order to theorise body marking practices. Here, I also begin to problematise some of the feminist analysis of women's bodily practices, specifically in terms of the binaries they rest upon, or the disembodied self they appear to posit as an aspiration for female personhood. Many of these positions also seem premised upon a lack of self-reflection, and a separation of self and other, that have been defined as antithetical to a feminist project.

At this stage an issue arises from within my analysis that it is important to address here. Namely, that criticism appears to dominate my analysis, and yet I have also argued (in chapter one) that criticism and conflict are not the most effective means by which learning is facilitated. My critique of either disciplines in general, or of specific theorisations, is not meant as a hostile rebuttal or dismissal of them, or to imply access to a superior truth claim. Rather, I have tried to use both the strengths and the weaknesses within the work I critique in order to facilitate increased engagement with and understanding of the issues, and indeed the people, who are discussed. In this way it is not criticism for its own sake but rather a process I have undertaken because I care deeply about, and am all too aware of the implications of the ways in which we understand one another. These implications are serious, particularly in terms of the ways in which women's relationship with their bodies are 'diagnosed' and how they are treated as a result. I have seen women refused support services, including basic facilities such accommodation, when their bodily practices become know to those who have authority over them. Or, in some institutions women are often refused fundamental human dignities, such as being able to wear their clothes, as a response to behaviour construed as 'self-injury'. Our knowledge has a huge impact on the lives and well-being of the people we claim to

[14] This gradual drawing together of the themes perhaps requires not only an active but also a patient reader!

know about, and indeed, the experiences of some of my research participants, particularly Elaine, graphically iterate these issues.

By the close of chapter five I hope I have made some significant steps towards undoing the normative paradigms of understanding body marking, a process which continues throughout the subsequent chapters. Chapter six revisits the conversation that began in chapter four, and again draws on the ways in which an embodied ethic moves away from dualism and into an understanding which is more open and fluid, and which can incorporate the very ambiguities that are at the heart of embodied human experience. Here, our discussion which focuses on the experiences of body marking practices in the context of non-normative embodiment and in doing so problematises the assumptions that underpin much of the work in this area.

As my work moves through the chapters which are intended to draw together an ethic, method, theory and experience of embodiment, I notice a subtle binary emerging in terms of the tone and representation of the theoretical and methodological sections. As I reflect on this, I wonder if such a binary of the theoretical and the empirical has become an unintentional reflection of the way in which I oscillate between being in myself as an embodied subject, and then retreating into abstract intellectualisation, in which the privileging of the mind becomes a defensive strategy that separates me from myself and my work. Intellectualisation appears to offer safety through the illusion of distance and separation, yet it is inauthentic, since as subjective human beings we can never fully separate ourselves from the knowledge we produce[15]. However, even where tension remains apparent between degrees of embodied and disembodied knowledge and (textual) representation this may not be altogether antithetical to the position of embodied sociologist. Thomas Csordas suggests that "the point of elaborating a paradigm of embodiment is then not to supplant textuality but to offer

[15] John Bradshaw (1990) makes some very interesting observations regarding the ways in which intellectualisation operates as a defensive strategy in which we continually repeat our own fundamental issues and conflicts.

it a dialectical partner" (1994: 12). In this way embodied methodologies offer a complimentary juxtaposition with textual analysis and theory.

> Problematizing the body and embodiment places [the] author within a nexus of dualities .... to work out his or her own position with respect to the relations between preobjective and objectified, mind and body, subject and object, representation and being in the world, semiotics and phenomenology, language and experience, textuality and embodiment. .... These pairs of terms define a critical moment in theorising about culture and self, and although none of these dualities are spurious, neither are the polar terms irreconcilably opposed.
>
> (Csordas 1994: 20)

The final two chapters apparently reflect this oscillation between embodied and more conventional textual means of representation. Chapter seven builds on chapter five and further re-works a theoretical engagement with the embodied aspects of body marking in terms of blood, pain and gender. The purpose here, is to re-consider the ways in which an embodied position moves away from dualistic approaches to body marking and into the complexity and multifaceted experience of human embodiment. Symbolism and transformation are key themes in connecting with and understanding body marking as embodied within individual experiences and social contexts. The issue of transformation also connects body marking practices with the purposes and ethics of feminist, embodied methodologies. This connection of method and practice through the embodiment of transformative practices is often epitomised within performance art which has become of increasing interest to embodied sociologists as a means of incorporating a method, theory and experience (in chapters one and three).

In chapter eight, through the format of a fictionalised ethnography, I attempt to breathe life into the key themes and issues I have raised throughout my work. That this final chapter is fictionalised, and appears in place of a conclusion, is intended to re-iterate the key issues of knowledge and representation that were initial concerns in this work. But more fundamentally, through this strategy, the reader is

invited to engage with and reflect upon the experiences and possibilities that are present within the snapshots of five women whose diverse lives converge for one day at a very culturally specific time and pace: The Third Annual Dublin Tattoo Convention. These stories, and the lives of the women they represent, are intended to touch the reader and to evoke thinking and feeling questions and leave open the possibilities of meaning, interpretation and transformation.

Overall then, the main themes of my work are drawn together under an ethic, theory and practice/experience of embodiment. In this context embodiment is a way of making knowledge and a means of knowing, a way of relating to other human subjects, and a way of being in the world and oneself. It offers a holistic, person-centred, non-judgemental, self-reflective, and creative politics of equality, transformation and social change. Embodiment, and the ethics and politics and practices I have outlined, are not only integral to the processes of my research, but also to the experience of body marking itself. In this way embodiment provides the ethic and conceptualisation which has for me most purposefully encapsulated the themes and issues which I have struggled to resolve within this PhD.

In this way, because my work is based in an embodied ethics, I do not offer a conclusion with finite answers but, rather, an embodied, fictionalised representation of the lives and experiences I have sought to understand. These fictions open up possibilities and questions not only in terms of gender and body marking practices, but also through exploring how we come to know and understand ourselves and one-another as embodied and intersubjective beings. The ethnographic fictions, a textual articulation from a position of embodiment - an "embodied tale" (Smith, 2002; Sparkes, 2003), contrast sharply with normative academic practices which privilege definitive conclusive statements. They provoke the responses and feelings that are integral to the experience of body marking, and indeed, our embodiment as human beings, which academic convention has sought to transcend in the pursuit of 'rational', disembodied knowledge.

1. Knowing Me, Knowing You?

Ethics & dilemmas of research practices.

Introduction

In this chapter I document my journey into research methodologies that are ethically salient and connected to the issues of gendered embodiment and body marking practices. This process has led from feminist concerns around power and equality, through issues of reflexivity and into creative means of conducting and representing research. The result of these processes and issues, are for me, most comprehensively understood as a position which encompasses an ethic and methodology of embodiment.

I begin this journey by discussing the ways in which feminist approaches to research have been fundamental in shaping my research ethics and practices. Indeed, I initially believed that feminist research alone could incorporate all of the issues I wished to address. And while this may be true in that feminist position(s)[1] regarding research ethics and practices have developed into rich and varied resources, these developments have not solely occurred within feminist work, and many similar issues are teased out in other areas of qualitative research[2]. In this way, both of the issues I address subsequent to feminist methodologies, namely, reflexivity and creative methods, have also been defined as integral to a specifically feminist ethics (Byrne & Lenitn, 2000; Reinharz, 1992; Hague et al, 1987; Hertz, 1997; Lentin, 1995; 2000)[3].

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[1] There is, of course, no single feminist perspective or practices, but a vast range of approaches to research.

[2] Thus, in a strange and unfortunate mirroring of what seems to occur within theorisations of the body and embodiment (see chapter three), feminist work develops in parallel, rather than in conjunction, with its methodological allies.

[3] However, since my initial ethical premise was feminist, and that these practices have been explored in feminist research means that the continuation of these themes maintains some tangible connections throughout my evolving research practice, particularly in relation to issues of gender.

However, while feminist methodologies have been central to the development of my research ethics, one of the issues that was not so easily resolved for me within feminist research practices was the issues of 'accessing' participants. Because of the position from which I understand body marking the idea of somehow seeking out and locating discreet groups of the population who indulged in particular practices[4] is not only antithetical to my work but also directly connects to my critique of some feminist analyses of women's bodily practices (see chapter five). Further, because of the sensitivities around accessing participants, and how I would use and represent their experiences, I wanted my research to only include women who were "self-selecting" (Letherby, 2000: 92). Reading the 'creative sociology' enabled me to begin to resolve some of the issues regarding my location within the work and to establish, in methodological terms, my relationship with the participants (below). But creative methodologies are not only important in this way, they also open up many layers of possibility in terms of representation and knowledge.

Traditional research practices, based on gaining access to another's experience through interrogative interactions, have been widely critiqued by both feminist and other reflexive researchers. From this position the possibilities of ever fully knowing or representing experience is highly contentious and the rigid borders of truth, knowledge and fact become blurred and mutable. Creative methodologies, then, step in where reflexivity and "the crisis of representation" (Bochner, in Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 748) left off. What I hope becomes apparent throughout my discussion of the various creative practices - autoethnography, poetry, fiction, and performance - is that they are fundamentally embodied in ethic, theory and practice. Creative practices engage the researcher/author, participant(s), and audience in a process of knowledge production that is intended to be affecting and transformative. In conveying the complexity, ambiguity, and pain of lived, human experience they also incorporate precisely the aims and ethics that are set out in a theory of embodied sociology (see chapter 3, below). Thus creative strategies not

[4] My initial supervisor had even suggested that I work part-time in a tattoo studio to this end.

only involve many of the ethical concerns that are central to my research practice, but also fundamentally connect with the position of embodiment through which I understand experiences of body marking.

1.1 Feminist methodologies

From the very beginning of my research, indeed at the stage of submitting a research proposal to register on the PhD programme, I had already firmly established feminist research principles which I intended to form the very epicentre of my work. I had enthusiastically and wholeheartedly embraced the feminist critiques of positivistic, masculinist, social science and the related notions of objectivity and rationality (Bell & Roberts, 1984; Bowles & Duelli Klien, 1983; Byrne & Lentin, 2000, Finch, 1984; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987; Hertz, 1997; Holland & Blair, 1995; Lather, 1991; Mackinnon, 1987; Mies, 1983; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Reinharz, 1992; Renzetti & Lee, 1993; Roberts, 1990; Stanley, 1990). The critique of objectivity appealed to me not only in theoretical terms, but also because it is intrinsically connected to the ways in which we understand and relate to one another. Objectivity becomes inseparable from objectification, and is intrinsic to epistemological practices where the researcher "judges and dominates from afar .... The subject [who is] outside all objects, fixes the object in its gaze, mastering and knowing it with unambiguous certainty" (Young, 1990: 190-191). Feminists, then, have sought to develop an alternative relationship with both the politics and practices of knowing within social research. Issues of power and objectification, participation and equality, and the conscious and reflexive acknowledgement of the partiality of the researcher have become central to the ethics of feminist research practices. "Recognising the intrinsically political nature of both theory and data means that the sociologist has a great responsibility to be open and scholarly about her practices" (Finch, 1984: 87). And, "feminism is in the forefront of developing less oppressive ways of knowing" (Lather, 1991: 95).

My Masters research had been formulated around feminist research ethics and practices, which were particularly pertinent because of the nature of the experiences upon which I was focusing. I was working with women clients of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, and so issues around power and objectification were a huge concern to me. As with other "sensitive topics" (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), conventional research strategies were wholly inappropriate, or "morally indefensible" (Oakley, 1981: 41), and even in some cases, laughable when applied to women's experiences (see Oakley, 1981[5]). At this time I also came across Carol Roberts' work with women who had experienced sexual violence, and she described the specific context of this research relationship in a way which had a profound impact upon me. She said,

> Rape is the turning of a woman into an object for the rapist's use only. There is no relationship, but an empty function between the rapist and the raped. It seemed untenable then to take on research methods which reflected such a process, for the process of objectification itself seemed as objectionable as victimisation.
>
> (Roberts, 1989: 46)

In this analogy Roberts starkly highlights the ways in which research may become a vehicle for the objectification and violation of individuals and their experiences. And if, as my own (Inckle, 1997), and other (Lees, 1996), feminist research has highlighted, the questioning of women throughout the legal system is experienced as equivalent to a repeat victimisation then the research interaction may be potentially very damaging indeed[6]. Feminists who have worked with issues of

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[5] Anne Oakley highlighted the ridiculous implications of applying text book research practice to her research with first time pregnant women. "These advise that such questions as 'Which hole does the baby come out of?' Does an epidural ever paralyse a woman?' and 'Why is it dangerous to leave a small baby alone in a house?' should be met with such responses as 'I guess I haven't thought it through enough to give a good answer right now,' or 'a head-shaking gesture which suggests, that's a hard one'. Also recommended is laughing off the request with the remark that 'my job at the moment is to get opinions, not to have them'" (1981: 48).

[6] Damage may also occur when researchers are not fully aware of the specifics of the context in which they are working. Sharon Herzberger (1993) describes how complete ignorance on the part of researchers to the very limited and unrepresentative accounts with which they were working in terms of childhood sexual abuse resulted in the widespread dissemination of the belief that victimisation leads to perpetration of abuse. This is not only numerically untrue - in that after a few

sexual abuse have stressed the importance of maintaining safety and confidentiality for their research participants, as well as working in ways which are sensitive to, and overcome power differentials, and where they also provide support for the women (Fine, 1992; McCarthy, 1996; Kelly, 1988; Kennedy Bergin, 1993; Roberts, 1989). In my research I was anxious to work only in ways which assured the participants the utmost safety, confidentiality and respect, as well as the space for articulating their own experiences and understandings of them. These very genuine concerns for the well being of research participants, not only in the research itself, but also in terms of considering its subsequent impacts has led feminist researchers to develop models of participation, where the research participant have some ongoing input and control over the way in which their 'material' is used. At the level of my masters research this meant that I ensured participants (via their counsellor) had a copy of the transcript returned to them and a period of reflection in which they may amend, qualify or withdraw any or all of their comments. This practice remained central to the ethics I brought to my PhD research, and was further influenced by the publication of Anne Byrne's (2000) work in which she developed an even more involved model of participation. She used consent and commitment forms to clarify her role and responsibilities as well as to ensure that levels of participation and anonymity were clear and acceptable for each participant, and I immediately adopted this into my own practice (see appendix).

Anne Byrne not only sent the transcripts to her participants for their comments and clarifications, but also the theoretical material in which she developed her analysis of their experiences. At the end of her research she also facilitated a group workshop to provide an opportunity for the participants to meet one another and to share and reflect upon their experiences. I found all of this intriguing and was determined to work similar levels of participation into my own research. All of the

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generations no individual would escape from the experience of abuse - but also totally contrary to women's experiences. Abused women who become mothers often have such a heightened sensitivity to not harming their children that they are commonly unable to have any form of physical relationship with them at all.

participants were happy with the consent and commitment forms, they all also returned the transcripts, either agreeing that they were fine as they were, or in some cases making some clarifications. However, when it came to me sending material to them, only two expressed an interest in receiving such documents and this has not remained active. The most common response was that they would be interested in seeing the final thesis but "not to bother" sending material prior to that. So, while I was very keen to salve my conscience by having the participants 'agree' with my representation and analysis of their experiences, they themselves had little interest in doing so. As I reflected on this I realised that this was yet another way in which the researcher - albeit with the most ethical of intentions - can impose her own needs and agenda on the participants, many of whom were in fact quite happy for their account to 'appropriated' and 'manipulated' as I saw fit. It also occurred to me that perhaps Byrne herself was ultimately not much more successful in this way, in that, for example, very few of her participants attended the workshop.

Byrne's work was also mediated by the fact that she did not share the experiences that she was researching, a situation which some feminists consider a barrier to equality and participation. According to Anne Oakley potential for equality and participation within the research relationship is most enhanced where "there is least social distance", and especially where "the interviewer and interviewee share membership of the same minority group" (1981: 55). Further, when the 'interview' (conversation) takes place in this context there is also potential for it to be an enriching and transformative experience for the participants (Finch, 1984; Letherby, 2000; Lentin, 2000; Oakley, 1981).

However, the issue for me is not so much about whether researcher and participants (and reader) *share* experiences, but rather the assumptions and processes through which we formulate the knowledge of shared experience and its implications. The notion of shared experience often depends upon issues of identification and readability, reciprocity and acknowledgement, that are problematised from a position of reflexivity based in therapeutic interactive practices (below). So that

while it has certainly been true that my research participants and I would share many experiences, and that for me at least, this has been a source of inspiration and support on many levels, I am not sure how apparent this was or what impacts it may have had for the participants. And while I cannot speak for the participants in terms of how they experienced the research, or me, I imagine from my appearance and some of my comments, they would have not have interpreted me as being wholly detached from the issues we were discussing, particularly in terms of body modification and the complexities of non-normative embodiment. However, because of the stigma and secrecy around 'self-injury' (as with sexual abuse) it tends to be experienced in isolation, and I do wonder what assumptions the participants made about my experiences, and the implications of these assumptions (as, indeed, during my masters research).

Feminist ethics of participation and equality have developed into a particular approach to the content of the interaction itself. Feminists working with 'sensitive topics' tend to favour open, unstructured and reciprocal research conversations which are often led by the participant rather than the researcher[7]. This was something that resonated with me not only in ethical terms but also in terms of the issues that are raised when the interaction process itself is considered more deeply (below). Feminist research interactions based around ethics of "conscious partiality" and "intersubjectivity" (Kennedy Bergen 1993: 202) also appear to me to be intrinsic to an embodied perspective (see chapter 3) which draws the researcher into experiences which are emotive and affecting. However, the nature of this kind of interaction and the depth of personal rapport established prior to, or during it, may also have mixed consequences, so that, for example, Gesa Kirsch found herself experiencing "simultaneous excitement and discomfort" (1999: xi) during her research conversations. Thus, on one hand feminists have argued that reciprocity can be an important, equalising experience (Kirsch, 1999; Oakley,

[7] This is not to say that there are not feminist quantitative researchers, or to imply that the method of research rather than the politics and perspective is what fundamentally defines it as feminist. See Byrne & Lentin (2000) for a discussion of the issues and processes involved in defining work as feminist.

1981), which can also provide support to the participants when they understand the researcher has shared their experiences (Finch, 1984; Letherby, 2000; Lentin, 2000; Oakley, 1981; Reinahrz, 1990). However, on the other hand, and this would certainly be true for me - as someone who would try and avoid talking about myself as much as possible (even to my therapist!) - an openness to reciprocity can also exacerbate the artificiality of the relationship. In this way, Kirsch realised that the more she established the context for a mutual and reciprocal relationship with her participants the more ambivalent she became about her role as researcher, and the more she experienced herself as a "voyeur" (1999: xi) into their lives. This is something that I have struggled with not only during the research interactions but also subsequently in terms of how to represent the participants in a holistic and non-objectifying manner (see chapter 2).

This concern for the representation of the participants and their experiences connects with the presentation of extracts from transcripts within the analysis (Byrne & Lentin, 2000). Transcribing a spoken conversation into a written format raises issues in terms of how exactly the meanings which are conveyed through the complex, embodied features of interaction are lost within a text. Liz Kelly found the process of textually representing the interaction fraught with difficulty:

> whilst transcribing the taped interviews I became aware of the problems in transposing the spoken to the written word. Meaning in the spoken word is often conveyed through gesture, tone of voice and emotional expression. .... In order to retain some of this meaning I developed a method of coding the tone of voice and emotional expression.
>
> (1988: vii)

Likewise, Maxine Birch found that transcribing, "left out many aspects of what had happened: how the interview felt, the unspoken meanings shared through gesture, the relationship that developed between myself and the interviewee. I was left with a text" (1998: 178-9). Because of these issues both Kelly and Birch developed a system of transcribing the research conversations using a code to represent these

unspoken factors, and I developed my own scheme of doing so (based on the systems used by Bradby (2001), Kelly (1988) and Silverman (1997) - see appendix). However, as Kay Standing (1998) pointed out, issues of power and representation of women's voices in the academic context are not necessarily so easily resolved. She argued that the very process of representing the spoken word *as it occurs* may in fact do a disservice to the participants. Including the pauses, repetitions, unfinished sentences and expressions that are a part of everyday interaction, in the midst of carefully crafted academic discourse, can diminish rather than bolster the credibility of the participants. For this reason she decided to "tidy up" (1998: 190) the transcripts, so that while remaining to true to the content of the conversation, aspects of the dialogue which appear clumsy in text were removed. Initially, I felt myself more closely aligned with the first approach to representing the spoken word, but as I have continued with my research I feel much more drawn to Standing's position. My final approach has involved something of a reconciliation of the two, I have left in the emotive features of the text, the tone, gesture, and emphasis, as well as my comments and prompts, but have removed the pauses, repetitions, and fragments that do not add to the points being made. In this way I have attempted to balance the issues of conveying the many layers of communication that take place during an interaction - through the body, gesture and emotion - at the same time as presenting the most coherent account of each participant's words.

Finally, I also felt that an ethics of 'participation' could be worked into issues of representation at the level of very simple practicalities. So that, for example, in recognition of the power and politics of naming (Daly, 1979; Spender, 1982), the participants always chose the pseudonym by which they would be represented. This means that not only are they easily able to identify themselves in any of the

excerpts or material that I use, but they could also include their own (private) layers of meaning in the names they select[8].

The implications of a feminist ethics are manifold and encompass issues of engaging and representing research participants and their experiences. Because feminist work is inherently political, another key feature by which feminists define their work is the goal of social change, and feminists develop research strategies with this agenda to the fore (Byrne & Lentin, 2000; Harding 1986: Kennedy Bergen 1993: Mies 1983: Ribbens & Edwards 1992: Stanley & Wise 1983; 1996).

> There is no neutral research. .... Emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings, and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in the present configuration of social processes.
>
> (Lather, 1991 50 & 52)

And while feminists have often focused on change at the broader social level, if the personal is political, then transformation is also subjective (Lentin, 2000), and as such feminist research resonates with similar processes within creative methodologies (below). "To talk of a feminist methodology is clearly political, controversial and implies personal and/or political sympathies on the part of the researcher which inform but do not constitute the [normative] sociological approach" (Roberts, 1981: 16). Feminist research is then, predicated on goals of social change for the benefit of the specific participant/s and/or women in general (Reinahrz, 1990), and is "overtly political in its purpose and committed to changing women's lives" (Stanley & Wise 1990: 21). Feminists rigorously scrutinise their work in this context, using notions of empowerment and change (as well as equality and reflexivity) as guiding ethics.

[8] The participants have often picked a name that has some personal significance to them, and while they have shared this with me it remains 'off tape', enabling private layers of meaning to co-exist alongside public disclosure.

> Our own investigative assumptions and procedures are made explicit as we seek to explain how we know what we know. A feminist research practice politicises the research act, not only in terms of producing research findings which can be used to lobby for social change but also in reworking the connections between researcher and her topic as well as the traditional subject-object relationships of researcher and researched.
>
> (Byrne & Lentin, 2000: 8)

Overall then, the pursuit of equality, participation and social change within feminist methodologies means that, "researchers are forced to deobjectify the participants and critically examine how their research may affect them as real people" (Kennedy Bergen, 1993: 202). This creates a research framework which is radically different from conventional methodological practices, one in which the researcher herself is enmeshed and has significant responsibilities. Anne Byrne frames these issues in the context of "Othering":

> Consideration of being Other or engaging in acts of Othering, invites decisions about participation, representation and interpretation, provoking keen self-reflection as well as a critical examination of all interactions, all analyses, all acts of knowing, all texts produced in the research process.
>
> (2000: 140)

This concern around the impacts of research, both in terms of the ways in which it affects the participants, as well as in establishing goals of social change, means that feminists usually adopt a high level of reflexivity in their work (for example, Alldred, 1998; Byrne, 2000; Herz, 1997; Letherby, 2000; Lentin, 1995; 2000; 2000a; Oakley, 1981; Roberts, 1981). This reflexivity makes their intentions, presence, and role within the research visible and apparent, at the same time as debunking any notions of objectivity or claims to a higher, more pertinent, single truth. Reflexivity also offers some protection to the participants in that a self-aware, reflexive and ethically orientated researcher is perhaps less likely to cause harm to them than one who has not engaged with these processes. "Reflexivity involves being explicit about the operation of power within the actual process of researching and representing people" (Alldred, 1998: 147).

Reflexivity has been practiced by a range of qualitative researchers for these reasons. For me, an investigation of reflexivity adds a further layer of critical awareness not only to the role of the researcher and her self-awareness, but also in terms of research practices which unquestioningly rely on interaction as a technique for 'knowing' another.

1.2 Reflexivity & the limitations of interaction

Qualitative researchers have used the concept of reflexivity to acknowledge and explore the ways in which knowledge is connected to the meanings, interpretations and presence of the researcher. According to Alvin Gouldner *all* knowledge is a cultural product bound up in "a relationship between persons and information" (1971: 494). Reflexive analysis recognises this relationship and rejects notions of objective knowledge and fact. "Meaning comes not from seeing or even observation alone, for there is no 'alone' of this sort. Neither is meaning lying around in nature waiting to be scooped up by the senses; rather it is *constructed*" (Steedman, 1991: 54).

However, not unlike the term 'feminist', reflexivity has been defined and operationalized in a number of ways by a range of theorists, for example, Cant & Sharma (1998) Davidman (1999) Finlay (1999) Game (1991) Gouldner (1971) Hertz (1997) Kennedy Bergen (1993) Latour (1988) Lentin (1995) May (1999) Standing (1998) Stanley (1996) Steir (1991) Woolgar (1988). Not all of whom would necessarily be equally positive about the possibilities or applications of a reflexive practice, or indeed what reflexivity itself entails. Steve Woolgar has pointed out that,

> if reflexivity refers, in simple terms, to the willingness to probe beyond the level of 'straight forward' interpretation, the response of social sciences to the issue of reflexivity is divided .... between those who construe reflexivity as a tool for improving observational accuracy and those who view it as an impetus for exploring different ways of asking questions about knowledge practices.
>
> (1988: 17)

My interest in reflexivity would be much more aligned with the latter position, in that I use reflexivity to consider the ways in which we come to (believe we) know and represent human beings and their experiences. I agree with Anne Game that reflexivity forces sociologists to recognise that "at the very least we need to acknowledge the ways in which we are implicated in representations" (1991: 36). In this way I have attempted to openly represent my presence throughout my work in order to facilitate an informed connection, appraisal, or response to all the layers of meaning and experience enmeshed within this project. However, as with reciprocity (above), the focus on myself that is integral to reflexivity is not something that I feel entirely comfortable with, but resign myself to it as a necessary ethical compromise.

Norman Denzin suggests that non-reflexive sociological research conventions reflect more general cultural assumptions in the context of what he sees as a "cinematic" or "interview society" (2003: 66). In this culture interrogative interaction is seen as the route to uncovering a fixed, objective truth. "We expect that persons, if properly asked, will reveal their inner selves", and that skilled "experts" can access an individual's "deep, authentic self" regardless of the intention or compliance of the person in question (2003: 66). "Interviews objectify individuals, turning lived experiences into narratives. .... The interview turns a transgressive experience into a consumable commodity. These narratives are then bought and sold in the academic market places" (2003: 86).

Non-reflexive researchers may also project their subjective responses to their subjects/subject matter as if they were universal truths, and this practice is particularly evident where researchers have analysed bodily practices which are outside their own experiences. The researchers' subjective responses become enmeshed with dualistic knowledge paradigms in determining the meaning of experience. These issues are particularly evident in Jane Kilby's (2001) assertion that 'self-injury' is so traumatic it is impossible for anyone to "bear witness" to,

and within Verity Huck's (1997) warning that "self-mutilation" cannot be understood as a means of survival (see chapter 5, below).

Sociological research has, then, often been structured around a distant 'expert' analysis of human experience, "sociology has always been about studying some one else" (Klienmann, 1999: 20). Reflexivity, on the other hand, challenges this separation of researcher and subject, it forces sociologists to "recognise that there are no grounds for assuming the activities of our subjects/objects are different from our own; such differences are accomplished through unreflexive observation and research" (Woolgar, 1988: 28). In an understanding of reflexivity, that is based on his work as a practicing psychotherapist, Ian Craib adds that unreflexive analyses reduce human subjectivity to over-simplistic notions, and ignores the centrality of ambivalence within subjectivity. He argues that research which ignores such complexities of subjectivity, either cannot comprehend, or over simplifies, key aspects of human experience, such as, "the way in which opposite qualities are entwined in all human behaviour" (1998: 155).

Here Craib's combination of psychotherapy and sociology opens up a deeper understanding of the complexities of interaction. The complexities of social interaction, which are often ignored or oversimplified by sociologists, seem to me essential in shaping research outcomes whether or not this is acknowledged by the researcher. Dialogue between two or more persons is infused with so many layers of each of their experiences, that no interaction can be simply read off at face value, and even less so in a hierarchical setting such as a research interview. Craib goes on to point out that it normally takes a person at least a year with their therapist before they are confident enough to openly and articulately discuss their subjectivity and particularly their personal experiences and feelings. Secondly, and more importantly, it takes *three years* of training for the therapist to be aware of issues such transference, projection and counter transference and the ways in which they shape and influence an interaction and its content. While sociologists cannot, of course, all be trained therapists, I agree with Craib that some knowledge and

awareness of these processes, as well as of the limitations of interaction as a tool for knowing another, would be hugely beneficial. On a more tangible level it surprises me that basic listening skills are not taught as part of qualitative methodologies. The ability to be fully present and to *hear* another individual is not straightforward, and without these skills the researcher may well do no more than produce "fictional human beings" (Craib, 1996: 74)[9]. In terms of my own research conversations, I tended to automatically slip into the active listening techniques that I learnt in my previous work. I also maintained a practice of 'being present' with each individual as she recounted her experiences and responded emotively and empathically to her words. I did experience some levels of conflict around this, in that while I felt this was the only appropriate way in which to share each woman's experiences, I did wonder if it somehow rendered me an impostor within academic practices, and a fraud in terms of the 'sociological' behaviour the participants may have expected from me.

A final technique, which could have been most beneficially utilised by many of the researchers in chapter five, who define body practices around pre-set binaries of agency and mutilation, is the practice of 'unconditional positive regard'. This is a technique which forces the researcher/counsellor/social worker to acknowledge the fundamental humanity and value of each human being, rather than regarding them as objects, or critically evaluating their responses in terms of how useful or appropriate it may be for their work. In my own research this was not an issue I had to work at, in the sense that I already felt respect, empathy and warmth for each of the women involved, and was keen to hear her experiences and learn from them.

It seems to me, then, that without some awareness around these issues and practices of interaction our levels of communication, self-reflection, research and knowledge are severely restricted. Further, our limitations in being present with, and listening to, one another have significant implications in political, social and methodological

[9] Raquel Kennedy Bergen also described "being a good listener" (1993: 208) as crucial to her feminist research with women who had experienced rape.

terms. Susan Wendell has argued in relation to dis-ability that, "if disabled people were truly heard, an explosion of knowledge of the human body and psyche would take place" (1996: 274). I would similarly suggest that if our research participants, as well as our own voices - at conferences, seminars and the like - were truly heard then an equivalent revolution of being and knowing would take place. I often feel that most academic discussion takes place in a context where people specifically *do not* listen to one another. Conferences, seminars and even written propositions are often quite combative and adversarial, with each contributor already enmeshed within a defence/attack protocol. I do not believe that learning is best facilitated within this context, and Carolyn Ellis (in Flemons & Green, 2002) likewise, highlights the ways in which understanding and connection are developed by responses formulated around a "yes and" engagement, and are closed down by the more conventional "no but" rebuttal (2002: 345). Likewise, Jane Ussher has suggested that, "if we spen[t] more time listening .... and less time expounding our own pet theories, perhaps we will move forward" (1991: 301). Norman Denzin shares these concerns, and sets out his methodological ideal thus: "I want to cultivate a method of patient listening, a reflexive method of looking, hearing and asking that is dialogic and respectful .... an active listener" (2003: 75).

These ideals would certainly go some way to describing my own role and approach to research interactions. I did not have a set agenda through which I was attempting to steer each participant via carefully structured questions. Rather, I wanted to hear each woman's experiences from her own perspective: the issues that were important to her, the themes she wished to focus on, and the connections she made for herself. That is not to say that I did not have my own interpretation and understanding of her account, but rather that I was open to listening to her perspective and to questioning and developing my ideas accordingly. In this way my work has certainly been shaped and influenced by the participants, as has my own personal understanding of, and relationship to, the issues at its centre. Both the researching and the writing of my thesis have therefore afforded me a very important learning experience on many levels.

In summary then, reflexivity recognises the ways in which the location and perspective of the researcher are both inseparable from, and integral to, the knowledge produced, and this has both pragmatic and ethical implications. This has been evident in terms of the feminist methodologies discussed (above) as well as being integral to an embodied, reflexive research ethics (see Kathy Davis, 1995 in chapter 5). Reflexivity operates as both an ethical and empirical tool which prohibits the transcendence of the realities and implications of embodied human subjectivity. The self-awareness and deliberate self-reflection of the researcher opens up the research process for the reader as well as the participants. Thus, power balances are shifted and the researcher no longer claims the position of all-knowing, objective expert.

> Reflexivity means reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiography as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents. Reflexivity also means acknowledging the crucial role we play in creating, interpreting and theorising research data.
>
> (Mauthner & Daucet, 1998: 121)

This recognition has significant implications for both the practice of sociology as well as its disciplinary location and status. Acknowledging the centrality of the researcher/author in the construction of knowledge challenges the established binaries of 'science' and 'art', and destabilises the location of sociology.

> Much literary criticism explicitly encourages constitutive reflexivity, the fact that the author constitutes and forms part of the 'reality' she creates is axiomatic to the analytic style .... tension thus arises because social science is attracted by the constructivist undertones of constitutive reflexivity in its literary mood, but repelled by the implications for it's own pretensions to produce 'scientific' social study.
>
> (Woolgar, 1988: 23)

The historical reluctance of sociologists to embrace these issues can be traced in part to the location of sociology as a discipline within binary knowledge structures. This location and the resultant focus and content of sociological knowledge and

practices, have been raised by a number of contemporary sociologists working in the field of the body (Frank, 1990; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; Turner 1996) and embodiment (Lupton, 1997; Willaims & Bendelow, 1998; Shilling, 2003). This dualism of the mind/body, reason/emotion self/other has developed into a sociological practice where, Ian Craib argues, researchers "have contented themselves with describing the pattern on the shell - the social identity and role expectations as if that was all there was"(1996: 9). Further, despite the protestations from objectivist academic practice, the self is always present and inseparable from the work we produce (Letherby, 2000). However, within normative paradigms it is "a divided self" (Sparkes, 2003: 61) which denies his[10] own and others' visceral, emotional and embodied experiences. Objectivist approaches to research disavow that observation and interaction are subjective processes, and that theorisation and analysis are processes of transformation, and ultimately reinforce the distinctions between theory and method, representation and the real, experience and knowledge (Game, 1991). Reflexivity, then, not only challenges norms of knowledge production, operating at both an empirical and ethical level, but also connects with questions regarding disciplinary borders and the representation of research material, which are key themes of creative sociological research and writing strategies.

1.3 Creative research practices.

Once the traditional borders between the researcher and the researched have been traversed and the goals are no longer for objective, quantitative means of knowing, possibilities open up not just in terms of the location of the researcher but also in terms of the means of re-presenting and writing up the research[11]. From the

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[10] I deliberately use the masculine pronoun here as this kind of self/other relationship is epitomised in the ideals of normative masculinity.

[11] Interdisciplinary practices and alliances are important and have been viewed as integral to the production of ethical, meaningful and relevant theorisation. In this way understanding emotional distress (Ussher, 1991), human subjectivity (Craib, 1998), and methods of researching and writing about human experience (Denzin, 2003) are all cited as benefiting from interdisciplinary studies. Further, feminist researchers have for a long time been staunch advocates of forays across established borders of knowledge in order to produce meaningful knowledge and to facilitate social change (Reinharz, 1992; Stanley, 1990).

nineteen-nineties onwards there has been an explosion in both of these fields, and research strategies such as autoethnography have meshed with alternative textual approaches, creating a genre of creative sociology. Denzin refers to this as "the new writing" (2003: 118)[12]: "a writing form that moves from interpretation and evaluation to praxis, empowerment and social change" (Denzin, 2003: 133). These methodologies are also enmeshed within a deep understanding of many of the ethical issues that are at the heart of feminist and reflexive research, and address the some of the "practical and moral problems of representation" (Smith, 2002: 113). They are intended to provoke a response in the reader (Sparkes, 2003) and favour creative and evocative ways of engaging with, knowing and representing experience (Denzin, 2003; Sparkes, 2003).

Auto/biographical or autoethnographic texts often form the basis of this work which is represented in poetic, story telling or dramaturgical form. It is no accident that these methods are particularly used to research issues which might be defined as "sensitive" (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), in that, creative methodologies are specifically poignant and effective in conveying the depths of complex and painful human experience. Human subjectivity and its fundamentally embodied, emotional, complex and ambiguous characteristics, requires forms of expression and representation that move beyond linear and binary analysis, requiring multiple, temporal and intersubjective forms. The "new writing", according to Denzin, works in precisely this way because it "privileges evocation over cognitive contemplation" (2003: 119) in stories that are "transformative" (2003: 120) and shift the relationship between researcher/author, reader and experience.

> This type of writing strategy is a powerful means of conveying complexity and ambiguity without prompting a single, closed, convergent reading. .... The genre becomes an opportunity and space where one may relinquish the role of the declarative author persuader and attempt to write as, and be represented by, an artfully-persuasive storyteller. (Smith, 2002: 114)

[12]Reinharz (1992) describes them as 'new methods'.

Here, I will discuss the way in which autoethnography, fictionalised research accounts, sociopoetics, as well as drama and performance have been used by researchers to these ends, and how they have influenced my work. These methods address my key ethical concerns around representation and knowledge and sit comfortably within an embodied position. Further, they not only represent an ethics of transformation but are also precisely a part of that process.

- Autoethnography

Carolyn Ellis & Art Bochner (2000) discuss a range of methodological initiatives under the heading 'autoethnography'. The primary use of 'autoethnography' describes empirical sociology where the authors' own experience forms the research material (see also Reed-Danahay, 1997)[13].

> Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal and the cultural. .... Usually written in first person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms. .... In these texts concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought and language.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 2002: 739)

Many authors have turned to this method having found conventional practices of research and representation inadequate for the task of conveying the multifaceted, complex and emotive layers of embodied human experience. For example, Ruth Behar's (1996) autoethnography of "The Girl in the Cast" is insightful and moving both in terms of the experiences she describes, as well as for her articulation of 'body memory' (see chapter 3). While Carol Ronai (1996) exposes the manifold and painful layers of experience in her paper "My Mother is Mentally Retarded" in

[13] Using one's own social location for research purposes is not unique to the 'creative sociologists'. The potential resources of sociologists' own lived experiences have also been recognised as part of the "qualitative sociology of everyday life" (Glassner & Hertz, 1999).

which she deals with disablement, family structures, violence and child sexual abuse. Earlier, she (Ronai 1992) described the struggles and conflicts she experienced while working simultaneously in academia and the sex industry. Lisa Tillmann-Healy also shares the conflicts she experienced between her intellectual and personal identities after she "invited bulimia to come and live with me" (1996: 76). For Tillmann-Healy, the creative genre - she uses both autoethnography and poetry - was essential to fully convey her experiences. She reflects upon how this methodology facilitated the multiple levels of impact she sought in terms of personal, individual experience, as well within broader cultural and academic locations.

> If my paper were a medical or psychological report, this section [the end] would contain the author's definitive conclusions aimed at explaining, predicting, and controlling bulimia. If it were a TV drama, the 'cured' protagonist would be moving on to a normal life. But this is my story and it is a story without resolution. .... I purposefully told my story *this way*. I wrote a sensual text to pull you away from the abstractions and categories that fill traditional research on eating disorders and into the *experience* .... to help you engage with how bulimia *feels*. I used multiple forms to mimic the complex and multilayered nature of food addition. ....I knew I had something to say that wasn't being said. I knew I could show you in detail how a bulimic *lives*, and I wanted you to know. Perhaps you already knew; if so, I offer this account as comfort and companionship. If you didn't I offer it as instruction. I hope that my lived experience helps maintain a critical attitude toward many of our culture's stories of body and food and helps create new and better stories that direct us towards healthier bodies and more contented hearts.
>
> (1996: 107-8)

The practice of autoethnography, and the issues it raises around knowledge, communication, and experience have a unique and inescapable impact. Autoethnographies, are by their nature, emotive and affective and become poignant and memorable strategies for conveying experience and raising questions about how we think about and deal with them at individual and social levels. According to Andrew Sparkes, authoethnography,

> disputes the normally held divisions of self/other, inner/outer, public/private, individual/society, and immediacy/memory. .... Autoethnographies can encourage acts of witnessing, empathy and connection that extend beyond the self of the author and thereby contribute to sociological understanding in ways that, among others, are self knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing and self-luminous. (2002a 216 & 222)

There are, however, significant risks in adopting this kind of methodology, particularly within the conventions of academia. Not only does the autoethnographer risk personal 'exposure' but also specifically in a context - academia - which is often hostile to both the content and genre of the work (Letherby, 2000; Sparkes, 2002; 2002a). This may have significant personal impacts, not only in terms of social and emotional well-being but also in terms of restricted professional and career opportunities (Flemons & Green, 2002; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Letherby, 2000; Sparkes, 2002). Finally, because these methodologies challenge the conventions of academic judgement and merit (Lentin, 2000; Sparkes 2002a) and focus on "feminised activit[ies]" (Letherby, 2000: 100) such as emotionality, self-reflection and empathic engagement there are also gendered implications of their use.

These risks form an important addendum to the issues of safety raised within feminist research ethics (above) in that issues of power, vulnerability and confidentiality do not always work 'in favour' of the researcher. To write in this way, to become the research subject as well as its author, may be to risk exactly the exposure and vulnerability that a feminist and/or reflexive ethics seeks to protect the participants from. Finally, lest I generate the impression that the only difficulties inherent to autoethnographic writing are in terms of personal consequences, Carolyn Ellis considers some additional, practical complications.

> [Autoethnographic writing is] certainly not something most people can do well. Most social scientists don't write well enough to carry it off. Or they're not sufficiently introspective about their feelings or motives, or the contradictions they experience. Ironically, many aren't observant enough of the world around them. The self-

> questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult. So is confronting the things about yourself that are less than flattering. .... Then there's the vulnerability of not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it. .... It can be humiliating.
>
> (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 738)

While I am very much drawn not only to the ethical dimensions of autoethnography, but also the powerfully evocative and transformative effects of this kind of work, it is as yet not something I feel brave enough to fully embrace[14]. An alternative, and less risky, application of autoethnography has been developed by researchers to capture the evolution of their research process rather than focusing directly on their personal experiences. Annette Markham's (1998) account of "Life on Line" describes how she moved from a separated observer to a participant in the category of "heavy internet user", a term which she had originally coined to describe the 'subjects' of her research. However, her own increasing engagement with virtual reality demonstrated to her how her initial perspective and the related theoretical frameworks, terminology, and research questions were irrelevant and unhelpful to understanding the central issues of the lived experience. She said, "most of the participants do not think about being online in ways I assumed they would before I talked to them" (1998: 79).

It is this use of autoethnography which I feel offers me a way of remaining consistent with the ethics and responsibilities of research and knowledge production but stops short of entirely opening myself up as research material. Thus, I can use my own location within the issues as resource for the research and at the same time maintain boundaries with which I am more or less comfortable. In this way I have used my own experiences of women's relationship with body marking practices to engage participants for my research. I have not sought out specific locations in which I can access discreet categories of people, behaviour, or experience, rather I have used my understanding of the multiplicities of these

[14] That is not to deny that all research/writing is to some extent autoethnographic or autobiographical, whether or not that is the intention or is made overt.

experiences to avoid limiting the participation in this way. Thus, autoethnography enables me to use my own social location as the starting point from which to engage research participants. As such I have become some kind of feminist, reflexive, 'key informer' attempting to bridge the gaps between lived experience and academic knowledge production.

Autoethnography has provided a research genre which tackles many of the issues and ethics around participation, and the appropriation and representation of experience, in which the borders of representation and researcher location are shifted so that the appropriation of experience and objectification of participants is at least problematised if not wholly avoided. Autoethnography also reflects and recognises the complexity and the fundamental embodiment of human experience (Smith, 2002). Working in this way has also inspired the development of 'creative' means of writing up accounts, including fictionalised texts, poetry and dramaturgical formats.

- Poetry

In 'Portrait of an Anorexic Life' (1998), though not strictly autoethnographic, Christine Kiesinger utilised creative writing strategies to portray the depth and complexity of women's experiences, as well as the relationships she developed with them during the course of her research. She used poetry to present evocative, in-depth accounts, rich with the emotion experienced and the multi-layered aspects of 'disordered' eating patterns. However, while Keisinger argued that her experience with bulimia enabled her to engage on an empathic level with her participants, her representation of them is not wholly unproblematic. Kiesinger wrote her poetic narratives using the first person voice, which for me re-ignites concerns around appropriation, representation and the researcher's reformulation of others' experiences. Poetry has also been used in this way to convey the complexities of a range of experiences including; locations of 'race' and 'ethnicity' (Austin, 1996: Travisino, 1998), and unmarried motherhood (Richardson, 1992). Poetic representation has also been used autoethnographically by authors seeking

an evocative way to represent their own experiences (for example Tilman-Healy, above).

The use of this creative technique as a representational method resonates with me on many levels. The poetic form recognises and incorporates the emotional and embodied interchanges that are present within a research interaction but which are lost within a transcribed text (however coded). It emphasises the implications of our own experience and subjectivity as individuals and researchers for the work we produce, and the fluidity of the boundaries of that role and the meanings we create. I believe that all knowledge is produced at the intersection of our subjectivity, our autobiography, repeatable 'facts' and the fictions we make of them, and our own perceptual processes which are inseparable from emotion, projection, and self. For me, poetry is the medium which captures these elements perfectly: it relies on interpretation, feeling and metaphor to convey 'truth' and meaning. It also enables us to engage on an experiential level; emotional, intellectual, bodily, with a range of human experiences and to explore and connect with them.

> Poetry is arguably closer to lived experience and more likely to affect its readers and listeners .... it engages readers in frankly interpretative labours. A sociopoetics draws lay readers to social theorising, and sociologists to critical confrontation with their value-constituting practices.
>
> (Richardson, 1991: 177)

Since I have a longstanding interest in creative writing and have been writing poetry for a number of years, I was keen to explore the use of poetry within my research. I have included poems at the end of the theoretical chapters in order to re-iterate the lived, corporeal, emotive aspects of the issues and the ways in which they resist linear or dualistic analytical models. These poems are also intended to begin to dissolve the border between self and other, researcher and participants, and, perhaps, reader and text. In this way poetry is doubly effective, not only in terms of using a form that conveys the complexity of human experience outside of discrete categories of knowledge, but also because the effectiveness of poetry

depends precisely upon the reader enmeshing their own experiences and emotions within the piece. Thus, the text is not a simple exposé of the authors' (or participants') experience, or description of it, but rather it is mediated through an emotive and interpretative relationship with the reader. Poetry is then, in many ways, a truly intersubjective form of representation. Using poetry as a means of representing sociological research moves another step in the direction of traversing the traditional borders between 'art' and 'science', 'fact' and 'fiction'. Sociologists have employed other creative writing practices to this end and have fictionalised both ethnographic and interaction based research.

- Fictionalised forms of representation.

Mike Angrosino (1998), who spent ten years working as an ethnographer and a volunteer in a residential project for developmentally disabled men, became increasingly frustrated with inability of conventional methods of social science writing to communicate the complex and multi-layered realities of the people and environment he experienced. In order to enable his audience to engage with his work on an experiential level, analytically *and* emotionally, he wrote the key events and issues as 'ethnographic fictions'. He suggests that "a story doesn't have to be *factual* in order to be true" (1998: 34)[15]. 'Fictionalising' his research enabled him to vividly re-create the context, key events, issues and characters, and at the same time avoid imposing a reading or interpretation upon the events.

> The act of reading a fictionalised ethnography enables the reader to enter not only another community, but also the consciousness of the ethnographer .... you lose the authoritative voice of omniscient science. But you create a world in which the reader can interact people and come to his or her own conclusion about what's going on. The reader can do what the ethnographer does, immerse him or

[15] Angrosino (1998) also notes that fiction has often provided a rich source of analysis for social science since it is seen to be indicative of many aspects of the social world from which it originated. Further, recent political theorisations, such as Queer Theory, also maintain a strong relationship with fiction. Butler (1993), for example, argues that interrogation and re-readings of literary and cultural texts are essential acts in the subversion of binaries of sex, gender and sexuality.

herself in the particulars and try and figure out what it all means.

(1998: 95)

These fictionalised accounts provided valuable resources in terms of policy development and at the same time addressed ethical issues around appropriation and confidentiality. Further, fictionalised accounts may also facilitate more open knowledge and analysis, opening up layers of evocation and connection though engaging the reader's responses. "Using stories to represent research can also resist premature closure on understanding, conveying complexity and ambiguity and making space for alternative interpretations" (Gray, 2004: 45).

Fictionalising ethnographic work in this way is also useful where subject matter is unusual or contentious within academia, in that "the process allows the.... [reader] to think about data in new, unpredictable ways" (Gray, 2004: 45). So that Ross Gray's (2004) fictionalised re-presentation of his encounter with his research participant, a "eunuch", enables the reader clear access to the agenda, motivations and experiences of the participant *and* the researcher, to reflect critically on their own position, and to self-consciously analyse the layers of meaning and relationships within the work, including their own. It "can lead us to discover new things about ourselves and our world" (Sparkes, 2003: 70). As such, this kind of writing establishes a particular relationship with the reader, in a structure which *shows* rather than *tells* the themes and issues unfolding (Ellis & Bocher, 2000; Smith, 2002; Sparkes, 2002; 2003), it is "a move from *description* to *communication*" (Sparkes, 2002:18). So that rather than being presented with a closed, linear and finite analysis the reader is invited to be "active" (Sparkes, 2003: 69) to immerse herself in the piece and to reflexively consider the issues at its heart.

> This kind of storyteller *trusts* the reader, understands the necessity of relinquishing control, of allowing readers the freedom to interpret and evaluate the text from their unique vantage points, and will coax the reader into participating in the imaginative construction of

> literary reality through carefully positioned blanks, or interpretative spaces, in the writing.
>
> My intention is that my stories contain a lot of interpretative spaces, inviting the active reader to fill them with personal meanings gathered from outside the text. .... [I] invite readers in, enticing them to think and feel *with* the story.
>
> (Sparkes, 2003: 68-9)

The need for a single reading of the issues or rigid conclusive arguments is replaced with an openness to multiple possibilities and ongoing transformation. Indeed, if learning and change are the purpose of research, then a strategy which involves writing or concluding in such a way as to close down alternative responses and exploration of the issues, contradicts rather than fulfils its own intention. Alternative strategies not only iterate the impossibility and undesirability of creating fixed and finite knowledge, but also offer a means of representing participants without entirely appropriating their experiences. Their understanding can remain intact, at the foreground, at the same time as facilitating room for other possibilities to be considered. A context is created where more than one interpretation or 'truth' can simultaneously coexist.

> Ethnographic fiction and poetic representation are utilised as a possible way to evoke emotions; broaden audiences; illuminate the complexity of body self relationships; include 'researcher', 'participant', and 'reader' in dialogue; help us to think with stories; and to invite the reader-as-witness to morally breathe and share a life within the storytelling relation.
>
> (Smith, 2002: 113)

In practical terms, developing ethnographic fictions has enabled me to include women's experiences in my research which had been crucial to the development of my analysis but which were ethically contentious because they resulted from interactions and relationships which occurred outside of clearly defined research parameters[16]. Thus, I have been able to incorporate material which would be

[16] Fine (1992a) also encountered the dilemmas of using material which she felt was crucial in terms of policy development and awareness raising, but which was problematic because she gained it in the course of her role as a counsellor in a sexual assault unit rather than as a researcher.

impossible for me to re-access, and ethically problematic to directly refer to, in a way which honours the safety and confidentiality of the 'sources', while also allowing me to clearly describe the particulars of the women's lives which have been integral to my analysis. Finally, using fictions can also allow the author to write in, or make use of, her own experiences with a degree of anonymity and safety which are foregone within autoethnographic or highly reflexive texts.

Fictionalised research accounts have also been used by sociologists whose research was based on in-depth interactions with their participant(s) (rather than ethnography). For example, Ross Gray (2004) used a single 'fictionalised' account to represent the content of a number of actual research conversations, in a text in which the reader is presented with Gray himself, and his participant, in storytelling format. Likewise, Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner (2000) have used a fictionalised dialogue format in order to write an evocative, explanatory article on autoethnography and creative methodologies[17]. Carolyn Ellis and Leigh Berger (2002) used a conversational format to represent ways in which the researcher's own experience could be incorporated into interview based research. Brett Smith (2002) constructed a textual dialogue to convey not only his friend's experience of sexual abuse, but also the ways in which more conventional analysis ignore the fundamental embodiment of both the experience and its consequences. As with Ross Gray's participant, she read, commented on and amended the drafts of the article to ensure that it fully represented her experience. Similarly, Andrew Sparkes authored a collaborative dialogue, a "symbiotic form" (1997: 28), in which he and his participant reflected on their shared experience of a "failed body" (1997a: 116). Finally, Karen Fox (1992) represented her research with the perpetrator and survivor of a relationship of child sexual abuse in a "subversive" dialogue format. In this text, Fox also included an account of her own experiences of abuse and the ways in which they impacted upon her responses to the relationship and the

[17] Carolyn Ellis (2004) has also authored *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel,* once again using the evocative and artistic modes of creative writing to make academic discourse both accessible and affecting.

descriptions of abuse she was encountering. I found her account unsettling, and her conclusions disturbing, but because of the way in which she had located herself, her position was also painfully comprehensible to me. The affectiveness of Fox's piece, and the feelings it left me with were both distressing and yet also inspiring to me. The dialogue format in particular, where the researcher and participants are presented in conversation with each other, captured my imagination, particularly as a possible means of drawing out connections between different experiences in a non-appropriating analytic form. I have used this structure in two chapters, where three of the research participants and I reflect on our experiences of non-normative feminine embodiment and body marking. In doing so I have included many aspects of my own experiences that had not, initially, occurred to me as related to my whole project, and which I also remain somewhat ambivalent about having exposed. This unexpected and somewhat uncomfortable inclusion of myself also connects with some of the other issues that are at the heart of these approaches, such as, the possibilities of social change and personal transformation through creative research strategies.

- Transformation and social change.

Writing research 'creatively' may in itself form part of the process of exploration and discovery of the issues at its heart. Laurel Richardson has argued that,

> Writing as a method of social inquiry provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science.
>
> (2000: 924)

In this way both the form and the content of creative methodological practices shift binaries of knowing and facilitate deeper understandings of the issues involved. Ronit Lentin suggests that "if researchers are open to it" these methods have "endless performative, but also transformative possibilities, in terms of constructing the self, but often also of bringing about a transformation of society" (2000a: 249).

In a four-part dialogue within Art Bochner & Carolyn Ellis's (2002) collection[18], various theorists discuss autoethnography in terms of "the effects on the researcher's sense of self" (Flemons & Green, 2002: 87). They suggest that the very process of writing in this way leads authors and readers to new and more complex understandings of the issues they experience. It may also impact upon her or his feelings and relationship with the experience as well as their self-regard. Further, because autoethnography engages the author in multiple possible relationships with, and interpretations of their self, the process itself is transformitive, meaning that the research may develop or 'conclude' in ways which the author herself had not envisioned at the outset (Carolyn Ellis in Flemons & Green, 2002: 92). Thus, the research evolves in parallel with the self-knowledge and understanding of the author; the writing process facilitates self-transformation. This would certainly be a very accurate reflection of the path that my own research has taken, as well as my relationship with the issues I address. I certainly feel very differently about my research, myself, and the issues that are bound up in both, than I did at the outset[19].

Further, even the relationship with a completed text of this kind can, over time, facilitate further shifts in consciousness. In this context Christine Keisinger describes how it became important for her to revisit her first autobiographical piece, where she described the abuse she experienced as a child, and to reframe it into a "life story in ways that empower rather than victimise me" (2002: 95). The use of writing as a process of healing and self-transformation is also a strategy that is widely encouraged and practiced within different therapies. The consequences of these expressions are experienced in terms of both personal healing (Bass & Davis, 2002; Bradshaw, 1988; 1990), and also as political strategies for survivors to name and take control of their experiences and the interpretation of them (Bass & Davis, 2002; Pembroke, 1996). Finally, the process of 'coming out', either intentionally or

[18] One draw back of creative sociology is that it tends to defy referencing conventions! I have done my best to accurately reflect it in the following citations.

[19] This is not to entirely credit my changing position solely to creative sociology! Rather, this has complimented the other transformitive processes I have been working with outside of academia.

not within autoethnographic work can be equally transformative. It may be both uncomfortable and risky, (Green, in Flemons & Green, 2002: 93; Sparkes, 2003) but there is also huge potential for healing. Outing ones experiences breaks the silence and shame around many issues, and, where respect and support are afforded to individuals who work in this way, possibilities for new and more positive self and other relations open up, as well as transforming social understandings and responses to them. Ronit Lentin describes this process within her research with daughters of Shoah survivors.

> Traumatic events are often dealt with by banishing them from consciousness: survivors of trauma, political or personal, often silence themselves and are silenced by society. .... The research process had a profound transformatory effect on me in naming myself, for the first time, a daughter of a family of survivors. Similarly, their [i.e the participants] 'research' processes (which resulted in their books, poems, and films) had a transformatory effect on the narrators. .... 'Stories', or personal narratives, are the only means at our disposal to close the gap between ontology and representation.
>
> (2000: 6 & 3)

Thus, a creative research project, and the representation of it, may be transformative for the researcher, participants, and readers, and may also facilitate change at the social and cultural level. However, as Andrew Sparkes (2003) points out it would also be naïve to expect such writing strategies to be instantly transformative, and indeed my own ambivalences around my exposure within the sections "Policing the Body" have not as yet resolved themselves.

I will now consider the final, and perhaps the most fundamentally embodied methodological form, that is drama and performance.

- Drama and performance

Norman Denzin uses the term performance to describe either a reflexive or autoethnographic text in which the "writer as performer" (2003:14) creates an evocative, moving, and political discourse.

> Performance texts can take several forms: they can be dramatic texts, such as poems or plays; natural texts;.... ethnodrama .... or dramatic staged or improvised readings. .... Performance writing is poetic, dramatic, embodied .... It is writing that is meant to be read, performed. It is transformitive. It is a way of happening, a way of becoming.
>
> (2003: 9 & 94)

However, within this broad definition of performance there is a more specific category of performed methodology which shares many of the features of drama and performance art, particularly its radical or democratising politics (Denzin, 2003; McCall, 2000). It is this use of performance that radical sociologists - as well as feminists (see, Reinharz, 1992) - have engaged from the nineteen eighties onwards (McCall, 2000). These methods not only embrace the politics of performance art, but also directly embody meanings and messages, and in doing so add a further layer of experience to the research process through the audience witness and response. Indeed the act of witnessing, based on intersubjective connection, may have powerful and transformative effects as well as implications for the process of knowledge making (Smith, 2002; Sparkes 2002a). Andrew Sparkes addresses these issues as "obligations" of witness.

> These obligations include recognising our engagement in active, yet partial, meaning-making; recognising that, as witnesses, we will change others and our roles as change agents need to be considered with great intentionality and sincerity; we have to be open to change; we have to tell others about our experiences and perspectives; we have to listen to the interpretations of our witnesses; and finally we have to explore multiple meanings of equity and care and act to promote our understanding of these concepts.
>
> (2002a: 222)

These intersections of communication, knowledge production and witness are integral to performance pieces.

> The [performance] text [i]s written with the express purpose of being performed so that nuances of feeling, expression, and interpretation could be communicated more clearly. .... An audience

> that witnesses a performance of this text thus is subjected to much more than words: they see facial expressions, movements and gestures; they hear the tones, intonations, and inflections of the actors' voices; and they can feel the passion of the performers. The audience is moved away from the universal and forced to deal with the concrete - particular people in particular places in face-to-face encounters.
>
> (Ellis & Bochner, 1992: 80).

Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner (1992) used performance to convey "The Constraints of Choice in Abortion." They suggested that because abortion is construed as a taboo or immoral action, most of the writing about it ignores the actual experience of abortion and the complex issues it raises. They performed their own experience in order to bridge some of these gaps, as well as to facilitate some resolution and closure within their relationship.

> Recognizing that the literature rarely reflects the meanings and feelings embodied by the human side of abortion, we wanted to tell our story in a way that would avoid the risks of dissolving the lived experience in a solution of impersonal concepts and abstract theoretical schemes. .... As narrators and performers of this story, we gained a perspective on our experience and a sense of what it meant that we did not have before. The responses of others to our performance strongly suggest that they have been moved to feel and think about themselves and others in new and important ways and to grasp and feel the ambivalence, confusion, and pain associated with experiences of abortion like ours.
>
> (1992: 98-9)

Performance has not only been used to convey the layers of experience, but also as a means to include research participants in the dissemination of the project. In Ross Gray's (2002; 2002a) work with women and men living with cancer, he developed the research into a series of performance vignettes which were aimed at increasing the understanding and dialogue between cancer patients, their families and friends, and medical professionals. The success of this approach has resulted in Gray and his troupe touring North America with their staged ethnography, as well as producing a video version of it (2002a) to great acclaim from audiences of all backgrounds.

Cancer was also the subject - quite literally - of an earlier dramatisation of the work of the late Marianne Paget (in McCall, 2000). Emille Beck adapted Paget's work which described her misdiagnosis as "mental patient" rather than as suffering form cancer. In this piece cancer itself became a performer:

> Cancer wore a long white dress, carried an evening bag and was barefooted. She was both lovely and flirtatious. .... Throughout the performance, she pays close attention to the patient. She dresses her up, coming to one point to apply make up and at another to giver her a chocolate. The patient belongs to Cancer.
>
> (in McCall, 2000: 425)

As with Ross Gray's work, this creative representation deepens levels of engagement and conveys the experience through metaphors of body, movement and imaginary that are impossible in any other format. The audience, rather like the active reader, is invited to open up beyond the cognitive or analytical level and to enter into the experience as emotive, embodied, human subjects. For me, performance is intrinsically connected to the issues of embodiment, and the ethics of intersubjective and transformative methodologies that are central to my work. Indeed, performance, and particularly feminist performance art, have been described as central to an embodied sociology (see, Frank (1991) in chapter three, below). Further, considering performance as artistic practice, and particularly "the self-injuring performance artist" (Hewitt, 1997: 105), opens up some interesting connections between the experiences of body marking and embodied sociology, which I explore further in chapter seven.

> The 'marriage' of sociology and art provides, therefore, some fertile new terrain upon which evolving debates concerning the dilemmas of human embodiment - including the relationship between 'experience' and 'representation', 'reason' and 'emotion', 'aestheticism' and 'eroticism', 'reproduction' and 'resistance' and so on - can take root and flourish.
>
> (Williams & Bendelow 1998: 205-6)

Conclusion:

My initial quest for a research ethics that was based around equality, safety and participation, and the avoidance of objectification and appropriation of the participants and their experiences, has developed into a questioning of the ways in which knowledge is produced and represented, and has provided alternative context for exploring these issues. To me, creative methodologies not only capture the ethics of feminism, and the issues raised in terms of interactive and reflexive research, but also fundamentally connect with the position and ethics of embodiment (outlined in chapter 3, below). Feminist research practices form the foundation from which to build the embodied method, ethic and practice through which I understand body marking. Embodied methodologies, worked out through creative research and representational strategies, not only refigure issues of knowledge in terms of self-other relations but also in terms of disciplinary borders. Further, Andrew Sparkes (2003) describes how these methodologies shift the traditional borders between author and their audience, engaging the reader in an intersubjective experience, and in doing so challenging them/us to think beyond the norms of academic traditions. In this vein Art Bochner questions why within academia we continue to value only that which has moved beyond the personal, "arguments over feelings, theories over stories, abstractions over concrete events, sophisticated jargon over accessible prose" (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 748). He argues for,

> a radical transformation in the goals of our work - from description to communication. ..... As I see it the practices of human communication - the negotiation and performance of acts of meaning - should become our model for now we tell about the empirical world. .... Then we would feel compelled to produce narrative, evocative, dialogic texts that show human beings, including ourselves, in the process of creating, negotiating, and performing meaning in a world of others, making our way through a world that poses obstacles, interruptions, contingencies, turning points, epiphanies, and moral choices. .... The goal is to encourage compassion and promote dialogue. Actually, I would be pleased if we understood our whole endeavour as a search for better conversation in the face of all the barriers and boundaries that make conversation difficult. (in Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 748)

In this way the move towards creative modes of knowing and representing experience, and the incorporation of embodiment and lived experience within social theory, seem to me, to be parallel and complimentary processes. Creative methodologies "can help us to hold onto the fundamental embodiment of problems and keep us connected to the needs, pains, joys and desires of socially constructed and socially constructing bodies" (Sparkes, 2003: 63), conveying complexity and layers of meaning within an 'embodied tale' (Smith, 2002; Sparkes, 2003). The move from stories *of* the body to those which "come out of my body" (Sparkes, 2003: 63)[20] are integral to new and more holistic ways of thinking about the practices and purposes of social research. For Thomas Csordas the position of embodiment - as methodology, theory, ethic and practice - constitutes a "radical empiricism" (1994: 10) which is fundamental to my work and the integration of the methodological, theoretical and experiential dimensions of the issues I address. The theoretical issues of the body and the ethics of embodiment are explored further in chapter 3, but first, in order to avoid the privileging of analysis over experience, it is high time we met the research participants.

[20] This also reflects the contrast between a sociology *of* the body and an embodied sociology (see chapter three).

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2. Meeting the Participants:

Texts and contexts of research interactions.

Introduction.

'Meeting the Participants' seemed particularly apt as a title for this chapter in that it both describes my journey through the various research interactions, as well as setting out this section as the space in which the reader can encounter the research participants and the contexts that have shaped my work. Ideally I would have preferred this section to be placed immediately after the introduction and prior to the methodological chapter in order to fully prioritise experience. However, it became almost impossible to coherently tell the story in this sequence without huge amounts of cross-referencing and repetition.

In this chapter I have struggled to represent lived experience and real people within a method and context that works through an ethic of embodiment. Reflexivity has been a crucial strategy here, in that it allows the reader into both the context of the research interactions as well as facilitating and intersubjective connection with the participants.

The research that I have undertaken has been based on conventional ethnography as well as feminist participatory research practices and creative methodologies. In the context of the embodied, feminist methods and ethics, writing up and representing the lives and experiences of the participants has been extremely challenging for me. In both accessing and representing these individuals' personal stories, their pains and struggles, I have been deeply afraid of causing hurt to them, of misrepresenting them, or of violating their integrity, often to the point of paralysis. I have sought to represent the individuals in a way which is holistic, respectful and protective of them, while at the same time being able to fully and honestly work with their accounts. This has been eased to some degree by the nature of my connections with the six main research participants, and also because their stories were moving, inspiring and highly relevant to the evolution of my work. It was, however, much

harder to maintain this balance in terms of the participants of the traditional ethnographic work, and I think this is reflected in the form and content of the interactions as well as my representation of them. Even so, when having to select highly edited selections from the transcripts with which to represent the individual participants I was thrown back into the midst of my struggles and conflicts around representation. Thus, what appears below is an attempt to balance my anxieties within the conventions of academic practice. I hope that I have maintained enough reflexivity to undo any implied truth claim in relation to the interpretations and privileging of aspects of the participants' lives, and that this also facilitates the reader in accessing something of the context of my research and the individuals who have participated in it.

2.1 Uncomfortable Beginnings: The First Annual Dublin Tattoo Convention (November 2001).

I registered as a PhD student in October 2001, having spent the four years following my Masters Degree in residential social work. Academia and Trinity College came as rather a culture shock to me and I had no real sense of how the PhD process worked. Initially, for my research proposal to be accepted, I had been strongly advised that I should make significant amendments to it, as it was not deemed viable to work with both body modification and 'self-injury'. To split the issues, and in doing so to be presumed to adopt the more conventional methods of research, felt like a huge compromise, with which I was very uncomfortable. At this time of confusion and discomfort, I was also aware of the impending Tattoo Convention - the first to be held in Ireland - and I mentioned it to my then supervisor. She strongly persuaded me that not only should I attend, but I should also carry out ethnographic research including recording conversations with convention participants. As outlined in the previous chapter I had already developed a feminist understanding and ethics of research in which ethnography, and particularly covert ethnography, where the "ethnographic voyeur" (Tierney, 2000: 547) "stand[s] outside and above what they study" (Ellis & Bochner, 1996: 19), was the absolute antithesis. I had no idea at this stage how I could reconcile

ethnographic practices with the ethics that were so important to me, or indeed how much I could be compelled to work in this way. Reluctantly, I bought a small tape recorder and I also took my camera. Because I was so unsure of how far I was 'permitted' to pursue my own research interests in the course of the PhD I also recorded conversations with men as well as women at this convention. The disjunction between my feelings about research, particularly the ethnographic method, as well as the apparent polarity between academic and practitioner understandings of body modification left me feeling highly conflicted. I did not know how to resolve these issues for myself, let alone explain them or my role and intentions to the convention participants. Consequently I felt as if I was working covertly, and dishonestly relating to people. My discomfort was clearly a factor in shaping many of the interactions, particularly for example, with Felicity the tattoo artist (below).

The ethnographic experience, then, was destined to be quite difficult, not only for the 'academic' reasons I have outlined, but also because I am not the most gregarious person at the best of times, and I particularly struggle in groups, crowds, or meeting new people. I would, for very significant reasons (see Chapter four, Policing the Body part 1), also be very reserved about asking people questions about themselves, especially in relation to their bodies and/or personal experiences[1]. Further, I am not particularly enamoured with the tattoo studio or convention as a social space, I relate to them as a means to an end rather than an environment in which I would choose to spend time. Added to that I was more or less stalked for the weekend by an 'alternative' photographer, part of whose increasingly concerted attempts to pick me up included trying to find out if I shared his interest in SM. (I don't!).

[1] This does not mean that I am not interested in or open to hearing about these aspects of people's lives, but rather that I would never impose my agenda upon, or presume to interrogate them in this way.

Overall then, the convention was destined to be a huge challenge to me: I was carrying out a form of research which I had already identified as ethically and representationally problematic; in an environment in which I was uncomfortable; and through interaction techniques which were antithetical to my usual behaviour.[2] I was so genuinely upset by having worked in a way which was so contradictory to everything I believed in, I intended to abandon this aspect of my work all together and to erase it from the biography of my research. However, while my discomfort around all of this has never entirely abated, I have made use of some of the material I gained from this experience, both in terms of direct representation and also as the inspiration for the ethnographic fictions that appear at the end of the thesis. Indeed, I revisited the convention - now at a new location and in its third year - in 2003 specifically for this purpose.

Thus, in writing up the thesis I felt that I had to in some way acknowledge the role of this experience and these people within the research, and while it is counter to the ethics and processes that are central to my research, I cannot deny the experience all together. Finally, I resolved to include an account of my experience of the tattoo convention, and an introduction to the people who appear in various forms within my work, alongside the self-selecting participants. My preference would be that the individual participants appear first, but again there feels something dishonest about representing the research journey in anything other than chronological order. I must also reiterate that the level of participation was so limited at this stage that these representations are even more mediated through me than the indepth conversations which follow. I did not have any way near enough the level of engagement or kind of relationship with any of these participants to be comfortable in claiming to offer any true representation of them. Further, the circumstances of the interactions were such that it was unlikely that I would gain anything more than fairly superficial responses. I have not attempted to include or represent all of the individuals who I had discussions with, rather I have restricted

[2] I guess it is not altogether surprising that I started smoking again during this weekend! However, I like to think of this form of self-abuse in the context of my analysis of agency and 'self-injury' in chapter five.

myself to the few who appear throughout my final thesis. This does mean that some unique and interesting people are omitted, including for example Sampa, the founder of "The Church of Body Modification", as well as 'Spud', international award winner for most pierced man.

Finally, I have many photographs from the convention that people were happy for me to take and make use of. Nonetheless, I would feel ethically compromised if I were to present an image alongside the text of the conversation and in doing so identify each individual. Instead I have created a collage of images, flyers and tokens from the convention. The collage, in its messy, unstructured, chaotic format is, perhaps, aptly symbolic of my experience of the event and the participants, and my early relationship with my research. Although on reflection it does perhaps appear somewhat more cheerful than I felt at the time!

- Felicity

I was interested in talking to some of the women tattooists at the convention and on the Saturday I had a preliminary chat with two women who were based in a studio in England. When I returned to record the conversations with them on the Sunday they were much less forthcoming and one of them didn't really engage with me at all. The other woman, who I have called Felicity, somewhat reluctantly agreed to go ahead and talk to me. She said she was a bit "interviewed out" as the woman from RTE had just been talking to her[3] (their 'boss' had also told me that they often get students from the local university wanting to 'research' them).

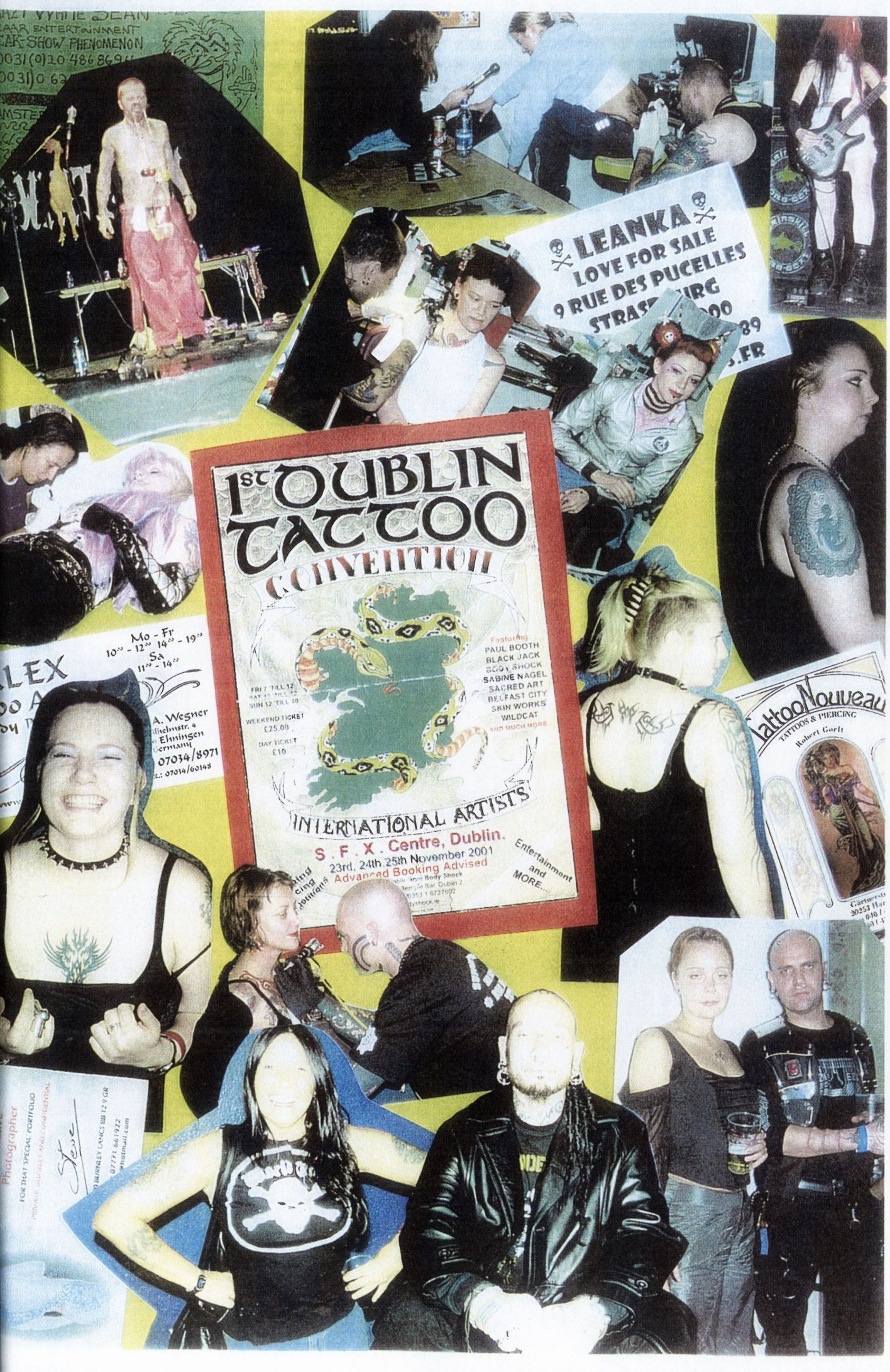
Felicity had an incredibly powerful visual appearance, her body, clothes, hair, accessories were cultivated into a stunning and intricate image. However, I was quite intimidated by her; her accent, her mannerisms, and the fact that she was not in great humour made me nervous of her. This was not helped by the fact she was wearing spiral black and green contact lenses, so it was impossible to get any sense

[3] In fairness I understood why she would have not been particularly forthcoming after that experience, the reporter in question was not using the most sensitive approach to her respondents - see top-centre photo in the collage.

of engagement through eye contact. My level of discomfort was obviously apparent and frustrating to her (exacerbating the situation) and I experienced her as quite domineering and interrogative towards me as a result. These excerpts from our conversation illustrate these dynamics at work. The conversation began with her asking me a series of questions to which my answers were faltering and inarticulate, increasing my embarrassment and her frustration.

> Felicity: So are there set answers that people answer you? Or is it all different? Or does it all fall within a parameter?
>
> K: I tell you what, it's really difficult because I'm like, I suppose I'm used to people asking me questions that I get really bored about, about my piercings like, 'Does that hurt?' or like '<u>Why</u> do you have them?' And its like I'm really trying <u>not</u> to ask those questions
>
> Felicity: Right
>
> K: But it's like, what I'm trying to do is like .. I guess I'm talking to everyone really differently, I guess I'm just doing it off the cuff, I s'pose .. I'm really interested in what it means for people, like altering the body, why they do it what sense of selves they have with it, loads of stuff really
>
> Felicity: So do you find everyone's different or do they fall into different categories?
>
> K: erm
>
> Felicity: Do you understand what I mean by that?
>
> K: So far, yeah, I've got people who come at it from quite a spiritual level saying it's something that's involved in like a connection of the soul, and some people who seem to be purely aesthetically interested in it - it's about an image, d'you know? It seems to be splitting a little bit down that line, but erm,
>
> Felicity: Is there a majority or is it pretty 50/50?

At the end of the conversation the same pattern repeated: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9 RUE DES PUCELLES
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Felicity: So I really wonder how many people you have spoken to and what they say

K: yeah, I mean like I say I've spoken to a few // Felicity: Most of them are quite shallow! [laughs, then corrects self] It's not shallowness, it's [lack of] life experience

K: And yeah I think for me it's kinda learning how to, just with each individual person pitch the conversation so // Felicity: Well I just took control of it

K: hu?

Felicity: I took control of it (K: yeah) by talking to you first (K: yeah) because it was easier

K: yeah, yeah so // Felicity: Because I could see you were nervous you see, and I was - and I just thought no I'm going to have to do this! [laughs]

- Aoife

Like Felicity, Aoife also spent much time asking me questions, but in her case about my tattoos and piercings rather than about my work. Our discussions felt somewhat easier, but I did wonder if this deliberate reciprocity made Aoife feel more comfortable in having shared with me. Aoife was the first person I spoke to at the convention and she was one of the few women, besides me, who attended the full weekend mostly on her own. Because of this and because of her very striking tattoos I noticed her almost immediately, so when she hovered with a pint across from the bar I took the opportunity to go over and chat to her. Aoife was also the only convention participant to whom I was able to return a transcript and have her okay it for my use. Our conversation, as would be expected between two strangers, was not particularly in depth, but she did raise some issues that connected with the themes I developed later in my work. Here she is describing the significance and motivation for two of her tattoos.

I'm really into Celtic stuff, you know, I'm an Irish Republican so Celtic stuff is very, very important. I started off with just a little one on my back, then I saw colour and I got into colour, and got the

> sacred heart which symbolises Catholicism. And then I gradually added on to this, and the one on my back is another Celtic knot, which is no beginning no end to the knot it goes on forever. [....] In the future, I hope to have, well I'm going to have, myself and my fiancée are going to have something done for our wedding as a gift to one another, it's like we have the rings but we're going to have another thing together.

- The Group

The bar area also facilitated my conversation with the group of four friends who had travelled from Scotland to attend the convention. As a group they were very noticeable not only from their visual appearance, but also because of their cheerful demeanours and how easily they engaged with the people around them. I felt interested in them for these reasons but also I think because as a group they reminded me of some of my goth/biker/punk friends from the past. The conversation with the four women was probably the easiest for me. Not only because one of them had written a thesis on tattooing herself, but also because of the energy and interaction between the women themselves. In this situation I was much more of a facilitator than an interrogator and the four prompted, chatted and laughed with each other and were relaxed and open. They all came across as very confident women, and often spoke about issues in pseudo feminist terms (see below in chapter seven). The group agreed how important it has become that their friend (C), who they describe as "an artist", inscribes their tattoos. In discussing his work they went on to consider the social implications of being tattooed women.

> 3: With C a few times [women] have come in who have maybe been about fifty odd, I think the oldest one is sixty-one years old, and she came in and got a tattoo done, and to me that's really brilliant because she was ne [not] able to do it then [e.g. when she was younger] and she's gone out and done it! Went a way and done it! And she's wanted to do this for years and years, and that's not something she could have done till then, and I think she's brilliant for doing it! It is a real individual [action]
>
> 4: Yeah, it's also kind of like now, while I've been writing my paper [on tattooing for BA in communication studies], I've been looking at

this about like belonging to a set culture, like a sub culture, and I suppose in a way we do because we're like a family unit

3: And we're all bikers, we're all bikers // 4: Aye we are. Although we're probably not a sub-culture we are probably, er, stereotypical! We are! // 3: Yeah // 4: That's what we do. // 3: Yep // 4:You know, [mocking tone] 'We tattoo hard, and we'll die hard!' // 3: Yeah we are! That's what we are!

All: [laughter]

4: But we're all normal really!

3: We all have families and

1& 4: Aye, yeah

1: Well except for you [to 2]

2: I don't do families!

All: [laugher]

3: Well, that's right - mine are all bigger than me now! [more laughing] I'm a granny as well! [laughter] // 1: Some kind of granny! // 3: No, I'm a nana, I'm a nana! [laughing] And I have a motorbike!

- Crazy White Sean

CWS is one of the people I have the most ambivalent feelings towards[4]. His performance, a 'freak show' was a series of 'shocking' actions he performed on his own body. These included wounding himself and rubbing his own excrement on to his bleeding body, nailing his penis to a block of wood, and hanging hooks and chains weighted with pool ball from his lower eye lids.[5] His act was disturbing, nauseating, and a bit fascinating to me, and my conversation with him, in his 'dressing room' on the Sunday afternoon, did not result in my feelings becoming

[4] CWS is the only person (apart from me) who appears in my work as himself. I have not attempted to annonymise his identity as he sees himself and his work as a public expression of who he is.

[5] Crazy White Sean has a website which provides details and images of his performances: www.crazywhitesean.com. Also, the photograph at the top left of the collage was taken during his performance.

any more resolved. On one hand he used political language to describe his motivations that appeared genuine, humanist and compassionate. I also like the way he overtly identifies his 'whiteness' disrupting the invisibility of the normative. Yet at the same time his manner and language could also be at best described as laddish and obnoxious, and at worst re-iterating many of the 'isms' he purportedly stands against. Perhaps it is precisely these contradictory aspects of himself that enable him to articulate his politics, compassion, and identity through exhibitionism, shock and self-torture. In this extract these ambivalences are evident in that while he tries to raise issues about cultural sensitivity and the mis-appropitation of traditional Maori tattoos, the language that he uses to do so is based within a normative and problematic sexual politics.

> Well the Maoris have a bit problem with the general New Zelanders [....] because they don't like seeing white people with facial Mokos and stuff because it's an actual rite of their culture (K: aha), and most of their tattoos tell stories of century's old things they each have passed down. Like for this chin tattoo a lot of [white] men have and it's a female tattoo! It means I give birth, you know! And then there's these like white guys walking through Western civilisation with this thing on their chin and everybody thinks, 'Wow, you're really cool', and then they go to NZ and everybody's like, 'Look at that homo!' You know, like that guy gives birth! You know - and not that homosexuals are a problem - just it would be like, if the guy's not trying to represent that and he's being, you know, I mean it's ridiculous. It would be like, a Maori not understanding the white culture at all and buying a pair of crotchless panties because he thinks it's good for his jungle outfit!

- Siobhan & Niamh

Two participants at the convention, who became important vehicles for expressing some of the themes and issues of my research, I have re-named Siobhan and Niamh. They both spent much of the weekend at the convention and Niamh in particular was very noticeable on account of the extent of her tattooing. Indeed, complimenting Niamh on her tattoos was the means by which I began a conversation with the two friends. And while much of what was recounted on tape was not particularly significant for me, the subsequent off-tape conversations

proved to be much richer sources for my work. As I was leaving the convention on the Saturday night Siobhan drew me aside. She told me that she was really glad I had spoken to them earlier and went on to say that the conversation had been really helpful for Niamh. She told me that despite her apparent confidence Niamh had a lot of issues with her body, and that our discussion had helped her to feel more positive about herself. In my thesis these two women eventually appear in the ethnographic fictions, but at the time I hoped that I would contact them again following the convention and continue to work with them. However, my efforts to this end elicited no response.

All of these issues made it ethically difficult for me to openly represent and discuss Siobhan & Niamh in my work and yet I was captivated by their experiences and wanted to make reference to them. Thus, in the ethnographic fictions as Niamh appears as 'herself' as narrated by her friend and embellished upon by me, and Siobhan I have replaced entirely. In her role I have cast a young woman (also significantly interpreted and embellished upon by me) who I had come into contact with as a residential worker. In this way I make use of what were effectively confidentialities in ways which enable me to protect the women from recognition, at the same time as recreating the essence of their original stories (as I understood them). The 'real' Siobhan and Niamh never participated to that degree, but I hope that Niamh's words here connect with the themes I worked into the ethnographic fictions.

> Niamh: I started getting tattooed about two years ago, when I started going out with my boyfriend cause he has a full body suit, and erm, I got interested through him. The back was my design, I started to draw it out about it about three years ago, and about a year later I thought that would make a good tattoo. I wanted something that wasn't too fussy, something that was striking that you could tell what it is from a distance away. [....] I've had a few negative reactions, older people generally, giving out that, you know, 'It's disgraceful to get tattoos'. But only one or two, mostly it's positive, mostly like, 'I can't believe you have the courage to get so much done', because I'm only twenty-one.

K: Right, right, and do you feel different about yourself since you've had the tattoos and piercings, does it make you feel different in any way about your body or yourself or

Niamh: Yeah, I suppose so. It makes me feel pretty, cause you never get, well you rarely get negative comments, its all like, 'Oh, that's wonderful work, very nice', so yeah it's cool!

K: Right, so it's like a really positive thing to have on your body?

Niamh: That's basically it, yeah.

2.2 Reclaiming the Feminist Approach.

Despite the next part of my research being based in the feminist aims and ethics which I had developed in my previous work, I continued to have many reservations about the ethics of using other peoples experiences for research purposes. My discomfort in encouraging disclosure, and my uncertainties about the viability of my work, meant that I was still largely uneasy carrying out research and tended to take a long time to follow up any potential contacts I had made. Even though I was working on a model of participation which included only self-selecting participants, and where I did not have set questions or an agenda for each conversation, I often still felt intrusive. In attempting to resolve my issues around these research interactions I began to formulate my role as facilitator or 'active listener' (rather than interviewer) and at no point attempted or intended to ascertain 'comparable data'. Thus, any patterns of experience that the participants share, or that connect thematically with my analysis are emergent and have developed as a result of what each woman *chose* to divulge, rather than as a result of my guiding their responses through specific questions. I did not ask for or include 'biographical information' aside from each participants age at the time of the conversation[6]. I omitted biographical details deliberately, since I believe that to specifically request and include particular details of a person's life is to pre-define which factors are relevant to, and shape, each woman's experience. Indeed, I demonstrate how this

[6] At the time of the conversation I also asked for each participant's occupation but have not included this information here.

has been particularly problematic in terms of research around sexuality, perversion and body marking in chapter seven.

In my research I prefer to let each participant define the relevant issues for herself, and for the details of her life to unfold through her own voice in accordance with her own priorities. Meeting the participants in this way also much more closely reflects the way in which social interaction is an unfolding process of coming to 'know' another person. The details of a person's life and experiences open up and fall into place gradually, and over time the reader comes to a more holistic understanding of each individual. This contrasts with the abbreviated biography or case study where deeply personal information is condensed into a gratuitous or salacious exposé of intimate 'highlights' of someone's life, in a way which would be completely inappropriate in any other context[7]. Thus, a crucial part of attempting to facilitate a respectful and holistic representation of the participants which maintains their integrity, is to enable them to gradually emerge before the reader, who is simultaneously learning about both the individuals and the issues at the heart of my research, in a process which is intended to be reflexive, moving and interactive.

During the two-year period in which I recorded six research conversations I began to feel a little more at ease with myself within the process. I also received some helpful reassurances from the participants, such as Maeve, who after our conversation responded, "I enjoyed that". Nonetheless, I was still relieved when I came to the decision that the sixth conversation would be the final one.

Because I had engaged with each woman and her account of her experiences with the intention of encouraging her to develop the themes, issues and analysis in a way

[7] These crude mis-representations of individuals are also often the format of medical or social work 'case notes'. It was interesting to see how the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act, which gave clients the right of access to their files, radically changed record-keeping practices, and even inspired a number of comprehensive training programmes about how to represent individuals in ways which were not offensive and detrimental to them!

that was relevant and meaningful for her, I hoped to remain true to this in editing and presenting each account. However, the task of concisely presenting each account in a way which allayed my fears of appropriation and misrepresentation proved impossible. Ethically, I would be more comfortable if I were able to more or less present the entire transcript, but of course space, academic conventions, as well as issues of confidentiality prevent me from doing so. I find editing the transcripts and selecting which sections to use very difficult, yet nor would I feel comfortable in providing a summarised 'case study' of each woman's account reformulated into my own words. Editing necessarily means presenting only snippits and selections, and missing out much rich detail, and for me, the editing process often feels like a violation of the depth and integrity of the individual. Ronit Lentin (2000) also struggled with such issues and chose to make extensive use of excepts from research transcripts in order to reflect as fully as possible her participants' accounts and understandings of their experiences. When working from this position, it seems to me that one or two of the transcripts could actually provide the breath and depth of human experience for one thesis, and that 'the numbers game' - that is how many 'comparable quotes' does is take before something becomes 'true' - is in both senses of the word, academic[8].

I finally achieved a satisfactory level of compromise at my second attempt to work out how to allow the participants to speak in their own words. In all of the conversations I had deliberately, before I switched off the tape, asked each participant if there was anything she wished to add, ask, comment on, or, that she felt should be included within my research. I initially considered using those sections of the conversations here, since it seemed the most pertinent means of privileging the participants voices and experiences. However, for some of the

[8] That questions of accuracy of representation are levelled at creative and qualitative researchers in accusations of "making it up" (Sparkes, 2002: 15), and not at more mainstream quantitative and qualitative research is to me somewhat contentious. Making statistics, equations, and rigid categorisations from the range and complexity of human experience seems to me much more an act of 'creative fiction' that using storytelling formats or language to convey experience. Indeed, uncritical reliance on 'the numbers game' where numerical quantification equates with validation of knowledge can be regarded as one of the primordial fictions of social science research.

participants those sections were to fit elsewhere into my work, and I was left once again with the dilemma of how to equitably introduce and represent the participants. I then struck on the notion that there had also seemed to be a spontaneous theme that arose during most of the conversations, which was the experience of the first tattoo, and that I could use this as a way of introducing each participant. In some cases I also include further comments if there was a particular issue or experience they wished to highlight which is not referenced elsewhere.

I hope, then, that each woman appears as a whole person and that her individuality and analysis of her experiences are foregrounded. However, these excerpts remain mediated by me in that I not only edited and selected them, but also that they arose from the interaction dynamic between each participant and myself.

The Participants.

The first two research conversations took place some time after an initial unplanned meeting and opportunistic, preliminary discussion occurred. The delay in following up from these initial meetings was largely due to my anxieties about conducting this kind of primary research, and consequently avoiding taking any constructive action to this end.

With hindsight I am struck by the ironies of what transpired in these two conversations, particularly in light of the theoretical issues I had been formulating around the assumptions and reading of the female body (discussed in chapters three, four and five). Neither Mary nor Ciara discussed experiences of 'self-injury' in the preliminary conversations and I did not expect them to do so during the research, however, in both of the subsequent conversations it transpired that 'self-injury' was something they had both experienced. This not only re-iterated the issues and connections that were of interest to me, but also the methodological implications of reading the body and the unpredictability of interactions and their outcome.

Ciara.

One of the more positive consequences of the tattoo convention was that it indirectly sparked the beginnings of my original research agenda. After two stressful days at the convention, each of which ended with CWS's performance, I was feeling desperate for a change of environment. I knew there was a queer event taking place that night across the other side of the city and that some people I knew would be there. The predominantly female, low key, environment felt like exactly the change in atmosphere I needed. It was here that I met Ciara, we had met briefly once or twice before though the same group of friends, but this was the first time we had an in depth conversation. I told her about my experience of CWS's performance (including my research interests) and she recounted a similar experience when she had innocently/mistakenly attended a *Theatre of Hate* performance. We discussed the gendered nature of these kinds of performances (the one she had witnessed included a simulated rape) and compared them with the work of female artists such as Orlan and Abramovic[9] whose bodily inflictions we agreed seemed to have much less of an outward direction of aggression. Finally, Ciara also told me about her own tattoo and some of the issues and experiences which were present within it. I asked her if she would be interested in recording a conversation as a part of my research and she readily agreed and I took her number. However, it was some months later, and after two subsequent meetings that I finally arranged to do the research with Ciara.

The conversation took place over coffee one Saturday afternoon in Ciara's house when she was twenty-nine years old. The discussion was somewhat halting to begin with as I tried to prompt the spontaneous conversation we had previously had. When we were discussing the *Theatre of Hate* performance (specifically that the performer burnt himself) the conversation took a direction and theme that I had not expected and Ciara became much more animated. Ciara described to me how she had burnt herself as a child and provided many poignant and valuable insights that

[9] Orlans work is discussed in sociological terms in the collections edited by Kathy Davis (1997) and Mike Featherstone (2000), and Abramovic is discussed by Kathy O'Dell (1998).

appear throughout my work. I remember that I was quite affected by a number of experiences Ciara disclosed. At the time of our research conversation we were pretty much the same age, and I remember how impressed I was with how together she seemed in spite of very difficult life experiences. I was also awed by the way in which she was able to speak about these experiences without becoming caught up in the self-negating emotions that so often become internalised as a result. I was also taken aback by the number of experiences we seemed to share (not all of which are recounted here), I felt that she was able to own her story in ways which I could not, and I became increasingly confused about my location within this project.

Not long after the conversation, Ciara and her partner emigrated, but she did spend some time reading through the transcript and making some clarifications. Here, by way of introducing her I have selected the extract where she is discussing her first tattoo, and what it signifies to her. I like this extract not only for Ciara herself, but also because she touches on issues of visual and tactile representation, a theme which arises later as integral to a feminist metaphysics of embodiment (see Young (1990) in chapter three, below).

> So in a way it [the tattoo] is a kind of a mark of pain that I've been through. [....] It's funny - but now I feel like I want one where it can be seen, primarily by me [laughs] cause I can't [see it]. Like a lot of the time I regret I don't have one that I can see. And, I just bought a new swimsuit when I was away for the weekend, and I tried it on and O [partner] was with me, and like it was fine. And then after we left the changing room I was like, 'BUT CAN YOU SEE MY TATTOO?' [both laugh] You know, and she was like, 'No', and I was like, 'Damn!' [more laughing] [....] Cause I never really see it and I don't like that. But I can, interestingly enough, I can feel it. And E's [Ciara's friend] has gone flat into her skin and you can't feel it (K: aha) but I can feel mine. I can touch it, and it's still raised (K: oh right) even though I've had it for two years. And I was with a friend who has quite a few tattoos and I was saying to her, 'Yours are all flat and mine's not flat!' [laughs] And she was saying, 'Don't worry it will go flat.' But it hasn't and I don't actually think it will. And I was thinking that maybe that's because it's kinda fattier here [gestures to place on body where E has her tattoo] and where I have

> it there's no actual fat it's just skin and then bone, and so maybe it's sinks into the fat and (4). Cause it's not going flat you can still feel it. Which, actually, I like now because I think I don't really see it very often, so I can feel it, and it's like yeah .. I want another one.

Ciara showed me a picture of the design that she was interested in and I asked her to tell me more about her choice.

> C: Because it's pretty! [laughs] and I like the shape of it.
>
> K: Right, yeah, it's quite round again isn't it?
>
> C: Yeah and I like the kind of like symbolic side of it as well. [describes spiritual tradition the image is related to and it's meaning in that belief system / faith] So it kind of like symbolises that kind of progression and .. kind of I don't know, goal towards being enlightened (8) something like that . [....] But it's, often symbolised as being kind of sexual as well, I think, kind of like a strong kind of female, female sex. [....] It has a kind of tie to femininity as well and female sexuality and things like that (K: right, right, right) and anything that I've heard about it is positive, so, [laughs] I like it.

Finally, one of the issues around body marking that was important for Ciara was the relationship between gender and power. Ciara told me about a friend of hers, of Burmese heritage, who had recently met women from her region with extensive facial tattooing. Ciara's friend initially thought that the tattooing was a traditional cultural practice of which she was ignorant. However, it transpired that the women had only recently developed this practice of tattooing each other, specifically in order to prevent their being forced into the Thai sex industry, their marked faces made them un-sellable.

> Women were doing that to stop themselves being abducted and taken into Thailand for the sex industry, [i]t was very common to either be sold or taken, mostly to Thailand, I think but possibly other places around Thailand, and essentially being kept as slaves there. But if they had these markings, the tattoos, then they weren't taken. Because I think it was mostly for western tourists and they wouldn't want somebody who had these markings, [....] the way they had it they were just seen of being as having as of no value. So they could live their lives without having to worry about that.

Mary.

I had already met Ciara and discussed her participation in the research (although I had not acted on it) when the preliminary conversation with Mary took place. I had met Mary a few times prior to this conversation, again through mutual friends. On this particular meeting Mary arrived with her nose pieced and a tattoo visible on her body. While I was talking to Mary I complimented her on them and we talked at length and eventually negotiated her participation in my work. In between the preliminary and taped conversations Mary deliberately reflected more deeply about the issues involved in her body marking practices. In our initial conversation she had outlined how her experience of participating in a protest in Genoa had been crucial to her decision to get the tattoo and a new piercing. However, during the period between the discussions, Mary felt that there were additional experiences that were being articulated through her body marking. These included the break up of her marriage and her subsequent diagnosis of clinical depression and her recovery from both experiences which culminated in her attending the protest. Mary, who was thirty-eight at the time, was articulate and considered in her account and talked openly and at length with little prompting or input from me. The research took place at Mary's house, she made dinner and we shared a bottle of wine before I started recording the conversation.

Mary clearly defined the decision to mark her body in a way which symbolised the experiences which had such a profound impact on her (a theme which recurs for many of the participants). I have used Mary's account of these experiences and particularly her participation in the protest at Genoa to illustrate the ways in which her politics are so important to her and integral to the ideals she pursues, as well as being embodied through the tattoo. On returning to Ireland from Genoa Mary was determined that the first thing she would do was to get a tattoo and she had a huge sense of urgency about this.

> So I started this tour of tattoo places! [laughing] All around town, and people were saying to me, 'No we cant do you today but there's an <u>apprentice</u> somewhere if you're <u>really</u> desperate!' And I would

have! [both laugh] I wouldn't have cared who it was that wrote on my body! But the first place I went into I found [the symbol] - I was looking through all the tattoos - I had a sort of an idea [of the design she wanted]. I knew it was like almost like a marriage[10] that this was something that I was going to have to literally live with for the rest of my life. So I wanted it to mean, to be able to bring a lot of my experiences from that year; the depression, everything else. I certainly wanted something, a mark on my [place on body] that I would know exactly what it meant, and would symbolise that for me. So I started to look through the tattoo books, and there was [smiling] wild, wild pictures that were very tempting! [both chuckle] But it was not really for me in my virginal state! [describes tattoo and it's meaning] And the minute I saw that, the minute, I just said, 'That's it exactly!' Because although Genoa in a lot of ways was a really, really terrifying experience and as somebody who I suppose went very naively, it was a eye opener. But the positive of the whole situation [was] the amount of people who showed up to protest, the amount of people who looked after each other, just the people, the way people without boundaries without politics looked after each other and looked out for each other, would just would have convinced me that another way of life is entirely possible! If people knew about it, or were free to live their lives. So this symbol [describes] was just perfect. But what it is also, [description] it was also used as the journey of the soul from its beginning through to maturity right through life. So everything literally everything was there.

So I eventually found this guy off [name] street and he said he would do it for me the next day. And I was at the stage where I was really going to cry! [laughs] And, god, it's the little things - cause I really wanted it done, and I said, 'Ok'. So I went to [name] market, so the day wasn't lost [smiling] and got my nose pierced. Because I always found like erm, - before there was always a couple of things I would sort of do before, like I would dye my hair, I'd get my hair cut, I'd get my ears pierced, so there would be something that I would do if there was a change immanent it would be like there was another hole in my ear or whatever. So I figured I'd get my nose pierced, I hadn't done that before and when I got it done it was like 'Yeah, that's good! Now tattoo tomorrow'.

Mary was delighted with the tattoo and described how it had a positive and powerful impact on her. The sense of self that she embodies through the tattoo

[10] In some ways this seems to me to be ironic since her marriage break up has been so central to the experiences she is discussing. However, on a deeper level perhaps both the experience and impact of the marriage, despite its impermanence, is life-long.

constitutes a private subjectivity as well as a public self, and is enmeshed in both her own and others' responses to it.

> I had to wait for a couple of days, until I could have a proper look at it. And I spent, I'd say about the next two weeks walking around half sideways anywhere I found a mirror [both giggle] to look at my tattoo, I was so PROUD. And I couldn't believe the amount of people who noticed it as well, and the amount of people who commented on it. It was like the minute I had it done it was like this is something I should have done years ago, and it was every thing that I wanted. I really felt that the whole of last year, kind of gathered together left a bit of a mark on me, well the accumulation of it when it all came to a head, and to have kind of a physical representation of that.

René.

René was someone who I had known for some years at the time of the research conversation which took place when she was thirty-three. I had first met her when we were both living and working in Dublin and it was at the point when I had begun to think about the relationship between body-modification and 'self-injury' in a critical and feminist context. By the time I began my PhD René was no longer living in Ireland and because of this she initially became involved with a different aspect of my research (which I subsequently discontinued). I had conducted the two previous conversations and while I found them to be incredibly valuable, rich sources I remained very uncomfortable with the ethical and practical issues of continuing this type of work. In experimental mode I decided to try 'virtual participation' where participants could *write* their own account and thus maintain the final editorial control over them (in contrast to the process of my transcribing and editing conversations). I e-mailed René with the consent and commitment forms, a brief outline of my research interests and a series of prompts so that she could write about her experiences[11].

[11] The e-mail response was the first time René disclosed to me her experiences of 'self-injury', and I think the reasons for her silence in the face of our otherwise candid conversations becomes clear in the excerpts in chapters five and six.

However, René was back in Ireland at the end of 2002 and as I would be spending time with her during her return I asked her if she would have a taped conversation with me. She agreed happily. The conversation took place just after Christmas in the north west of Ireland in a holiday house borrowed from a friend of René's, and where we (René, her partner and myself) were staying. Despite having discussed the issues and my research with René and the fact that she had already completed the e-mail, I still felt very reluctant to 'do' the research conversation. René, however, was very positive and encouraging and we finally taped the conversation one evening. We used the e-mail to guide us and refresh our memories but the conversation was mostly spontaneous. René's partner was also present (they both expressed a preference for this) and we were all drinking alcohol[12].

In my research (and elsewhere[13]) René described in detail her experiences of body modification and articulated a very coherent feminist analysis of her motivations for these practices and their relationship with femininity and sexuality. At different stages I have felt both personally and intellectually drawn to René's arguments. She defines tattooing as a form of resistance and empowerment in a feminist context which negates pathologizing views of these practices. Over a period of time, René has had a considerable impact upon the ways in which I have thought about these issues, however, a significant divergence in our views became apparent (in chapter five) when we talked about body marking in the form of 'self-injury'.

Because I have felt so connected to René's understandings of her experiences and actions and because we talked at such length it has been particularly difficult for me to reconcile myself to an 'edited highlight' here. However, as I am working around the theme of the first tattoo I have selected two sections where her account is connected to this experience and the specific symbolism of her tattoos. Her first

[12] Having smoked my way through the tattoo convention, I drank my way through many of the subsequent research conversations! Happily, it is now more than three years since I finally quit smoking and over a year since I last drank alcohol.

[13] René has participated in at least one other piece of research about women and body modification.

tattoo was an integration and celebration of her sense of herself and her body through the symbolism of her name.

> When you get a tattoo, a first tattoo especially, I mean they're all important but the first one is like you struggle and struggle and you try and figure out what to get, and are like, 'I'm not sure what to get'. And people talk about this for years, because they feel like it has to be the PERFECT image, you know, (K: aha). It has to be this perfect thing. So I had to struggled and struggled, and I finally came up with this symbol which I actually had read about which was the meaning of my name. And so I decided to get this tattoo and then I had several other tattoos done along a similar theme. But to me, I had never identified with my name, I had always felt like it didn't fit me, or it was too exotic, I always felt like I was too plain or something, or it was too ethnic, and I was just really waspy[14]. I never really felt like, I know this sounds really strange, but I never really felt like I was good enough for my name, and so somehow getting tattoos which represented my name was a way of saying I am this goddess or I am this image, and I am beautiful, and exotic and all these things, so it was very important to me.

This stating of her name, the re-claiming of her sense of self, was also integral to a later tattoo.

> I had four [tattoos] and then I had this break up with this woman and I went out and I got a tattoo. Like I just, I remember at the time writing in my journal 'I want there to be some space on my body which that she doesn't know about' - isn't that stupid? I felt like I had to // K: it's not stupid. // R: Because I was battling with, like I had been in this lesbian relationship and all of a sudden I was out of the relationship and 'Was I really a lesbian anymore?' I actually went through this whole thing like 'Oh my god I'm not in a relationship and what if I'm not actually a lesbian?' Which was just utter ridiculousness [incredulous] but I had so much self doubt that I was actually doubting all of the things about my identity because she had left me and I wasn't in this relationship anymore and I had to find new ways - some ways [to self-identify]- So in an EFFORT to reclaim my inner identity and to reclaim myself as an individual I went mad [laughs] and got it done!
>
> K: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And how do you feel about that particular tattoo now? Do you // R: I love it! Yeah! It's good. It's funny cause you know a lot of people get tattoos because they want to represent the person that they're with [K: laughs] with their name,

[14] White, Anglo Saxon, protestant.

> a name like Joey, or, you know, or [both laugh] Marie, or you know, they get their lover's name and they have to get it lazered surgeried off when they're with someone else, and I was doing exactly the opposite! It was like mine was to say my name again, (K: aha) to have my name on my body again.

Finally, René described how her own sense of embodiment was shaped by particular familial circumstances, which were to me fascinating and relevant beyond, I think, the level René deemed them to be.

> Well one thing that's not something I talked about before [....] I mean I don't think it would be particularly interesting but .. one thing I was thinking about in relation to the beginning was that - this is weird but - my mother is disabled, she's an amputee, she lost her leg when she was seven. And I grew up with this really weird idea, I don't know where it came from, this sort of superstition that I was also going to lose my leg when I was seven. I always had this I idea that because I was her daughter that I was going to loose a leg, that that was going to happen to me. And I don't know how that's related, but I feel like being the daughter of a disabled person has definitely shaped my view, somehow, of the world and my body and stuff (K: aha). And then I turned seven, and all year I was waiting! And then of course nothing happened! [both laugh] I'm still here with both my legs! [....] And then it's funny because I remember writing in the e-mail what DID happen when I was seven, for my seventh birthday, I got my ears pierced! // K: Oh god, yeah [fascinated] // R: and, I had really wanted that, and it used to be very formal, a long time ago (K: aha) like you made an appointment with a DOCTOR and it was your paediatrician that pierced your ears [smiling]
>
> K: Oh my god! It was a doctor that did it?!
>
> R: Yeah, yeah
>
> K: That's very interesting isn't it?

Lucinda

The research conversation with Lucinda (consistent to form) took place a significant amount of time after our initial conversation. The original conversation had taken place in a pub where we were part of a larger group of people and where

Lucinda and I had ended up discussing my work. She was particularly interested in my approach to women who engage with different bodily practices because of her own experiences and interests. We talked about tattooing and cosmetic surgery as well as her experience of bulimia and her ideas about the perpetuation of 'body dysmorphia'. Lucinda, who was twenty-four at the time, had a lot to say and was forthright and articulate, so I asked her if she would be interested in having the conversation 'on the record' for my research and she agreed. Lucinda never indicated to me that she had any experience of 'self-injury', however, her description of her experiences of bulimia and tattooing seemed both pertinent and relevant to my work, particularly in that it transpired during the conversation that her experience of bulimia led to irreversible marking of her flesh. Further, her management[15] of her eating practices and the changes which that brought about for her, were also connected to her experience of tattooing (in chapter seven).

The research conversation took place in an empty office in Lucinda's place of work and began with Lucinda telling me about her first and subsequent tattoo, so this was a very easy reference point for selecting an excerpt here. Because Lucinda had some experience of academic research I felt rather self-conscious about my work, my approach to it, and the methodologies I was attempting to incorporate. Lucinda, however, seemed very positive about what I was doing, and even perhaps, keen to fulfil my expectations as she perceived them to be. The dynamic between us was friendly, jovial, and almost conspiratorial in the ways in which we sniggered at the conventions of femininity and normative understandings of body modifications.

> The [describes tattoo], I got that done when I was in E about four, three years ago. My friend L - I love her to bits she lives in N now - and she has loads of tattoos and I had just met her at that stage, and it was something I had always wanted to get done but I didn't because [mock serious] 'It's not very attractive, I'd have it for the

[15] Lucinda uses 'management' intentionally to reflect how she experiences bulimia. She said "I don't believe in recovery I believe in management. (K: aha) I believe that - I think I'll always be a person who has an obsessive personality or an eating disorder - I think you just manage it. (K: aha) I don't think it's completely cured, I think it's like alcoholism in a kind of way."

> rest of my life', you know, and I wanted something that actually meant something. [....]
>
> I think it was just strategic at that time, though, when I was really happy. [....] Like I think [states year] was one of the happiest years in my entire life, that was a brilliant year .. brilliant year. [....] I was just really happy and that was when I got my tattoo.[....] [It was] when I became really comfortable with my own skin. I was really happy with myself. I was really, really happy and comfortable with myself. And that's why when people presume that it's to do with kind of that you didn't like yourself, like with self-harm, that it's a form of self-harm or that you wanted to rebel against something or that you wanted the pain, you know, the tattoo to mark the pain you were in inside either psychologically or emotionally or (K: mm) for me it's a load of crap! Like, I did it when I was really happy with myself (K: aha) and I think I wanted to kind of celebrate my body, and so I wanted to put something on it, and I think the [symbol] represents that. [Symbol] is about centeredness and wholeness and the unity of the different shapes in one symbol (K: aha). And I think for me, that was why it meant a lot to me to get [symbol] cos I was really centred and really focused, and really, like, you know, not like deliriously happy singing in the streets kind of thing, but I was really comfortable with my own skin (K: aha) and [symbol] to me represented that.

Towards the end of the conversation she re-stated this experience, this time specifically in the context of my research and also normative perceptions of body marking.

> I got the tattoos done I felt completely happy with my body, and it's not about you know, like you don't have piercings because you're traumatised internally and you need to show the world how much you're hurting on the outside because people can't see how much you hurt inside and that kind of stuff (K: aha). And it really annoys me when you hear people say that kind of stuff, I get really tired of it when people say that to you, it's just like [tut] they've been reading a bit too much Freud!

Lucinda also tackled some of the issues of meaning and representation within linguistic structures of knowledge. In her attempt to challenge some of the notions around gender and eating practices she critically addresses the formulations of disorder.

> There are a lot of men with eating disorders and body dismorph- I don't like that term body dismorphism. It's like to morph like you've morphed into this like weird alien, you know, you're not normal! That's why I don't like the word morphism [....] Like it is some kind of disease (K: mm), like a dis.ease (K: aha), or an eating dis.order (K: aha). You're not working properly.

Maeve.

The experience of getting to know Maeve, and also to have her participate in my research, was very significant for me. Because of her experiences of the ways in which people responded to her non-normativity[16], I found a sensitive and supportive ally for the issues I was beginning to formulate for myself[17]. My conversations with Maeve laid the foundations for utilising my experiences and connections with Maeve, René, and Elaine in "Policing the Body" (chapters four and six, below).

However, the environment of our taped conversation was far from ideal. Mave was pushed for time and so the most convenient location for us to meet was the windowless and airless common-room of the sociology building in Dublin city centre. The surroundings were made even less pleasant by the fact that the building was being renovated at the time and so most of the furniture had been removed! Despite the environmental issues the conversation flowed easily, and I felt mostly at ease within it. Maeve was personally and politically interested in the issues we discussed and was insightful and informative on many levels. As with René, it is rather heartbreaking to only be able to provide such limited excerpts from our conversation to represent such a vibrant person.

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[16] During our conversation Maeve used descriptive terminology for her corporeality, but asked me to mask it so that her identity would not be revealed, thus, I use the phrase 'non-normative' throughout.

[17] Specifically in terms of my disability, but also more generally about non-normative embodiment.

The conversation began with me inviting Maeve to talk about her tattoos[18]. Maeve's decision to have a tattoo was specifically related to marking the end of a difficult period in her life.

> I had it at the time because I'd come through - I had it after my first year of university. I had come through a difficult emotional time in terms of, erm, .. whether I wanted to .. whether I wanted to be in the world and to - And I sort of had had, was having issues with my body and all sorts of things, and it was kind of just as a marker I guess, a sort of a marking of time, of a passage of a particular time. The second one I had done was about six months ago and I had that done on my [describes place on body] and it was another kind of a marker.

Maeve described how her non-normative body means that she experiences her corporeality in complex, ambivalent and often problematic ways. This is reflected in terms of how she feels about herself in relation to the conventions of femininity as well as in the ways in which people respond to her, and particularly the ongoing negative interpretations of her embodiment that she is subject to. In this way Maeve frequently described this marking of her body in terms of re-claiming her body, as beautifying and redefining it.

> I knew that I had an urge to decorate, I guess with my first tattoo the more I think about it, it was to do with making, with actually exposing some kind, or making beautiful my skin; transforming [non-normative] flesh and making it beautiful.[....] When I got that [tattoo] it was a mark, to mark something, it was to mark my body with a kind of reminder and to decorate and to make beautiful part of my body. [sigh] And it sort of had a whole lot of symbolic stuff like you know [describes tattoo] on my [describes place on body] and all those kinds of things. [....] I think the experience of having a tattoo for me has been a positive experience and it's something that I get a lot of pleasure from, but I think that also I do see them as ways of marking out and tracing back certain moments. And people talk about writing on the body and all those sorts of things, and I do think that there's something to that, and I do think that there's something about marking out those experiences really.

[18] At this stage I had begun to think this may be a good ice-breaker for the research discussions and to utilise it where possible.

Maeve also described how her relationship with body marking is temporal, firstly in that the tattoos do not always instil positive feelings within her, and secondly in that her understanding of them changes along her life-course.

> Sometimes when I catch sight of one of my tattoos I feel really dirty. I feel like, almost like I've, like I'm embodying those ideas like why would I decorate something like that, that I've only made it uglier rather than more beautiful, and other days that, I feel that they are really beautiful. It's not always (K: aha) a consistent response. [....]
>
> But the more you think about them and the older you get the more you grow with your tattoos, the way in which they transform you, and the way you embody their meanings and the way they mean to you is different. It always changes.[....] There is definitely a kind of passage. A journey that this has all kind of taken, and I definitely think they're connected. That you only kind of come, you only sort of decide to be the person, well you really are only the person that you are as a product of all your experiences. And so the reasons that you have to be angry, or the reasons that you have to adorn, or to be made beautiful, or to be visible in different ways have got to have come from experiences of your body that have been negative, or have been difficult, or have been other, at some previous point in your life. So definitely, you know, there is a line that connects all those different experiences together and marks them out.

Elaine

Elaine came into my research via a mutual friend who had told her about my work. Elaine is the only participant who agreed to become involved without us having had an unplanned meeting and a spontaneous conversation. Elaine's friend felt that she would be very interested in the perspective I am working from and that it resonated with her experiences. Prior to the research conversation Elaine and I had some halting e-mail interactions, and we also met each other at an event where it subsequently transpired that neither of us were sure whether we should mention the research!

Finally, we arranged to meet and I travelled to the North of Ireland to catch up with her, and it was at this arranged meeting that we had the preliminary conversation.

We were both a little nervous, Elaine the more so on account of her having arranged a 'date' for straight afterwards with someone that she had recently met. However, she was extremely forthcoming in relation to her experiences and we must have talked for the best part of two hours. Her primary concern about the research was the level of confidentiality she would be afforded, she had recently done an interview with a magazine, who, on publication failed to protect her anonymity to the degree which she had been promised. I reassured her on that front, and in order to giver her some sense of my approach to research ethics I gave her a copy of the paper that I had recently written, *Who's Hurting Who? The Ethics of Engaging the Marked Body* (2005). It was sometime after this that we finally arranged the actual research conversation and once again I travelled to meet her. We drank coffee[19] in a quiet hotel lounge and spent some time chatting more generally both before and after the tape was switched off. At the time it was the Marching Season, and at one point our conversation was interrupted by the noise of a passing band, and, in the spirit of voyeuristic ethnography, I briefly abandoned the conversation with Elaine - who was entirely unmoved by the whole event - to go and watch.

Like Maeve, Elaine had a profound effect on me in many ways. I was awed by her courage, her struggle to survive, and the bravery with which she coped with the consequences of her struggles. Our conversation was particularly significant in that she drew me back into the messy reality of body marking and away from the tidy abstractions of disembodied theorisation. Before meeting Elaine I had drifted away from some of the lived realities at the heart of my work, which were also becoming apparent to me within the contradictions between the sociological 'theory building' I was undertaking and the training sessions I was facilitating in the social/voluntary sector. Elaine brought me back to the centre of this fragmentation and thus provided a bridge into the final development of my work. From here on I became much clearer about the perspective I was working from and the ways in which

[19] At this stage both Elaine and I were alcohol free.

embodiment as theory, ethic, method and experience was crucial to understanding body marking.

During our conversation Elaine talked mostly about her experiences of 'self-injury' rather than in detail about any specific tattoo, so in this extract she describes her experiences of body marking and the ways she understands the differences between them.

> I guess the point that I would make about the difference between very actively chosen tattoos and piercings is that I would see those as being a positive way of, I guess, modifying your body. Whereas self-harm whilst it might have positive implications in that your coping at the time, you're not really doing it to re-claim anything, you know, you're doing it as a means of coping. Where as for me there is a quite clear difference between getting a tattoo that feels like it's part of you, it's making a positive statement, and it's almost like adding to you. Whereas I guess the way that I would see self-harm, certainly after stopping using it as a coping mechanism - as it kind of takes away from you, you know, (K: aha). But tattoos and piercings to me would be something that I very actively thought about and something that is very, very personal and spiritually connected, you know, at very specific times and very specific reasons.
>
> That's not to say that people who have tattoos and piercings are all doing it for that motivation (K: aha). Or that people don't - well I'm sure there are people that would use them in a slightly self-harming way, but usually probably only if they still are using self-harm things as a, you know, as a mechanism for coping or something, because it would be a more socially acceptable way for them to undergo some kind of pain (K: mmhm). But I think, for me I would say that they were different things. My tattoos are all positive kind of re-affirming things to make me, to remind you, I think, or to make a positive claim over something that was negative. [....] I think I would see them as an extension of myself and not something that's just there. I always feel that they're a part of me cos they've all come from quite personal reasons. (K: aha) I can't really explain it. They're not a decoration (K: aha) they're more part of me, now, that's how I would describe them, and I think there is quite a big difference between that and ['self-injury', and] piercing [which] is again slightly different to me. Because I had piercings and I have taken some out because I've not felt the need or whatever, the reason to have them anymore. It's like I was playing with my body by having it, or I was kind of just experimenting with my body by

> piercing things through it. Some of them I've taken out cos I haven't wanted them, [....] I don't feel the need to have them anymore. (K: aha) So there's kind of different reasons there as well (K: aha) but I think that, like I have no - I don't have the need to have any more tattoos, right now. [....] I feel that all of the reasons that I wanted to have mine, I have no other kind of reason. (K: aha) Unless I have another big reason I wouldn't get any more, currently, at the moment. And the last time I had a tattoo was nearly three years ago. I haven't, I have no desire to have anymore (K: aha) you know? (K: mm) All of mine have been very specific, I have known exactly what I have wanted them to mean or look like or exactly where I have wanted them to go. So I have no [further reason / desire for more] Cos they're about me not I guess aesthetics (K: aha) then I don't feel the need to have anymore, personally.

Finally, there was also a particular issue which for Elaine was crucial to make 'on the record' and again it is something that is intrinsically connected to the training work that I have done around 'self-injury' and some of the issues I address in chapter five. She said,

> And I think, just a final thing to say about it, I think that there needs to be a lot less reaction to self-harm in terms of physical injury. In that just because someone's cut their arm, and yes there is that idea that they are at risk, but they don't need to be put into a psychiatric hospital because of self-harming, that's a reaction to the injury. (K: Absolutely, yeah) You know, that's a big area of confusion. I can appreciate the issues that people have around is it really ok to send someone out with fifteen stitches in their arm when they'll be back in again next week? And are we at risk? Are we a risk to ourselves? Is that a risk to yourself? Is that a risk? And it's like yes, technically I can see that it would be, but, I don't believe it's right to put people in psychiatric units because of self-harming. I think that actually does more damage than good. [....] It's a reaction to the injury, (K: aha) and it would be better dealt with if people reacted [differently]. I can understand because one of the most fundamental, basic human things is to react to an injury, and it's kind of wrong in the context of self-harm. (K: aha) That's why it's very difficult at the minute for it to be dealt with effectively, (K: mm) because people react to the injury and go, 'Oh my god!' And people don't know - I need a counsellor not to be put into a psychiatric unit. Cos all that does is mess up people's lives (K: exactly) and take away any reason they might have for not doing it: like normality, (K: aha) like their job, like relationships, friendships, {K: privacy as well E: and put them

in an environment} yeah, where they told can't do it, they're not allowed to do it, where they're treated like they're mentally ill and really put them in an environment where the social acceptability [smiles] of doing it is very high, you know? (K: aha) So they'll only come out however long later really a lot more messed up.

Afterwords.

In introducing the participants and some of my experiences of conducting research with them, I hope I have provided a window to the people, issues and experiences that have shaped my work. I have also tried to expose as much as possible my role in forming the representations to allow the reader to reflect upon the people involved, the issues I have formulated, and the ways in which they are mediated through me.

Some of the themes and issues of my work are also touched upon in these extracts, but I have not attempted to highlight, quantify or 'analyse' them here. Rather they form the beginnings of an evolving knowledge process which progressively integrates the experiential, methodological and theoretical aspects of body marking within an ethic and practice of embodiment. The reader is invited to share and reflect upon the lives of these women and the ways in which they have participated in, and facilitated, the development of my work and my relationship to, and understanding of, the issues that are integral to this project.

3. Gendered Embodiment:

Marking the borders of sexual difference.

Introduction:

In this chapter I trace the development of a theory and ethic of embodiment within sociological discourse. I position this alongside feminist theory and ethics of the body particularly in terms of the issues of gendered embodiment and body practices. I draw these themes together in a way which not only connects with an embodied methodology and knowledge but also with issues of gender and body marking. The theory of embodiment, and the ethics that are inherent to it, that are developed as a means of understanding the social world and engaging with experience forms the second key strand of my work and adds a theoretical framework to the methodology of embodiment. It also leads into the third strand, embodied experience, which is developed in chapter four.

My analysis takes place in three key sections. Firstly, I trace the appearance of the body within sociology and the emergence of the specific field of the sociology of the body. I briefly review this genre and consider some of the strengths and omissions in the context of my analysis of gendered embodiment[1]. The sociology of the body is widely acknowledged (Csordas, 1994; Featherstone, 1991; Frank, 1991; Howson, 2004; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993) to have developed from Bryan Turner's 1984 publication *The Body and Society*. However, the positioning of sociological theorisations *of* the body, contrasted with the somewhat different history of corporeal theorising within other traditions (specifically feminism) render this field far from wholly unproblematic, or fully comprehensive, in terms of the range of perspectives and experiences it incorporates. For my purposes I

[1] It is, however, important to acknowledge that this is in no way intended to be read as a complete review of all of the themes and issues encapsulated within the sociology of the body. Largely, because not only have many other writers undertaken such an extensive project (Frank, 1991, Howson 2004; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993), but more importantly such a project would be way beyond the scope and purposes of my work here. Rather, my aim is to tease out some of the specific themes and issues that are useful and/or critically relevant for my developing analysis of gendered embodiment.

conceptualise these issues firstly, in terms of the contrast between the theorisation *of* the body and embodied-theorisation evidenced in the medicalisation of gender. Secondly, I consider the peripheral location of feminist theory within the genealogy of the sociology of the body which at the same time regards gender as a key issue.

This paradox of the presence of gender and the absence of feminism means that despite the incorporation of gendered experiences within the sociology of the body such as; anorexia, (Turner, 1984) menstruation, (Frank, 1991) and 'beauty' (Synott, 1993), these theories ultimately remain problematic and dualistic in their representation of corporeality and self-identity. In drawing attention to these issues I adopt an embodied feminist location from which to understand the gendered body. This location within embodied sociology forms both the ethical and conceptual basis for understanding the relationship of gender, body, subjectivity and society, and is closely linked to feminist politics and practices. In the third section I suggest that the female body-self is the primary site upon which gender is marked, but fundamentally, is marked in a way which appears normal or natural, and thus sets up an arbitrary and binary structure in which women's bodily practices are located.

The consideration of these issues lays out the foundation for the subsequent analysis and reconceptualisation of women's body marking practices from a position where the embodied subject rather than an objective/objectifying binary of pathology/normalcy is the basis for understanding agency and embodied practices. This feminist ethics of embodiment connects with the methodological issues, ethics and practices addressed in chapter one, and addresses the analytical dimensions of a position of embodiment.

3.1 Theorising Corporeality: The body, embodiment and gender.

- The Sociology of the Body

In 1984[2] the concept that the human body was relevant to the discipline of sociology, and that indeed sociology was the weaker for its absence, was apparently very radical indeed. Thus, Bryan Turner (1984) carefully argued for not only the inclusion of the body within sociological theorising, but also pointed out that the body had a historical relevance to many of the 'greats' of sociology and their subject matter including, for example, Max Weber on religion, and Karl Marx on the plight of the working class (see also Lyons & Barbalet, 1994).

Turner explains, what Shilling later refers to as, the "absent presence" (Shilling, 1993: 9) of the body within sociology as due to historical and cultural factors. That is, sociology emerged within a dualistic society where mind/body, culture/nature, art/science were clearly separated. In establishing sociology as a social science, corporeal matters were deemed to be at odds with, or beyond the scope of, sociology and were thus abandoned to the biological and medical 'sciences'[3]. This location not only of the body, but also of sociology within a culture based upon dualism and binary oppositions has been a key theme within the sociology of the body (Featherstone, 1991; Frank, 1991; Hancock et al, 2000; Howson, 2004; Leder, 1990; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993)[4]. This foundational binary has been something that sociologists of the body (Featherstone, 1991; Frank, 1991; Leder, 1990; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; Turner, 1984; 2001), and more fundamentally, embodied sociologists (Crossley, 2001; Csordas, 1994; Lyons & Barbalet, 1994;

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[2] A significant date, perhaps, coincidence considering Orwell's work!

[3] Bill Hughs (1996), alone, contests the notion of the absence of the body within sociology. He argues that the body has been central as both a metaphor, and in terms of methodological naturalism. Although it is, perhaps, precisely this metaphorical or ambiguous presence of the body that the other writers are making critical reference to.

[4] These sociologists trace this dualism in what they refer to as 'western' culture to the early Greek philosophies in which contemporary culture is rooted. There are issues around the use of 'western' as a normative which divides the world into a dualism of 'western' and 'other' and I specifically address these issues in the contest of body marking in chapter seven. Thus, I have tried not to over-use the term 'western', but rather to emphasise dualism as a relevant, problematic cultural issue.

Shilling, 2003; Williams & Bendelow, 1998) - as well as, of course, feminists - have sought to critique, transgress and dismantle.

In his inaugural sociology of the body Turner's (1984) key aims were to demonstrate the importance of, firstly, bringing the body explicitly into sociology, and secondly, for using the body as a starting point to create new sociological conceptualisations of the workings of society at large, and its manifestation in experiences of, for example, illness, gender, and power. Turner says of *The Body & Society*, "I attempted to capture a historical dimension to the body in society through the notion of a 'somatic' society, namely a society within which major political and personal problems are both problematised in the body and expressed through it" (2001:1).

Turner developed a model of the body in society in order to conceptualise a sociological schema in which the social, material, internal and external aspects of corporeality could be theorised. Locating a specific theorist, illness and issue of the body social in each quadrant, he argues that, "the body is always socially formed and located. .... The problem of the body [in society] is thus not simply as issue in epistemology and phenomenology but a theoretical location for debates about power, ideology and economics" (1984: 82). In recognising the multiple aspects and interconnections of corporeality Turner opened up the possibility for theorising the body beyond the binaries of the social or the 'natural'. Sociologists of the body reject any simplistic or causal notion of the body, and consider the way in which the body, self and society are mutually interconnected and productive (Frank, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; Turner 1984; 1996; 2001). So that, for example Frank explains that "what I am calling 'the body' is constituted in the intersection of an equilateral triangle the points of which are institutions, discourses and corporeality" (1991: 49). Shilling, similarly argues that society both shapes "body techniques (combinations of discourse, institutions, and the corporeality of bodies), and that the society is also the medium and outcome of these body techniques" (1993: 94). Thus, there is neither a purely 'natural' essentialist body, and nor is the body

simply a social construction. These issues are for Turner illustrated in "illnesses of dependency" (Turner, 1984:125), where power, medicine and gender combine to produce female illness including anorexia and hysteria.

Turner distinguishes between illness as a social entity and disease as organic and argues that "we have to combine the notions that 1) disease is a language 2) the body is representation and 3) medicine is a political practice" (Turner, 1984: 201). Turner (1984; 1992; 1996; 2001) considers medical practice as a means of regulating bodies in terms of gender and sexuality. The medicalisation of the body and gender not only affects the lived experiences of bodies in society, but also the ways in which knowledge of gender and the body is structured.

Turner (1984; 1992; 2001) understands gender, power and the regulation of female (hetero)sexuality through the disorders that manifest in individual bodies. He describes anorexia in contemporary society and hysteria in the nineteenth century as manifestations of gendered social conditions, medical power, and the body. Alongside numerous problems with his discussion of anorexia (too lengthy to detail here[5]), it seems to me that while the combination of a critique of medical regulation of the body, gender and sexuality, and regulatory power in the definitions of disorder are important, a more relevant, contemporary analysis of this regulation may be gleaned from Trans studies and activism, and those who have engaged with it. Judith Butler's work provides a powerful insight in to the policing and regulation of gender and the ways in which it is integral to heteronormative structures of sexuality. She argues that it is no coincidence that since the de-medicalisation of homosexuality (removed from the international DSM in 1973) and its later

[5] Turner's analysis is not only offensive in places but also reiterates much of the patriarchal medicalised definition he seeks to analyse. For example he suggests at one stage that 'disorders' such as anorexia can be understood in terms of material underemployment, and symbolic occupation: an empty womb and an occupied body, or, as a result of an over domineering mother! (Turner, 1984: 194) Further, that Turner argues that the excesses of patriarchy have been dismantled by capitalism and replaced with a more benign "patrism" (1984: 142), appears to somewhat contradict his assertion that anorexia in contemporary society can be understood as a gendered disease of dependency in the same way that hysteria represented equivalent structures of body, power and gender in the previous century.

decriminalisation (1993 in Ireland (!)), that there has been an explosion in the diagnosis, treatment and centres of medical expertise for gender dysphoria/gender identity disorder (GID).

> This diagnosis that has, for the most part, taken over the role of monitoring the signs of incipient homosexuality in children assumes that 'gender dysphoria' is a psychological disorder simply because someone of a given gender manifests attributes of another gender or desires to live as another gender.
>
> (2004: 4-5)

In medical science gender must be reconciled within a bodily expression where sex and sexuality are worked across a binary of desiring opposites. Thus, the policing and regulating of sexuality constitutes the enforcement of the binary manifestation of normative gender (Butler, 1993). In this way, when the diagnostic criteria of gender identity disorder is closely scrutinised Butler reveals that,

> the diagnosis of GID is in most cases a diagnosis of homosexuality, and that the disorder attached to the diagnosis implies that homosexuality remains a disorder as well. .... Thus we could argue, somewhat facetiously, that 100 per cent of those diagnosed with GID turn out to be homosexual!
>
> (2004: 78-9)

The struggle for those who negotiate this system of definition in order to receive the treatment and recognition that makes their lives livable, as well as for those who wish to engage with their experiences in an empathic and non-pathologizing way, is to maintain a critique of the reductionism, power and abuses of gender within medical science, while acknowledging the necessity of strategic and possibly even subversive engagements with it[6]. These issues of politics, practice

[6] Many trans people have qualified as psychiatrists specialising in the field of gender identity disorder in order to facilitate and support the needs of their peers and to bring an alternative understanding and experience of the issues to the field. Or, in other cases post operative trans people provide information and support regarding the kind of issues and the means of expressing them which are required to successfully negotiate the medical system.

and theorisation are also integral to constructing an ethics of the body, a project which is elaborated more fully by Arthur Frank (1991, below).

Turner's (1984) work did, however, identify gender as a mainstream concern for the sociology of the body, albeit in very normative terms, and gender has, likewise been emphasised by subsequent theorists (Frank, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993). The sociology of the body, then, acknowledges the centrality of gender as a key variable of the relationship between body, self and society, and that gender is also fundamental within the binary structures of dualistic culture.

> The main somatic variable for most people for most of their lives is gender. .... Women and men defined since the early Greek philosophers as *opposite* sexes, structure their/our lives in dualistic terms. Women and men are only one chromosome away from being men and women; yet this single chromosome divides the corporeal worlds like a scalpel. Almost all our symbolic and ritual somatic and sensory behaviour is different for the two sexes, and so are many somatic meanings: beauty, hair, body, touch and so on. .... Even working towards equity, we none the less institutionalise symbolic differentiation (and conflict) in our somatic behaviour.
>
> (Synott, 1993: 4-6)

In considering the centrality of the dualism of gender there has also been quite widespread use, and acknowledgement, of the importance of feminist work (Featherstone, 1991; Frank, 1991; Hancock et al, 2000; Howson, 2004; Lyons & Barbalet, 1994; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993).

> Th[e] feminist focus on the embodied existence of women did more than simply highlight the multiple ways in which bodies were implicated in social relations of inequality and oppression. Analysis of the sex/gender, nature/culture, and biology/society divisions began to break down, or at least reduce the strength of, some of the corporeal boundaries which popular and academic thought had posited.
>
> (Shilling, 1993: 33)

However, the inclusion of feminist theory within the sociology of the body has a tendency to be quite limited in its scope, interpretation and application. Turner (1984; 1996; 2001) for example, sees feminism as simply a combination of foundationalist and social constructionist viewpoints, while Shilling (1993) criticises feminism for its 'naturalistic' tendencies[7]. Further, while Shilling (1993) highlights the importance of feminism in terms of theoretical development, most of his work in relation to gender focuses on masculinity and the work of Robert Connell. This in itself would not be so entirely problematic if it had not already been suggested by a fellow sociologist of the body that men cannot in fact be feminist because they do not and cannot share the embodied experiences of women[8] (Frank, 1991), thus, rather ironically re-enforcing the rigidity of the gender binary.

Overall, Turner's (1984) thesis became a catalyst for an explosion of sociological work around issues of corporeality. In particular his model of the body in society received much critical engagement and resulted in significant developments of the sociology of the body. Turner was frequently criticised for constructing an over-theoretical (i.e. disembodied), functionalist, top down (Frank, 1991) or even Parsonian[9] (Shilling, 1993) analysis of the body. These issues led his critics towards reconsidering the position of the theorist in relation to the body, which eventually developed into embodied sociology[10]. For example, Shilling in his later

[7] Sociologists of the body have also been quick to criticise queer theory, and in particular Judith Butler, as "disembodied" (Shilling, 2005) or purely about roles (Turner, 2001). Once again presenting an oversimplified interpretation of a wide and varied body of work and a too easy dismissal of it.

[8] Trans-men will, of course, have shared some of the corporeal experiences of women, including menstruation, alongside sharing some degree of the social conditioning of femininity (see Whittle, 1999).

[9] Not, I fear, by any stretch of the embodied sociologists' benevolence a compliment!

[10] Turner himself, in the later editions of *The Body & Society* (Turner 1996; 2001), provides a new introduction in which he responds to some of his critiques and more clearly discusses the centrality of embodiment as both a philosophical and phenomenological position within the sociology of the body and endorses the further development of an embodied sociology.

work (Shilling, 2003) also begins to map out a conceptualisation of embodiment, however, for me Anthony Synott (1993) and Arthur Frank (1991) are perhaps the most useful theorists in moving towards a more embodied sociology.

Frank (1991) maintains a high degree of abstraction in some of his work, and even goes on to rework Turner's (1984) 'functionalist' model into another complex, quadranted (although less Parsonian), schema of the body (Frank, 1991: 54). Nonetheless, in doing so, he manages to produce a much more experiential model. He suggests that four issues, namely; control, desire, relation to others and self-relatedness can be mapped out within different bodily types: the disciplined, the mirroring, the dominating and the communicative body. The communicating body, Frank's ideal type, is exemplified through feminist performance artists, who rework the relationship between art, self, body and audience (see also Williams & Bendelow, 1998), "among performance artists narrative are fundamentally embodied" (Frank, 1991: 89). Many of these artists have focused on the stigma of the female body and reworked and re-presented this pathologization through the medium of menstrual blood. And although Frank does not explicitly develop this here, he has touched on the paradigm in which theories of the body can become connected with embodied methodologies, which I develop in terms of embodiment and body marking in chapter seven.

Synott (1993), like Frank, has also moved away from some of the more dualistic or objectifying locations of the sociology *of* the body and towards a theoretical position that is perhaps closer to an embodied sociology. His analysis of the gendered symbolism and practices around features of the human body, for example hair, touches on the relationship of the regulatory functions of emotions within these practices. He argues that hair "is one of the most powerful symbols of individual and group identity - powerful first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal and second because although personal it is also public rather than private" (Synott, 1993: 103). In this way hair is highly gendered, and thus facial hair is "the young man's glory and the woman's shame" (Synott, 1993: 111).

And this preliminary step towards considering the way in which the emotions, particularly shame, are crucial to the social regulation of the body (Shilling, 1993) and gender (Synott, 1993), provides another important link to both considerations of gendered embodiment as well as the emotions as embodied.

In a related conceptualisation, and likewise alone among the other sociologists of the body, Synott devotes an entire section of his book to the senses[11]. He considers the ways in which sensory capacities are corporeal, social, emotional, and subjective, and his analysis of the sense of smell is useful here: "odour has powerful aesthetic, sexual, spiritual and medical and legal as well as emotional, moral, political and economic implications; and these are intertwined" (Synott, 1993: 205). This analysis of the senses not only lends itself towards the development of an understanding of embodiment but also enables a further level of critical awareness regarding the dualistic structuring of knowledge/culture. The privileging of the visual sensory capacity and it association with knowledge and objectivity/objectification is evident in the social and symbolic meaning of the eye/I.

> Th[e] false equation of seeing as believing and knowing has epistemological consequences. .... The high evaluation of sight in our culture is therefore not simply a matter of linguistic and folkloric interest, but has far-reaching implications for many diverse corners of our lives: the devaluation of other senses, but also for religion, science, language and social relations.
>
> (Synott, 1993: 211)

This critique of visual objectified knowledge is also central to the development of an embodied feminist ethics and is discussed further (below) in that context. In this vein Frank (1991) adds an ethical dimension which he argues is integral to the politics of the sociology of the body. He suggests that the centrality of the body to sociology is essential in that it grounds theory in human experience and prevents empty theoretical abstraction. His ethics are based on, firstly, the development of

[11] Lyons and Barbalet (1994) do highlight the importance of the senses for understanding issues of the body, I have made reference to their work under the heading of embodied sociology.

contingency, that is based on the reality of bodies and "terms of shared humanity" (Frank, 1991: 93), and secondly, on avoiding appropriation. He argues that there can be no single ethics of the body "one term does not fit all" (Frank, 1991: 95) but rather that all ethics should be corporeally based. The sociology of the body should not then, be a separate distinct field, but all sociology should be grounded within the body, and all theory based on an ethics of the body, so that "if that theory enhances our appreciation of the body's contingency, and helps us to recognise and eliminate appropriations of the body, then the theory too will have merged into the process" (Frank, 1991: 96).

Overall then, the sociology of the body has created a valuable foundation for the refiguring of the issues that are relevant, and indeed necessary, to sociology as well as the location, boundaries and ethics of the discipline itself. Issues of the body, gender and bodily regulation and practices have been brought to the fore. That said, there are fundamental issues that remain entirely absent from the sociology of the body, which are for me, hugely problematic in political and epistemological terms. During the same time period of the development of the sociology and the body there has also been an explosion in the field of radical disability studies. Part of the disability studies critique has been upon the limitations of both the medical model and the medical sociology approaches to theorising corporeality, difference, power and control. The sociologists of the body however, remain attached to the medicalised position[12] and thus either neglect disability altogether, or make reference to it only in terms of binaries of health and illness (Crossley, 2001; Frank, 1991, Shilling, 1993; 2003; Turner 1984, 1996; 2001) or ageing (Featherstone, 1991), and miss the radical critique of the normative binaries of the body/self that have been developed within disability studies[13]. Frank (1991), for example,

[12] Lyons & Barbalet (1994) argue that it is precisely because many theorists have made such limited and uncritical use of medicalised sociology that the body tends to be formulated in ways that are both objectifying and render it as passive.

[13] When the experience of disability *is* referenced it is done so in inexcusably offensive ways. Both Synott (1993) and Crossley (2001) make uncritical reference to people as 'handicapped' and Crossley (2001) also discusses 'the crippled'.

describes illness narratives as representative of the ideal communicating body, yet never considers the ways in which the disabled body or disability studies may be equally so. Disability theorists have not only indicated how politically problematic such neglectful practices are, but have also gone on to develop important analysis of the regulation and control of corporeal difference from an embodied perspective (Morris, 1991; Wendell, 1996; Shakespeare et al, 1996, Davis, 2002; Thomas, 1999). For example, Margarit Shildrick's (2002) very moving work, *Embodying the Monster* focuses on the way in which western society is based around notions of self, subjectivity and 'other', that require distance, corporeal boundaries, and separateness. Thus, conjoined twins have been defined as lives which are unlivable or "less than human" (Butler, 2004: 2) in both social and medical contexts, at odds with how conjoined individuals experience their self. Shildrick argues that their experience may offer a radical, non-binary, position for refiguring understandings of body, self and sociality within a model of intersubjectivity. Shildrick's critique of the corporeal self-other binary within masculinist, dualistic society has implications for and connections with feminist conceptualisations of the embodied self as intersubjective (see Young, 1990 (below) and Irigaray, 1999).
Thus, the limitations of the sociology of the body may inhibit as well as eventually produce the conditions in which embodied analysis can emerge.

- Embodied Sociology

The conceptualisation of an embodied sociology rests on the fundamental distinction (dualism?) between a sociology *of* the body and an embodied sociology. That the former is *of* the body, and is written *about* the body, locates it within dualistic theorisation where the subject matter is separate from, and observed by, a knowing other, in what Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow refer to as "a Cartesian masculinisation of thought" (1998: 133). Thomas Csordas argues that this writing of the body is objectifying and disembodied, and cannot represent the complexity of human "being in the world" (1994: 7). Further, this kind of objectification or distance from human embodiment is precisely the source of individuation and dualism. Similarly, Nick Crossley (2001) points out that the

sociology of the body has a tendency to re-iterate the very dualism it seeks to overcome in specifying the body as a site of investigation. "It is the concern with 'the body', which is just as much a part of (mind-body) dualism as the mind, that has generated the problem of dualism in our discipline" (Crossley, 2001: 2). In this way the more traditional focus of sociology on issues of agency can be seen as less problematically dualistic, in that they rest on notions of subjectivity and agency that are "both mindful and embodied. .... Human beings are neither minds nor, strictly speaking, bodies .... but rather mindful and embodied social agents" (Crossley, 2001: 2-3).

That many theorists of the body make use of the term 'embodiment' (Frank, 1991; Leder, 1990; Shilling, 1993; 2003; Synott, 1993; Csordas, 1994; Crossley, 2001; Turner, 1996; 2001), extrapolate complex sociological models from it, (Crossley, 2001; Shilling, 2003), or argue for its epistemological centrality (Turner, 1996; 2001) does not, as such, render them embodied sociologists[14]. Nor has this use of the term created much in the way of succinct definition of precisely what embodiment *is* or how it may be conceptualised. Nick Crossley has offered one useful definition, embodiment, he suggests involves: "corporeal aspects of agency, ... and focuses on the sensuous nature of human perception, emotion and desire, and the corporeal basis of agency, communication and thought" (2001: 3). The term embodiment, like the complex of entities and experiences it encapsulates, "lies ambiguously across the nature culture divide" (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 1). In drawing together an understanding of what it means to be embodied for my purposes, I find the most useful articulations of embodiment arise from considerations of the emotions in the context of a body social[15].

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[14] Frank (1997) may be the exception here in that he has used autoethnography and his own experiences of illness and medicalisation to construct an "embodied tale" (Smith, 2002)

[15] While this is very similar to the position taken by Lyons and Barbalet (1994), my understanding is not primarily analyitcally based. Rather, I arrived at this point experientially, and translated embodied knowledge into academic discourse. I most fully connect with, and thus understand, what it means to be embodied in the context of holistic, therapeutic and healing practices which focus on being mindfully present within the embodied experience of emotion.

Lyons and Barbalet suggest that one of the main problems of the recent theorisations of the body is that the body has been depicted as largely "passive" or as merely the "*outcome* of social processes" (1994: 488 & 49). Crucial issues of embodied agency, the embodiment of personhood, and the centrality of emotion to both of these have been neglected. "The body is intercommunicative and active; and it is so through emotion. .... Emotion is precisely the experience of embodied sociality" (1994: 48). Emotion is both embodied and the source of bodily/embodied agency. That emotions can be understood as corporeal and social enables a conceptualisation of embodied agency within a social context.

> An understanding of emotion and its foundation in sociality is part of and makes sense of embodied experience, and in turn locates within the body the basis for its agency in the world. Thus emotion is essential to any conceptualisation of social life, as a link between embodiment on the one hand and the practical activity of social life, that is, the praxis of the body, on the other.
>
> (1994: 62)

Further, the word emotion itself (e-motion: energy in motion) has embodied origins in that up until the nineteenth century it referred to movement and it was only subsequently used to describe invisible feeling (Lupton, 1998). Further, "the emotions tend to be associated with nature and the body rather than culture and the mind. The cultural meanings of emotions therefore intersect with those of nature and the body" (Lupton, 1998: 166).

However, despite this structuring of the emotions they have not, until recently, within sociology been considered as bodily or embodied experiences, and have more often been theorised in terms of social construction (Denzin, 1984), management (Hoschild, 2003; Lupton, 1998) or cultural specificity (Ellias in Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; and Lyons & Barbalet, 1994). Further, not only are emotions crucial in terms of embodiment, but they also transgress the normative conceptualisations of the opposition between reason/knowledge and feeling. While objective and positivist sociologists have been at pains to distance themselves from

any contamination from messy subjectivity, feeling or emotion, this practice has only served to further alienate the academic practice of sociology from lived subjectivity and being in the world. In this vein Jack Barbalet has pointed out that "without the appropriate emotions underpinning and supporting reason, reason turns into its opposite" (2002: 2). Embodied sociologists have reclaimed the emotions as not only central to the embodied self but also as providing a fundamental element of human sociality. "Not only are emotions central to the lived experience of our bodies and ourselves, they also provide the existential basis for social reciprocity and exchange and the 'missing link' between micro processes and broader macro issues of social structure" (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 7).

In this sense then, a corporeally located analysis of the emotions offers a perfect illustration of what it is to be embodied. I quote Williams & Bendelow at length here not because they are not providing an easy definition of emotion and/or embodiment, but rather an analysis of the interdependence of the two. In this way the textual representation of each is impossible without the other, and as such reflects the actual experience of embodiment/emotion.

> Emotions are complex multifaceted phenomena that are irreducible to any one domain or discourse. Emotions, in other words, are thinking, moving, feeling 'complexes' that sociologically speaking are relational in nature and linked to circuits of selfhood; comprising both corporeal, embodied aspects as well as sociocultural ones. Whilst basic emotions - rooted in our biological makeup and shared amongst all human beings as embodied agents - are involved, they are endlessly elaborated, like colours in a painter's pallet through time and culture. ....
>
> Emotions are essentially communicative, intercorporeal and intersubjective, constituted as physical and cultural dispositions through techniques of the body, forged within a social habitus. These body techniques, in turn can be properly understood within the context of the power relations of particular social and cultural groups located in space and time.
>
> Emotions, in short, are most fruitfully seen as *embodied* existential modes of being - ones that centrally invite self-feelings as the 'inner core' of human emotionality and active engagement with the world. (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 8)

The emotions like embodiment are both corporeal and subjective as well as culturally located, and are enmeshed with issues of gender and power (Lupton, 1998). Considering emotion as embodied in this way not only enables an understanding of what embodiment entails, but also opens up the possibility for embodied agency, and a reclaiming of the body from it's objectified status. However, it is important to re-iterate that emotions are not just experienced *in* the body, but are also *of* the body. Many contemporary healing practices and therapies use 'body work' to engage with experience and memory that may not be articulatable in cognitive or linguistic terms. 'Body work' facilitates a way of entering into, re-experiencing, and healing experiences that are not available to the conscious mind, particularly where disassociation or suppression have been necessary strategies of survival (Bass & Davis, 2002; Miller, 1990). But the issue of the body as a feeling, remembering part of the self has not, in this way, been theorised within sociology. While both Shilling (1993; 2003) and Crossley (2001) have discussed 'habit' and Lyons and Barbalet consider the importance of "understanding the interrelationships of affect, learning and memory" (1994: 62), in ways which *almost* connect with these issues, they do not fully engage them[16].

Outside of sociology there have been some limited references to 'body memory'. The anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996), autoethnographically describes her sudden affliction in adult life with ME like symptoms, and the increasing distress she experienced as there was repeatedly no diagnosable cause for her incapacity. It was only through working at the level of her body, and the panic induced by particular movements, that she recovered childhood memories and began to understand the experience her body was reactivating through ME. She recalled a traumatic accident which had left her bedridden for a year, vulnerable, incapacitated and subject to often inappropriate handling and intervention by others. As a child, "disempowered, disembodied, lacking the language to clarify my pain" (1996:

[16] Likewise, some writers have discussed the phenomena of the 'phantom limb' (see, for example, Grosz, 1994) but from a rather simplistic and objectifying position, that is certainly not experientially based.

130), her only means of coping and survival was to forget the experience, but her body remembered. "Healing calls for more than physiological mending; it calls for a full restoration of one's sense of being in one's body and in the world" (1996: 129). And, without the opportunity to integrate the experiences and restore her body-self relationship, "the girl in the cast grows up to be the woman in the cast" (1996:130). In this brave and unusual piece, Behar succinctly articulates, the issues of embodiment that are often omitted from, misunderstood, or perhaps even defy academic articulation. "The body is a homeland - a place where knowledge, memory and pain is stored" (1996: 134).[17]

Two further writers, although rather more 'clinical' practitioners than social scientists, have regarded 'body memory' as significant within their work. Firstly, childhood rights expert and activist Alice Miller (1990), relies extensively on understanding body memory in both advocating for children's rights, as well as providing therapeutic interventions for adults in distress. Secondly, Oliver Sacks used his own experience of bodily trauma to understand the ways in which it could be later manifested as a corporeal memory within 'patients' experiencing "prisoner syndrome" (1984: 156) i.e. ME.

Understanding that body memory opens up experience and knowledge which is not available or accessible through cognitive, mental or textual processes is a crucial aspect of embodiment. It establishes that there is a level of experience registered in the body that is often inaccessible to the cognitive mind. Accessing and resolving such experiences (and perhaps subsequently being able to articulate them at a linguistic level) can only be worked at the level of the body and the memories and emotions it stores. Thus, while we may not be cognitively aware of it, or may transcend or deny it, the body can register and articulate feeling and

[17] Behar uses the metaphor of 'homeland' intentionally here, she is a daughter of Cuban exiles to the US, who has spent much of her academic life working on issues of identity and ethnicity among immigrant communities.

experience at its own level[18]. Indeed, these very issues are central to the symbolic and transformative elements of body marking, as well as the ethics and practices of embodied methodologies, which, through performance art begins to merge with body marking practices (discussed in chapter seven).

Embodiment is not then solely a theoretical reference point, but it is also a position from which to engage with human experience in lived, and therefore less objectifying, terms. An embodied perspective considers the location and ethics of theorisation, it is a position that comes from, and is of, the embodied self. It is,

> a new mode of social theorising *from* lived bodies. Only on this basis can a truly embodied sociology have any real hope of putting minds back into bodies and bodies back into society and society back into the body. .... Rather than being 'representationlist' we propose a more *experientially* grounded view of human embodiment. .... One which overcomes past dualities, and in doing so helps us move towards a broader understanding of the relationship between body and self, culture and society.
>
> (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 3-8)

In this way an embodied location enables at the very minimum a critical mapping out of dualisms, and may also possibly achieve, if not a complete resolution, then at least some kind of refigured relationship between them. Embodiment offers an opportunity to re-articulate our understandings of both being and knowing and also raises issues of representation.

> Embodiment as the existential ground of culture and self is critical to capitalising on the [embodied] methodological opportunity. ....The fact of our embodiment can be a valuable starting point for rethinking the nature of culture and our existential situation as cultural beings. I suggest the promise of such a standpoint is to throw new light on questions traditionally asked by .... scholars in the human sciences.
>
> (Csordas, 1994: 6)

[18] This is of course to some degree recognised with the playing out of psycho-somatic illness.

Here we arrive at the radical potential of embodied theorisation, where as a position and an ethic of knowledge it also becomes a methodological strategy and a new way of creating and engaging with knowledge and being in the world. Knowledge, experience and representation merge within an ethic of embodiment, a "radical empiricism" which focuses on "lived experience" (1994: 10). Embodiment is "an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement with the world" (1994: 12). A methodology in which, according to Thomas Csordas (as with creative sociologists), evocation should privilege representation.

In this way feminist work[19] (as well as that within disability and trans studies) appears to me to be exemplary of embodied theorisation. "By assuming the theorist is also embodied, feminist theory opens up possibilities for exploring new ways of doing theory - ways which use embodiment as a theoretical resource for an explicitly corporeal epistemology or ethics" (Davis, 1997: 14). It seems all the stranger then for its either very limited use (feminism), or entire absence (disability and trans studies) within both the sociology of the body and embodied sociology. Those within feminism, disability studies, and trans studies, do not share the privilege of distance and write as embodied theorists. It is their own lives, pains, hopes, fears and desires that are theorised and as such, seem to me, to exemplify a fully embodied and holistic analysis. Thus, the work relating to embodiment which remains the most affective in terms of its visceral, emotional and transformitive qualities comes not from embodied sociology - although I do feel a great affinity for this genre - but from feminist work (as well as disability and trans studies). These fields continue to develop as a parallel, rather than as integral to embodied sociology, and sociology is, I fear, the weaker for their absence. It is precisely because of these weaknesses, as well as the invitation from both the sociology of the body and embodied sociology, to explore realms of corporeal experience

[19] While the process and experiences of knowledge described as "women's ways of knowing" (Field Belenky, 1986) are intrinsically embodied, this is not to imply that feminist work occupies a homogenous position, unproblematically related to the body and embodiment. Rather, that feminism has been located in such a way as to have much more direct involvement with these issues. I deal more critically with feminist work in chapter five.

previously excluded from the sociological remit, that I turn largely to feminist theorisation in developing an analysis of gendered embodiment.

3.2 Marking Gendered Embodiment:

So far the human body has been established as integral to a sense of self - individual subjectivity - as well as enmeshed in social and cultural norms and values (Giddens, 1993; Crossley, 2001; Synott; 1993), and shapes, and is shaped by, them (Shilling, 1993; Lyon & Barbalet, 1994). While both sociologists of the body (Howson, 2004; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; Turner, 1984, 1996, 2001) and embodied sociologists (Williams & Bendelow, 1998; Crossley, 2001) have posited gender as a fundamental corporeal binary, they nonetheless consider male and female selfhood as equivalent. Giddens therefore extrapolates from this work that "most people are absorbed in their bodies and feel themselves to be a unified body and self" (1993: 59). Yet if the body is integral to the sense of self - of subjectivity - and gender is the primary binary of the body, it seems incomprehensible that males and females share an equivalent sense of their embodied selfhood. In this vein Drew Leder has also argued that the body is primarily absent from our consciousness because "in the west there has been a tendency to identify the essential self with the incorporeal mind, the body relegated to an oppositional moment" (1990: 69). However, this absence or transcendence of the body is only possible where the corporeal aligns with the normative, and within a gender binary is impossible for those marked other, that is, female. Feminists[20] have frequently pointed out that within 'western' dualistic structures there is a constant association of the female with the body, so that while a man *has* a body, which he may transcend, a woman *is* her body (Bordo, 1993; Frost, 2000): "The whole nature of women's relationship to their bodies is gender specific" (Frost, 2000: 48).

[20] I do realise that the fact that I reference feminist material in this section which post dates some of the sociology of the body and the theorists I criticise, may appear to undermine my position that feminist material has been available to yet ignored by sociologists. However, feminist interest in the body pre-dates much of the work I use here, which is developed on the foundations of earlier feminist scholarship in this area. Further, the very notion of the 'personal is political' which seems to be one of the 'new' discoveries of corporeal sociology has been a rallying cry of feminist theory and activism for more than three decades.

The specific, gendered body-self relationship and the resultant fracturing of subjectivity has been largely ignored within both the sociology of the body and embodied sociology. This absence can perhaps be explained to some degree by the fact that even an embodied sociology has its roots in sociological traditions where privileged members of society abstractly theorise issues of such as gender, inequality, disease and disorder in terms of their potential for building theoretical models. Thus, political and experiential dimensions, and the depth of lived theory are absent. Further, that these writers largely stem from a social group (white men) and a tradition (academia) in which the body is transcended and mastered by a rational mind, ensures that these theorists are protected, as well as shaped by, their separation from their analysis.

> The body may be back, but the new body theory is just as masculinist and disembodied as it ever was. While it acknowledges the importance of feminism in helping to make the body a topic, actual feminist scholarship on the body is notably absent from much of the literature within the 'new body theory'. .... This is not merely a sin of omission, but affects the content of the theories which are produced to explain the importance of the body in contemporary social life.
>
> (Davis, 1997: 14)

Nick Crossley's analysis of the embodied self illustrates some of these issues and also provides an introduction to some of the themes I will consider in building a feminist analysis of gendered embodiment. Crossley argues the embodied self is both intersubjective and self-reflexive, but that it also exists within a pre-defined social value structure.

> Different bodily markers, including genitalia and skin colour, I argue, effectively become tokens of physical capital, opening (or shutting) doors and shaping life trajectories and, in this way, habits. Social categories penetrate the flesh, manifesting as habitus and hexis.
>
> (Crossley, 2001: 6)

However, he goes on to argue that despite such value structures, and the integration of the embodied self with social norms, individuals do *not* evaluate or experience themselves in this context[21]. Rather, each individual experiences himself as a normative referencing point from which to understand the social world. However, I would suggest that it is impossible to have universalised notion of embodied subjectivity within a dualistic culture. In that where there are inescapable cultural markers of the body in terms of, for example, gender, ability, and 'ethnicity',[22] these prohibit any sense of the self as normative, and decrease self-integration, meaning that not only the body but also the subjectivity is marked.

> If the mind is necessarily linked to, and perhaps is even a part of, the body and if bodies themselves are always sexually (and racially) distinct, incapable of being incorporated into a singular universal model, then the very forms that subjectivity take are not generalizable.
>
> (Grosz, 1994: 19)

In a further extrapolation from his masculinist[23] position Crossley argues that the sense of self is developed in a relationship with the body, a relationship which balances a sense of the body as both integrated and a part of the self, and also as objectified and separated from the self. Crossley argues that this self-objectification is integral to reflexivity, and thus essential to human sociality. In this way he ignores the excesses and the socially hierarchical and self-negating impacts of objectification which I discuss in terms of the specifics of gendered embodiment (below). Crossley's position then, appears somewhat self-contradictory when gender is considered, in that while on the one hand he argues that self

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[21] Crossley in fact argues that each individual is their own "blind spot" (2001: 142) a metaphor which while embodied is particularly problematic in terms of both equating knowledge with vision and describing visual impairment as equivalent to ignorance.

[22] Franz Fanon (in Butler, 2004) describes the embodiment of 'racial difference' as creating a similar self-consciousness or self-objectification that feminists describe in terms of gender. In a complimentary analysis Dyer (1997) describes the ways in whiteness is both the norm and yet also invisible as a corporeal or cultural category.

[23] I use the term not as an essentialist reference point that is linked to corporeal 'maleness', but rather in the context of Williams and Bendelow's (1998) definition, above.

objectification only takes place at the social level, at the same time he points out that gendered markers of the body form a kind of "symbolic capital" (2001: 151) which are intrinsically connected to corporeal features. And that these markers, and their social values, become internalised and essential in reproducing appropriately gendered behaviour. What Crossley neglects is that the gendering of the body is ultimately so effective in that it also creates a gendered subjectivity and body-self relationship. Further, that these norms of gender are enmeshed within a specific and debilitating self-objectification was articulated more than a decade before Crossley's work by the feminist sociologist, Dorothy Smith:

> In the context of the discourse of femininity, a distinctive relation to the self arises: not as a sex object so much as a body to be transformed, an object of work, even of a craft. Participating in the discourse of femininity is also a practical relation of a woman to herself as object.
>
> (Smith, 1990: 187)

Therefore a female in a male dominated society, as with those who are marked as ethnically other, or who are dis-abled, can never interpret her own position as a normative reference point, she is always fully conscious that she is marked as distinct from the normative or ideal.

However, the fundamental nature of the gender binary does not imply that sexual difference is an innate or essentialist feature of the body[24]. In may ways women and men are not particularly biologically distinct, (Synott, 1993) and the innate corporeal binary of gender is more fantasy than reality. The bodies of intersex, transgenderd, and trans sexual persons (Butler, 2004; Cromwell, 1999; Whittle, 1999), the butch lesbian body (Creed, 1999; Munt, 1998; Walker, 1993; Esteberg, 1996; Halberstiem, 1998; Kidd, 1999), post operative survivors of breast (Young, 1990), testicular, and prostate cancer (Gray, 2004), as well as many passing women and men, do not necessarily conform to the rigid and oppositional definition of

[24] When I use the terms masculine or feminine they refer to the polarised binary characteristics assigned to each gender rather than to any essentialist notions of male or female.

male and female. Since the binary of gender is not innate, and dualistic culture requires absolute gender difference (heteronormativity), then gender is played out upon the body which is already marked as other - female - through the norms of femininity.

> Biological femaleness is not enough. Femininity always demands more. It must constantly reassure its audience by a willing demonstration of difference [to masculinity], even when one does not exist in nature. .... Femininity, then, supports the gender binary and confers an extra portion of unearned gender distinction on men.
> (Brownmiller, 1984: 15 -16)

In this way, according to Susan Bordo, the contradictions and enticements of femininity are precisely the means by "which culture enjoins the aid of our bodies in the reproduction of gender" (1997: 105). Gender difference is thus established through the embodiment of femininity on the female body/self. The gendered, embodied self is not only manifested in terms of appearance, deportment, and learnt and performed characteristics, but is also mapped out in specific experiences and qualities of subjectivity. In what follows I discuss some of the ways in which feminists have considered femininity to be central, not only to particular bodily practices but also endemic to female subjectivity - the embodiment of the gendered body-self relation.

There has been a vast range of feminist work relating to the body and its practices in the context of gender norms and femininity (for example, Bartky, 1992; 1997, Bordo, 1993; Brownmiller, 1984; Chapkis, 1986; Conboy et al, 1997; Frost, 2000; Howson, 2005 Davis, 1995; 1997; Arthurs & Grimshaw, 1999; Shildrick & Price, 1999;), and it is only possible for me to present a partial review of this work[25]. The theorists I primarily focus on here (Bartky, 1992; 1997; Frost, 2000; Young, 1990) succinctly capture the themes and experiences of gendered embodiment that are essential to my critique of the body theorists and also connect with my subsequent analysis of body marking practices. These themes include: the objectified female

[25] Again, this is not to imply that feminists occupy a homogenous, or wholly unproblematic position.

body and the complex body-self relationship enmeshed within structures of femininity, the gendering of body practices through the maintenance of femininity and finally, the specific subjectivity it engenders.

Femininity is essential to the dualism of gender, it defines appropriate appearance, deportment, actions and characteristics of the female body/self which are always the opposite and unequal reflection of masculinised norms (Bartky, 1992; Bordo, 1993; Brownmiller, 1984; Davis, 1995; Frost, 2000; Young, 1990; Wolf, 1992). "Femininity is a certain set of sensibilities, behavioural dispositions, and qualities of mind and character. It is also a compelling aesthetic of embodiment" (Bartky, 1992: 321). In this way femininity is defined as being interchangeable with 'biological femaleness', that is a female person is expected to display femininity through her body, character, and especially, her sexuality (Frost, 2000; Bordo, 1993). "Feminine movement, gesture and posture must exhibit not only constriction, but grace as well, and a certain eroticism restrained in modesty" (Bartky, 1997: 135). Femininity is rigidly policed, and failures are met with shame inducing criticism and hostility (Bartky, 1992; Davis, 1995; Frost, 2000), violence, discrimination and even death (Butler, 2004; Walker, 1993; Synott, 1993). Further, femininity is essential to the embodiment of gender in that it is not just read off from the body in terms of appearance, but also indicates a woman's moral (Bordo, 1993; Davis, 1995; Frost, 2000), and intellectual capacities (Bordo, 1993), as well as providing indicators regarding her sexuality and sexual availability (Bordo, 1993; Davis, 1995; Frost, 2000) and her mental health (Frost, 1999; Ussher, 1991). The limitation on physical expressiveness has a huge impact on both the experience, and sense of, self as being in the world (Young, 1990a) and is integral to constructing the appearance of gender difference and inequality as both visible and natural.

In terms of the body-self relationship Sandra Lee Bartky suggests that the norms of femininity which women must negotiate render the body a trap, or an "enemy, an alien being" (1997: 133). A woman must control and alter her body in order to be

appropriately gendered, and size, movement, and adornment as well as physical features such as the hair and the skin must be actively intervened in and controlled:

> The project of ideal embodied femininity is a 'set-up' for most women, for its standards are largely unattainable. The taboo on aging may poison a woman's maturity. Her infantilised body must take up as little space in the world as possible, this is when women are demanding more entry into and control of public space; her infantilised face must not betray the marks of strong emotion or deep thought. The extraordinary importance given to women's appearance produces in many a narcissistic preoccupation with the body that alternates between infatuation and self-disgust.
>
> (Bartky, 1992: 328)

Similarly, in her research with *Young Women & The Body*, Frost describes how women's negotiation of their sense of self within the gender binary creates a very specific body-self relationship, where the norms of femininity intensify processes of self-objectification and creates a "sense of the self as object" (2000: 44). In this way the embodiment of femininity creates "a paradoxical relationship between women and their bodies: women are seen as synonymous with the body, while experiencing the body at a distance" (Frost, 2000: 194). For women femininity shapes their subjectivity so that the body is both integral to their gender identity, but at the same time is rendered problematic in terms of an active subjectivity. The body becomes other to the self, it is both "self and not self" (Frost, 2000: 71).

> Female subjectivity is therefore related to very narrow and rigid definitions which are tightly monitored. This means that while on one hand women must develop an observing and separated relation to their bodies in order to recreate femininity they are also inevitably heavily identified with their bodies and this process offers only a disjointed and contradictory subjectivity.
>
> (Frost, 2000: 198)

Femininity also regulates the norms of sexuality, and the female body is deemed to be intrinsically sexual. In this way the female body is not simply the embodiment of self but it is also where struggles over gendered identification occur at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level the female body is the site of political

contests between social power and control and individual expression. That these struggles are often constructed as 'moral' issues, located in specific cultural rather than humanitarian ethics, highlights the association of femaleness with the specifics of gender and sexuality rather than as more generally human. Thus, from the burqua and the hijab, to female genital cutting (FGM) and from breast implants and burnt bras to cosmetic surgery and body marking the female body is a battle ground, where female humanity seems irreconcilably pitted against the cultural regulation of gender.

In western culture the medicalisation of the female body and sexuality has significant impacts on the development of female personhood, particularly during puberty when the female body becomes not only "the object of medicine, [but also] the object of the gaze" (Frost, 2000: 74). This medicalisation which has created a "psycho-biological category of adolescence" (2000: 60), defines women as "actually or potentially physically limited, ill and depressed, as an inferiorised, physically imprisoned being in need of medical attention" (200: 74). Frost suggests that femininity, the intrinsic sexualisation of the female body, and the medicalisation of both the female body *and* sexuality, leaves women experiencing their bodies as "limiting, wanting and humiliating" (2000: 80).

> The predominant ambivalent and misogynistic attitudes to some specific aspects of women's bodies: for example, menstruation, breasts, and manifestations of sexuality offer girls contradictory and often negative messages about their bodies, which have a detrimental impact on their ability to establish a confident subjectivity.
>
> (2000: 61)

Female sexuality, while defined in such a way as to be integral to the female body, is permitted only as a passive recipient, text or object for masculinised desire and sexuality, adding a further level to the experience of objectification and self-objectification. Further, the intrinsic association of unequal power and sexual desire within heteronormative sexuality structures female "sexuality as victimisation"

(2000: 120). This exacerbates the distance and separation within the body-self relationship and decreases the opportunities for embodied sensuality. At the same time within these norms of sexuality females are deemed responsible not only for the restraint of their own desires but also for the threats from masculinised sexuality (Bartky, 1997). This is harshly evident in the way that legal process which purport to establish if the sexual abuse of a woman took place are based around examining *her* behaviour, appearance and life-style, rather than the man who has harmed her (Lees, 1996).

To me, the dualisms in which gender and sexuality are manifested and the fundamental irreconcilability of them are evident in the very interesting contradictions between the assumed naturalness of heterosexuality, and the artificiality of the feminine, and thus desirable, body. So that while the female body is seen to be synonymous with (hetero)sexuality, and heterosexual desire is assumed to be 'natural', at the same time radical alterations of the female body are required in order for it to be considered desirable, and the unaltered female body is considered repugnant. In the same way, desire between lesbians, particularly lesbian feminists who reject any engagement with feminine bodily practices, is seen as not only unappealing or unattractive, but more particularly unnatural[26]. Further, gender and sexuality are linked in such a way that any non-normative embodiment or manifestation of gender is assumed to indicate a pathology of sexuality, and 'homosexuality' is presumed to be easily apparent from such characteristics (Butler, 2004). That homosexuality is understood as an aberration of gender renders it so powerful as a tool for policing normative behaviour in medical, legal and social contexts.

The constant struggle between the self and the social norms of gender is most often regulated through shame. Shame and objectification are parallel processes in that in order "to experience shame one must have a sense of being watched" (Frost, 2000:

[26] There are of course particular, hyper-ojectified, representations of lesbians and lesbian sexuality that are specifically intended to be desirable to heterosexual men.

136). In this way femininity entails being subject to the constant, internalised scrutiny of the male gaze, creating a hyper self-objectification. "The tying of social acceptability, perhaps even to identity, to the repressive norms of ideal embodied femininity requires constant surveillance and self surveillance" (Bartky, 1992: 328). Thus, aspects of the female body: breasts, menstruation and body hair, as well as in some cultures head hair, legs and shoulders require close monitoring. Their exposure or lack of containment is associated with an excess of femaleness that is seen as both highly sexual and/or shameful. "Shame as an identity state may have a close correlation with female selfhood per se" (Frost, 2000: 139). Thus, the female sense of self or subjectivity is based on "disembodiment, or disassociation from the body rather than embodiment and active pleasure" (2000: 121). This separation and objectification of the body and the threats of stigma and shame which police femininity constitute "serious identity damage" (Frost, 2000: 136) manifested in various forms, of what Frost refers to as, body hatred.

Overall, Frost (2000) suggests that the norms of gender are not only imposed upon the female body through femininity, but also that because the self is embodied, this results in a specific, and what she refers to as separated, subjectivity. However, the analysis of the effects of femininity do not end here. So far they have been discussed in something of a top down manner which has resonances with what Bartky refers to as 'alienation' analyses of the female body, where women

> live inside our bodies with a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency, even of shame. Women in western societies live out an estrangement from the body; on the one hand we are the body and are scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, we must exist perpetually at a distance from our physical selves, fixed in a permanent posture of disapproval.
>
> (1992: 324)

Based largely on Marxist feminist critiques of the "fashion/beauty complex" (1992: 323), this position critically addresses the specific socially constituted female body-self relationship, but from a position which emphasises the power of the cultural over the individual, and as such neglects the level of embodiment at which women

engage with the body practices of femininity. Because of the nature of femininity and its impact on the embodied female self it is essential to consider women's relationship with the specific bodily practices that create femininity in spite of their objectifying consequences. Both Frost (2000) and Bartky (1992) make use of Foucault's analysis of power in terms of discipline and self-regulation through surveillance to understand women's engagement with, and perpetuation of, femininity. Disciplinary power is effective in that it translates external surveillance into self-regulating behaviour and is crucial to the maintenance of normative gender.

> Gendered subjectivities, are constituted through individual self-surveillance and obedience to norms that arise with 'regimes' of knowledge/power 'discourses'. On this view, gross violence is not necessary to subjugate women, just a gaze. .... [Further,] the imposition of normative femininity upon the female body requires modes of training that are properly described as 'disciplinary practices' .... systems of micro power. .... The norms of feminine body comportment, dieting, some forms of exercise, hair care, skin care, etc, all satisfy Foucault's criteria for disciplinary practices. Within a sexist society, the mastery of these disciplines can give a woman more power than she might have otherwise; this is part of their widespread appeal. .... In this society in order to *be* at all .... one must be a body that is masculine or feminine: the prospect then, of abandoning the practices that perpetuate femininity must induce in many women a kind of ontological vertigo.
>
> (Bartky, 1992: 326)

In dualistic society, to attempt to become embodied subjects women must negotiate some degree of engagement with, or risk the consequences of a total rejection of, femininity. This creates a paradox, where on one hand the constant threats of stigma and shame for women who fail to meet the standards of normative femininity produces "serious identity damage with ramifications for various aspects of selfhood" (Frost, 2000: 136); and yet while achieving femininity is sought precisely as a means of avoiding shame and stigma it does not eradicate the anxious self-objectification associated with being female. In this way altering the body, in ways which comply with the norms of femininity, and which may be both physically painful and also debilitating, facilitate levels of social integration and

self-autonomy which may not otherwise be possible or socially viable (Bartky, 1997; Bordo, 1993; Davis, 1995; Frost, 2000).

Overall then, feminist work enables an understanding of the ways in which the binary of gender is embodied and 'naturalised' through the norms of femininity. Women actively embody femininity, and thus gender, not only through the practices of the body, but also in terms of their subjectivity. The sense of self which is tied to the relationship with the body is fundamentally shaped by the binary norms of gender. Women, therefore, experience a specific, contradictory and disassociated subjectivity, and gender is both fundamentally embodied as well as directly, yet covertly, marked upon the female body.

To round(!) off this discussion of feminist work in relation to gendered embodiment I will review Iris Marrion Young's (1990) essay "Breasted Experience: The look and the feeling."[27] In this piece Young discusses not only the issues of femininity, objectification and the subsequent female self-relation, but also refigures conceptualisations of knowledge and subjectivity through the experience of the female body into a non-objectifying, intersubjective metaphysics in which "breasted experience" is central. Her work is important here in that it is fundamentally linked to an embodied location and ethics, rooted in a politics of a feminist body-self relation.

Within the lived experience of the human body, symbolism and subjective experience, as well as social norms, become intrinsically connected - embodied. For Young, the chest forms the interconnection of both corporeal symbolism and subjective experience, in that the chest is primarily experienced as the location of the self. While the head may house the brain, the mind, and even consciousness, Young suggests that individuals unwaveringly point to their chest to signal the

[27] I find it interesting that while male sociologists (Crossley, 2001; Shilling, 1993) have referenced Young's (1990) essay "Throwing Like a Girl", they do not make use of "Breasted Experience", despite the fact that they appear in the same volume, and that to me at least, "Breasted Experience" is much more radically connected to the issues and perspective of embodiment.

essence of their self. The chest, for adults, is not of course (gender) neutral. In 'western' cultures[28] breasts are one of the most appropriated and fetishised symbols of gender difference and are therefore also enmeshed with the imposition and constraints of femininity and sexuality. The self is unavoidably experienced in direct connection to the bodily markers of gender: "if the chest is the centre of a person's being in the world and identity, men and women have quite different experiences" (1990: 189).

For women "breasted experience" involves the negotiation of many complex and contradictory prescriptions of femaleness. So that while on the one hand breasts are seen as primarily sexual, the objects through which a woman's femininity and sexuality will be appropriated, appraised and judged, on the other hand this sexuality is only passive, objectified and often debilitating. Breasts function as "secondary" sexual characteristics, as a visual stimulus for objectifying desire and pleasure.

> A fetish is an object that stands in for the phallus - the phallus as the one and only measure and symbol of desire, the representation of sexuality. This culture fetishizes breasts. Breasts are the symbol of feminine sexuality, so the "best" breasts are like the phallus: high, hard and pointy.
>
> (1990: 191)

Defined as objects breasts become property, not of the female, but of the possessor of phallocentric power and desire. Breasts are then, "commodities of exchange" (1990: 191) in the market place of gendered sexuality[29].

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[28] Breasts and their symbolism may be quite different in cultures where nakedness or semi-nakedness is the norm, or where age, maternity and wisdom, rather than youth and virginity are prized.

[29] Susan Brownmiller has also theorised breasts as central to the binary of gender, and the experience of femininity: "Breasts are the most pronounced and variable aspect of the female anatomy, and although their function is fundamentally reproductive .... It is their emblematic prominence and intrinsic vulnerability that makes them the chief badge of gender. .... Although they are housed on her person, from the moment they begin to show, a female discovers her breasts are claimed by others. ..... No other aspect of the human anatomy has such semi-public, intensely private status, and no other part of the body has such vaguely defined custodial rights. .... Breasts belong to everybody, but especially to men" (1984: 41).

> Breasts are the most visible sign of a woman's femininity, the signal of her sexuality. In phallocentric culture sexuality is orientated to the man and modelled on male desire. Capitalist, patriarchal, American media-dominated culture objectifies breasts before a distancing gaze that freezes and masters. The fetishized breasts are valued as objects, things; they must be solid, easy to handle ... their value, her value, appears in their measurement.
>
> (1990: 191)

In this way Young describes how the appropriation of breasts are integral to two of the most fundamental binaries of patriarchal culture; the privileging of objectification (vision) over experience (touch), and the separation of maternity and sexuality.

That women may experience their breasts as simultaneously sexual *and* maternal constitutes "a scandal for patriarchy" (1990: 190), and a unity of experience that phallocentric culture must fracture[30]. The appropriation and objectification of the breasts are evident not only in sexuality, but also in daily practices which privilege visual appearance and control over experience. Practices which include wearing bras[31], undergoing breast augmentation, and medicalised (de-sensualised) breast-feeding practices. Young argues that "the movement of her breasts is part of the expressiveness of her body" (1990: 196), but the sensual experience of being breasted, of female embodiment, is objectified and sexualised in such a way that any movement or visibility of the breasts, and especially nipples, is regarded as "indecent", shameful and humiliating. In this way, female embodiment is experienced as a restriction within an appropriating masculinised gaze. This fracturing of sensuality from female embodiment is, according to Young, epitomised in the norms and taboos of breast-feeding. Cultural nursing practices

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[30] If maternity was to be understood or experienced as sexual, then in a phallocentric sense at least, the male would be dispensable. Phallocentric, patriarchal culture rests of the shattering of precisely this bond, and the separation of mother and daughter are at the heart of heterosexuality. In this way "lesbian mothering may be the ultimate affront to patriarchy, for it involves a double displacement of an erotic relation of a woman to a man" (Young, 1990: 198).

[31] Indeed, radical feminists such as Mary Daly (1979) and Sheila Jeffreys (2000) have drawn parallels between bound breasts and bound feet.

establish the maternal breasts as devoid of sensuality, eroticism and pleasure, in a merely functional, non-reciprocal, physical relationship. Sensual pleasure between mother and child - the stuff of Oedipal tragedies - is an absolute taboo of patriarchy.

> When I began nursing I sat in a stiff chair, holding the baby in the crook of my arm, discreetly lifting my shirt and draping it over my breast. This was mother work, and I was efficient, gentle, and watched the time. After some weeks, drowsy during morning feeding, I went to bed with my baby. I felt I had crossed the forbidden river as I moved toward the bed, stretched her legs out along my reclining torso, me lying on my side like a cat or a mare as my baby suckled. This was pleasure, not work. I lay there as she made love to me, snuggling her legs up to my stomach, her hand stroking my breast, my chest. She lay between me and my lover, and she and I were a couple. From then on I looked forward with happy pleasure to our early-morning intercourse, she sucking at my hard fullness, relieving and warming me, while her father slept.
>
> (1990: 199)

For Young unbound breast/s, and "erotic maternity" are the antithesis of dualistic and objectifying culture, and integral to a metaphysics of being and knowing based on intersubjectivity and connection. Breasted experience is fundamental in re-figuring notions of being and knowing, based around an ethics of intersubjectivity and mutual touch[32] rather than separated, visual-privileging and objectifying distance.

> An epistemology spoken from a feminine subjectivity might privilege touch rather than sight. Unlike the gazer, the toucher cannot be at a distance from what she knows in touch. While active, touch is simultaneously passive. The gazer can gaze without being seen, and as Foucault has pointed out, this possibility is a major source of modern disciplinary powers. But the toucher cannot touch the happenings she knows without also being touched by them. The act of touching is also necessarily as experience of being touched; touching cannot happen without a touching back, and thus there can be no clear opposition between subject and object, because the two

[32] Young credits much of the ground work for this analysis to Irigaray's theorisation of the 'two lips' (see, for example, Irigaray, 1999).

> positions constantly turn into each other. With touch as the model of experience of the world, moreover, dividing the world into objects with definite borders makes much less sense.
>
> (1990: 193)

For me, touch is not simply a corporeal connection, but works equally at the levels of emotive and cognitive interconnection where the self and other become intertwined in a mutually affecting experience. Touch, fluidity, and embodied sensuality are then integral to an ethics of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that avoids objectification, visual and separated knowing, and eradicates the distance and hierarchical privilege between the knower and the known. This female/feminist ethics is integral to an embodied sociology and refiguring the issues of agency and pathology in terms of understanding women's body marking practices (below). A theory of bodily practices that stems from an ethics and experience of (gendered) embodiment and which privileges interconnection rather than objectification and abstraction, enables the integration of theory, methodology and experience within an ethics of representation and knowledge.

Before concluding this section, I have a final gesture in the way of a feminist, embodied sociology. It takes the form of a poem which invokes the issues of embodiment and knowledge that are central to my work through the allegory of marked flesh. The poem is located in the juxtaposition of disembodied knowledge and embodied experience and it draws out the ways in which a position of embodiment forms the life-blood running through and connecting a theory, methodology and experience of body marking.

Carved In Flesh

Even when the sun shines upon old scars
and they glisten
like streams of perspiration on leather skin
they do not become much sweeter.

A map of pain and longing
that few can read or follow
to the chest of buried memories

No rainbows,
treasure troves
or sweet surprises here
to meet the crouching shadows
and the triptychs that whisper fear

No simple retort or recompense
Return these especially secret gifts.

Stranger's eyes carve distant tales
that twist and turn hard ridges
and cast a shadow that burns like ice
into this fleshy landscape.

Summary/Conclusion.

The sociology of the body has provided a crucial stepping stone in terms of legitimating corporeality as not only relevant, but in fact *essential,* to sociological theorisation and practice. It has also provided a foundation for a critique of dualism not merely within cultural practices but also within the establishment and maintenance of disciplinary borders. Gender has been established as one of the most all-encompassing binaries within dualistic society, and one which is fundamentally embodied. The gender binary is such that the female is required to fully embody gender difference through the absorption and enaction of the norms of femininity. It is the active marking out of the difference, of femininity from the

masculine norm, that creates heteronormative sexual difference and the female body as the site of its embodiment. Female bodies are not only a collection of (varied) physical features, but also of learnt deportment, restricted movement and expression and specific bodily practices, but they are also fundamentally marked as feminine/female through the alteration and intervention of their material fleshy substance. The female body is intrinsically marked as the site of gender difference, and at the same time the demands of appropriate femininity require further marking of the body. In this way female subjectivity incorporates a very specific body-self relationship which underpins the experience of bodily practices. This gendered, embodied subjectivity is not only integral to understanding the norms of gender, but is also crucial to understanding women's engagements with body marking practices.

Finally, the position of embodiment as both a perspective and relationship to female bodily practices facilitates an analytical position which avoids some of the objectification and pathologization endemic within dualistic culture and binary structures of knowledge. Embodied knowledge is integral to the ethics and practice of researching women's experiences of body marking. It privileges a mode of connection with and representation of experience that is from the body, emergent from lived subjectivity.

4. Policing the Body:

A conversation from the edge of normative femininity.

Part 1: Non-normative Embodiment and Social Policing.

Introduction.

The analytical themes as well as the methods of representation and knowledge that are at the heart of this chapter stem from the position of gendered embodiment. The compulsory norms of gendered embodiment, their practice and implications, are exposed through the lived experience of four women whose non-normative corporeality excludes them from the privileges of normative gender (femininity). Because these experiences are so multifaceted in corporeal, emotional and social terms, and because of the significance they embody, I wanted an equally multifaceted - embodied - method of engaging with and representing them. In an attempt to do justice to the themes and issues, as well as to honour and respect the individuals who tell their stories here, I have created a fictionalised group discussion in which I also participate and write in my own experiences.

At the outset of my work I had not intended that I would incorporate my own experiences in this way, or to engage the strategies of autoethnography that I briefly touch on here. Nor had I fully considered the impact of non-normative embodiment in the ways which develop from this conversation. Both of these issues are emergent from the research processes with which I engaged, and as such I am indebted to my participants for enabling this development. Their courage and openness in sharing their stigmatising experiences provided a source of political, emotional and personal motivation to me. I was, in particular, so touched, and gained so much support from Elaine sharing her experiences with me, that I felt moved to construct this piece. However, I am still not altogether comfortable or reconciled to the ways in which I have exposed myself in this piece, even though it continues to have multifaceted impacts upon me.

Because of my investment in this section, and because as a creative piece its affectiveness is achieved through an intersubjective connection with the reader I struggled to find an appropriate means of textually and visually representing the experiences. I wanted the participants to speak freely, to articulate their experiences in their own voices as they struggled to make sense of and to live with the issues and experiences that are integral to the experience of non-normative embodiment. I wanted to be able to draw out the connections between our experiences in the context of the theoretical issues of gendered embodiment at the same time as avoiding re-interpreting participants experiences or speaking for them. I wanted the reader to share the pain, depths and strengths of each individual as she struggles to negotiate her embodied sense of self. A 'fictionalised' textual re-presentation of a conversation between the research participants and myself, as both participant and analytical framer of the issues, afforded the means to do so. This strategy has also been used by a number of sociologists, (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis & Smith, 2002; Gray, 2004; Sparkes,1997; Smith, 2002) but I was particularly inspired by the affectiveness of the piece by Karen Fox (1992 - above). The idea of a group discussion also appealed to me at another level, because I would have dearly loved the participants to be able to meet and share their experiences, and draw strength from one another, in the same ways that individually they have done for me.

The actual process of putting the conversation together as a dialogue was not a particularly difficult task. The participants are all very articulate women, and the themes and issues quickly fell into place as I read through the transcripts. However, I have struggled, and ultimately been unable, to visually format and represent the text in a way with which I am fully satisfied. The key to the dialogue perhaps serves to distance rather than incorporate the reader and participant into the text, as does the linear appearance of the dialogue on the page - I would have liked to somehow create a more circular, a more dialogical, appearance. However, I have reconciled myself to this being the closest approximation to my ideal as I am able to produce at this time.

Before going on to the dialogue itself, I will briefly recap on the theoretical context with which the discussion connects in both epistemological and ethical terms. In the previous chapter I have described how the female body occupies an uncomfortable position within the norms of gender; it is both the embodiment of self as well as the site of subjective dislocation and objectification (Frost, 2000). It is the location where the polarised norms of gender must be materialised and as such is the focus of continuous scrutiny, surveillance and intervention (Bartky, 1992; Davis, 1995). While normative femininity embodies the pathology of the 'other' set against the ideal of personhood - masculinity- relatively successful approximations of femininity also reap the rewards of normativity. The non-normative female body, on the other hand, is intensified as the focus of hostile and intrusive public scrutiny, and is afforded none of the protections or 'pay-offs' of normative femininity. This multiple de-privileging is experienced in terms of 'ethnicity' (Aziz, 1992), lesbian sexuality (Creed, 1999) disability (Morris, 1991; Shakespeare et al, 1996; Thomas, 1999) as well as for women who are seen to be wilfully non-compliant with the embodiment of feminine norms (Bordo, 1993). In this way if, as Butler suggests, "sexuality is regulated through the policing and shaming of gender" (Butler, 1993: 238), then gender is likewise regulated through the 'policing and shaming' of the body. Certain bodies are abjected in order to re-iterate and reproduce normative power structures.

I suggest that rendering the non-normative body a site for public approbation is not only intrinsically connected to the policing of the borders of acceptable gendered embodiment, but that it also impacts upon the experience of socially problematised subjectivities and the impulse to intervene in or 'correct' them through corporeal alteration. Davis (1995) describes how this process is central to women's decisions around cosmetic surgery, while Thomas (1999) and Davis (2003) similarly describe the social and medical imperatives to 'normalise' the appearance of disabled bodies however physically and/or emotionally debilitating this may be. In this context it is perhaps no surprise that women who have engaged with body-marking practices have experiences of their bodies being rigidly policed, and that this policing may be

both prior to, as well as result from, their corporeal interventions and transformations.

Some of the substantive issues that I raise regarding non-normative embodiment and its consequences are not vastly dissimilar to Erving Goffman's (1968) analysis of stigma. His analysis is not only interesting (particularly for its time) in terms of the issues he raises about the role of the body in interaction, but also in that he extensively discusses shame and its role within social hierarchy, and the subsequent diminishing of selfhood. However, despite his intentions which, even if interpreted in the most benevolent way, I nevertheless have huge difficulty with his work. I find his presentation of the individuals he discusses hurtful and objectifying at best, and at worst a cruel and fetishistic spectacle. For example, Goffman touches on many of the experiences that are discussed in this chapter, but he posits them as a contrast between the experience of "normals" (1968: 15) and "a cripple" (1968: 23), "the mentally defective" (1968: 36), "a physically deformed person" and "the homosexual" (1968: 19). This is not merely a matter of un-politically correct language, but rather that he unquestioningly occupies a normative position, a privilege which he assumes his reader to share, and as such is entrenched in the objectification, judgment and maintaining the de-humanisation of others. Further, in describing people in this way he perpetuates exactly the kind of objectification and ostracisation of non-normative individuals that he purports to critically address. In a more contemporary example of this kind of reiteration of normative privilege Nick Crossley refers to "cripple consciousness" (2001: 143) to illustrate the limitations of self-perception.

Such writers, located in normative, disembodied perspectives, produce theorisations which are irreconcilably objectifying and problematic at both the political and human levels. In contrast, I attempt to balance an empathic, non-objectifying and respectful depiction of experiences in a context which at the same time highlights the pain and problematization of non-normative embodiment. My participation and investment within this dialogue means that my position and

intentions are unavoidably partial and political. Feelings of discomfort, shame and anger pervade this piece as we discuss the constant reiteration of our failures to be fully human. However, the dis-ease and discomfort that is normally experienced and absorbed by those of us outside the normative is reflected back to unsettle the reader. This political intention is also central to my lack of biographical re-presentation of participants. By allowing the women to speak for themselves, and in refusing to biographically or physically define them, I am forcing the reader to engage with them on an equal human level. My refusal to 'categorise' the individuals also invites the reader to be "active" (Sparkes, 2003: 71) and to engage with the many layers of meaning in the text. The reader comes to know and understand the individuals in a way which much more closely mirrors an equal social interaction, facilitating a more non-judgemental context in which each participants' particular experiences can emerge in her own time and words.

For all of these reasons: the politics; ethics and methodologies; the representation and my location within the dialogue; as well as of course the subject matter itself; I offer this piece as an expression of an embodied, feminist, sociology.

Key to presentation of dialogue:

Times new roman: original transcript extract

Garamond: text written in afterwards to construct group conversation.

[words in square brackets]: Contain descriptions that clarify issues, and edits that conceal identificatory statements.

[....]: Indicates section / words edited from transcript.

Underline: Spoken emphasis.

(SMALL) CAPITALS: Spoken loud.

A Conversation from the Edge of Normative Femininity.

Part 1: Non-normative Embodiment and Social Policing.

Kay:

"Thank you all for being here, for sharing some of your experiences with me, and for being willing to let me work with them. Because I have already spoken to each of you individually and am also framing the context for this discussion I will try and direct, as well as participate in, the conversation.

What has really become apparent to me as a result of my conversations with you is that most analyses of women and body-marking (be that as body-modification or 'self-injury') arise from a position where experiences are uncritically located in the context or ideal of normative embodiment. And while as a feminist I would have been very aware of critiques of the norms of femininity and the imperatives to embody them (Bartky, 1992; Bordo, 1996; Davis, 1995; Frost, 2000; Wolf, 1992; Young, 1991), I had not really made the broader connections between the range of experiences of non-normative female embodiment, the social control of them, and body marking. I had, however, always been aware of the ways in which the non-normative aspects of my own corporeality, those which I had chosen (piercings, tattoos), as well as those which I had not, redefine my body, my self, as publicly violable. Dale Spender (1989) has pointed out that women's bodies in general are constituted as more 'touchable' than men's bodies, and that this maintains their diminished social status. I think non-normative female bodies, like children's bodies (and the infantalisation of women with disabilities is widely acknowledged: Morris, 1991; Shakespeare et al, 1996; Thomas, 1999) descend even further on the hierarchy of normativity and the corresponding degree of integrity afforded to them. Non-normatively embodied women are objectified and disempowered through patterns of intrusive behaviour, surveillance, and interrogation which I consider to be highly significant and effective/affective in terms of policing and re-enforcing parameters of normative, gendered embodiment.

In this way I think that our experiences of the ways in which people respond to our bodies, and the impact that has upon our behaviour and our experience of ourselves is very significant. Elaine, I remember that you shared the experience of your dilemmas around issues of visibility, and your changing position in relation to exposing your scars."

Elaine:

"The first time I really ever wore [describes clothes that expose scars] was actually at work - in my old job - and the uniform was [clothes that expose scars]. And when I went for the job interview I said I'd had an accident as a child[1] so I couldn't wear [clothes that expose scars] and so they made me a [specific] uniform. (K: aha) And that was all fine. And I'd been there about a year, and just without having a conversation with my boss or anything, and it was a really hot day and she was like, 'For god's sake will you go and put on [describes clothes that expose scars]?' And I did. And I felt uncomfortable for a bit, and then I never wore the [concealing clothes] again, as in at work. And yes, some of the customers were rude, but I was protected by my work so [....] I would just ignore them. (K: aha) And then I got braver and started wearing them [i.e. clothes that reveal her scars] when I went out. And people would comment, and some people would even stroke [parts of body with scars] and say, 'Oh they're really soft aren't they?'"

Kay: [outraged]

"Oh my god!!"

Elaine:

"And you'd be like [sarcastic], 'Er, do you mind?'"

Kay: [laughing in disbelief and disgust]

"My god!"

[1] This is not actually 'true', but a 'story' Elaine uses to protect herself.

Elaine:

"Or you'd get"

Kay: [interrupting]

"That's outrageous!"

Elaine:

"the usual questions, or people saying like, 'Oh my god I wouldn't wear [that] if I was like that!'"

René:

"For me it's different. To some extent I have a choice about the way my body looks; it's more of an ideological struggle between wanting my body to be natural, but then dealing with the impact of people seeing it. Ideologically I feel like I should have it. And I feel like it's attractive on other people, but I feel; ugly, I guess. I mean I don't feel like those other people who have facial hair are ugly at all, I think they're so, I think very attractive. I actually think it's unusual, it's attractive and it tells you something about a person's spirit and personality. And it's funny because I would be more conscious of it in certain environments like when I go to teach (K: aha) I feel, [....] I don't know, I mean maybe, if I had long flowing hair beautiful long hair I would feel differently, where as I have short hair, I don't wear make-up, small breasts!"

Elaine, Maeve, **Kay:** [Laughter and head-shaking at the way she describes herself]

René:

"And then I've got this beard! You know! [laughs] I mean it's a tiny little beard, but it's kind of like a little billy-goat! [....] The whole shaving thing too, I mean I haven't shaved in probably ten years I mean my legs or my arm-pits and I thought never again, but I feel like I can't wear heels, or I can't wear skirts [....] because I feel so strange because of how it looks with my legs, you know? [....] And as I said, probably if I was left to my own devices and I

didn't see anyone, with my facial hair I could have a full beard! I would naturally have especially in the last few years quite a lot of facial hair - a whole beard growing out of my chin, and so it's awful because I feel like intellectually I should have it, I should grow it out and not buy into all this kind of crap. Because every time I've met with women who has that kind of facial hair and I really respect her and I really think that is SO AMAZING that you have decided to let yourself be the way that you are naturally, and I have so much admiration for those women and yet every time I grow it out I start getting a lot of comments about it."

Kay:

"One of the things I feel very strongly is that people are not simply making benign comments. That the way people make an issue out of difference is very political in the sense that it re-enforces the very limited definitions of how a woman must be in order to be 'normal' and acceptable. And I find it interesting that while there has been some feminist research (for example, Lees, 1986; Frost, 2000) on adolescence and the policing of gender within interactions in schools, peer groups, and so on, there has been little work done on the way these processes continue into adulthood[2]. It's as if the social policing (as opposed to the media and macro pressure which is more widely documented in terms of the norms of femininity (see Bordo, 1996; Davis, 1995)) magically disappears in adulthood. Yet the experience of being outside of the normative contradicts this very sharply indeed[3]."

René:

"Yeah, I mean where I live now is a very, in general, making huge sweeping, generalisations, but, it's a fairly conservative area. It would be fairly

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[2] One exception to this would be in terms of sexual harassment, see Wise & Stanley (1987).

[3] Goffman (1968) makes some reference to these issues, but as described above, his focus was much more on the 'abnormal' experience, rather than the effects and purposes of those who instil the stigma on the non-normative other in the interaction situation. Thus, the power relationships which are integral to reproducing normativity remain unquestioned.

homophobic, and I would feel like some of things that [previously] didn't bother me as a lesbian, I would be much more conscious about now I'm not living in the city (K: aha). I mean I never really consciously thought this through and thought right you have to wear this or don't look a certain way, but I think that when I started this job two years ago I was much more cautious. I went on the first day of work, and this woman I was teaching with said, 'Did I see you at church? In church on Sunday? At the [name] church?' And I was like 'Oh my god' you know, I was really like, 'How am I going to be able to come out to her when I can't even tell her that I'm not a Christian?!' You know! [laughter]

So, I was quickly aware that I was working in an environment that wouldn't necessarily accept me as a lesbian, and where I could be fired, and I actually really needed the work. And I didn't really feel like I wanted to enrage the whole political thing about being out, because I needed the money and I just felt like I don't really want to deal with that right now. I need this job, I like this job, and if it comes out organically then that's fine but I'm not going to show up on the job and say 'I'm here! I'm queer! Do I still have the job?' D'you know what I mean? (K: aha) So I think initially I would have had this really strong sense of maybe not giving off certain signals that would be lesbian; like [laughs] having facial hair, [both laugh] and short hair, and tattoos, and no make up, and I know this is all just so really shite! This is all based on the whole stereotypes - which are all true! But, I was, I think I was - it was partly the thing of wanting to sort of pretend and play this part of being someone that was [....] wealthier than I really was [....] and then partly not wanting to give off clues, like under arm hair, or tattoos, or things that would identify me as a lesbian."

Elaine:

"Yeah, like, I have now worn [clothes that reveal scars] around all the people at work, because I had an Ann Summers party and I actively said to them, 'I

don't know what to wear. I want to wear my [describes garment] but I don't know.' And they went, 'Well it's all people you know.' And that was their way of saying it's fine (K: yeah). So I did, and I'm sure they thought what ever. Then at work the other day they were saying something about choosing a uniform and they were saying, 'Well do you definitely have to wear [particular garments]?' and I said, 'No', and I kind of looked at them as if to say I was unsure as to whether I had to, and my boss went ,'Oh, it's your issue.' And I went, 'Well, no, I would wear [describes garments] but ...' (K: aha) And that's the first time that they've ever kind of told me it was ok (K: right, right). And I think that there's always an element of, in your job, you, you know, I question whether everybody or every place would be ok with you showing scars (K: aha). Even though I'm sure there's probably some kind of discrimination act that says you should be able to show them! [chuckle] "

Kay:

"Well absolutely, yeah!"

Elaine:

"You know, if you wanted to wear [particular garments] I'm sure there is an element of (K: yeah, yeah) but I'm never sure of it, of that. So I always err on the side of caution unless they let me know it's ok."

Kay:

"Aha, I think it is significant that all of us have these experiences of having to consider the ways in which people are going to react to our bodies and how we are going to deal with that. There are multiple implications and consequences of those responses from the hurt of ignorance, bigotry and cruelty to direct discrimination[4]. So that for me, I would always have actively lied to employers

[4] Synott (1993) discusses a court case in which an employer's (the YMCA) right was upheld to fire a woman if she refused to remove her facial hair. Likewise Wolfe (1992) outlines similar legal decisions against women who did not wish to shave their legs. Further, there are technicalities in Irish employment legislation that allow Catholic schools to suspend or fire teachers who breach the

about my disability, because up until December 2003 (when EU equality legislation was implemented in Ireland) it was legal for an employer to dismiss, or to pay a person less, on the grounds of their having a disability regardless of whether this impacted on their work. Further, from an early age I was both compelled to, and also 'learnt' the 'benefits' of concealing my disability because of the pathologization of 'difference'. When you embody something beyond what people consider normal or acceptable you really think a lot about how you can be around people. You become hyper-conscious all the time, and I think that links to what Frost (2000) describes as a split or separated subjectivity."

Maeve:

"Yes, I think that it's this sort of split that you kind of you irrevocably are your body, you irrevocably live your body and you are irrevocably embodied as a subject and yet because of discourses around you, the temptation, well not the temptation but the reality is, is that sometimes you are split that you want to pull yourself away from that body because it does or doesn't adhere to dominant discourses about what is acceptable and beautiful, particularly when you're a woman. [....] I think that it's interesting too in that in terms of the split subjectivity that you feel, that I feel, in my body often today when you can feel comfortable in your body, you can enjoy your body at some points, but then you're aware of the way that somebody looks at you or an interaction that you have, or a comment from somebody might be the punishment that you have to always necessarily expect from enjoying your body from feeling comfortable in your body at any one point."

Elaine:

"Yes and, for example, the way I would play it with scars is that, [....] I would be a lot more sceptical of people than perhaps I should be; so I would always

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ethos of the school, and while this has yet to be directly utilised against gay and lesbian teachers (it has been used against divorced or co-habiting heterosexual women) the threat of it itself leaves many teachers closeted and insecure.

err on the side of caution. [....] Because the impact of what people say when it's negative is like, sometimes it's so, so shocking that you can't speak. So I would always, kind of be cautious and end up saying to people, 'Oh I've got scars do you mind if I wear [garment]?' And it annoys me that I say things like that to people because I think it would be great if I could be like, 'Oh I don't care', (K: aha, aha) but that's not the way the world is. And you don't feel, nobody feels, 'I don't care' and, 'I don't care what people think of me', even half the time, you know (K: aha). It's very hard."

Maeve:

"Yeah. Absolutely. Like you can intellectualise these things and you can critique the discourses that govern the way that you be in the world, you can definitely deconstruct them, and talk about them, and get angry about them, but you also embody them."

Kay:

"And however much you intellectualise it, the feelings and the practicalities of dealing with it remain the same."

Elaine:

"I have this thing of if I'm meet new people, for example, if I start seeing someone I would actually conceal them [i.e. scars] from their friends because I don't want them - whilst it's not an entirely rational thing - I don't want their friends going up to them and going, 'Why are you going out with someone who has got such scarred [parts of body]?' Or, 'What's that about?' I don't want to enter in to that conversation (K: aha) I don't want to be thought about it that way. So by not showing them yes I am kind of making a judgement on them, but I'm more kind of being cautious for myself (K: aha, aha, mm). And, at some point [....] I would always say, 'I'm sure you've noticed' or, 'You might have noticed, that I have scars, and I'm going to wear [garment] now and I just wanted to bring it up so you don't ...', you know, 'I just wanted to

bring it up.' But that's all it takes to make me to feel comfortable, is me saying that one sentence. I would feel really uncomfortable if I didn't say that sentence."

Kay: [very moved]

"I'm so glad you shared that! Because, you know, I have really similar problems with people making inappropriate or hurtful comments about my disability, and then a year or two ago I came up with pretty much the same thing, I would pre-empt it by saying, 'I have a disability and I would appreciate it if people don't ask me questions or make comments about it.' And the effect is amazing, it really does take that stress and anxiety out of situations where otherwise you'd just be really self-conscious of people looking at you and just waiting for, or having to deal with, someone to saying something really awful."

Elaine:

"That's it! As soon as I've said it, as soon as I've stated the obvious, and that's' it! All the worries and anxieties about it just dissolve, [....] whereas if I didn't say that I would be thinking, 'Have they noticed?' [concerned] Or things like that. And most people just go, 'Yeah, cool.' And then that brings it up into conversation without anyone asking me anything about it. It's not uncomfortable, and that's the way I play it, and that's the way I feel comfortable, by saying it. And people would say, 'Oh you don't need to say that to my friends' and you're going, 'Well I do. For me. That's the way I feel comfortable.' And that actually really works for me saying to someone, you know, 'Oh I've got scars.' And I would rather say it before I take off [concealing garment] (K: yeah, yeah) because to me it's not comfortable to think, 'Are they looking at me?' [....] As soon as I've said that I could wear [garments] around those people all night and I would never think about it again because I've already said it to them (K: aha). And it just takes that two seconds conversation and (K: aha) that's it, so that kind of works for me in that way."

Maeve:

"In some ways it's similar for me, when I'm talking more about it other people talk less about it."

Kay:

"Yes, I think that there are two responses to that approach, either people really don't understand why you need to say it because they cannot or will not perceive how intrusive and, at times cruel, people are or it makes them think about those kinds of comments and their implications."

Elaine:

"Yes and I think when you take control of it in that way I think that you're facilitating a lot more of that thinking about it. [....] And obviously like you're stating the obvious but it's like saying, 'I'm comfortable with this I just wanted to say -'"

Kay:

"Yeah, yeah, it's kind of making it a non-issue"

Elaine:

"Yes. And that works. I find that works for me well. [....] Because then hardly anyone would come and ask me about it, cos it's not relevant, why the scars are there or anything. The only people who really would ask me about it are rude people, [ironic chuckle] like, if I'm in the street or something and people would come up to me, 'Why do your [parts of body] look like that?'"

Maeve, René, **Kay:** [murmurs and head-shaking in empathy]

Elaine:

"Or, like, a couple of weeks ago at work I was serving somebody, and at work we would wrap the [merchandise] in tissue, you know. (K: aha) And this

customer had been buying stuff and at one point I was [describes particular actions that would reveal scars] and I was there on my own, and [describes actions] and I could just feel her staring, <u>really</u> staring, and she just looked at me and went, 'What happened to your [parts of body]?' [demanding] 'Were you in a fire? What happened? What happened?' And I just kind of laughed and went - like nervously kind of laughed - and normally I'd be like, [embarrassed] 'Oh nothing, it doesn't matter' but I actually said, [assertive] 'Oh, erm, it's not really any of your business.' Which is the first time I had ever really!"

Kay:

"Well done!"

Elaine:

"And I kind of said it in a <u>polite</u> way, but it was like, 'Look you're asking somebody <u>at</u> work!' you know, (K: aha) and then she suddenly went, 'Oh my god, I'm really sorry! I'm really sorry!' [anxious] 'It's just that I saw them and I was just curious.' And she kind of realised that she shouldn't have been asking. (K: aha) But, it was the first time <u>I</u> had been able to say - normally I just kind of go, 'Oh it's a long story' (K: aha). But, you know, it kind of <u>was</u> none of her business, and you certainly don't ask someone serving you in a shop."

Kay:

"Absolutely, yeah!"

Elaine:

"It's definitely none of your business."

Maeve:

"Yeah, it's that combination of being female and what that means in terms of what people expect and how they judge you and then coupled with being non-normative means that you are just an open target for comment. I get it a lot, like people might comment that, 'you're a [non-normative] girl', you know, 'you shouldn't [describes particular behaviour] this'. Like I was in the shopping centre yesterday, I was shopping with a friend, and I picked up [describes item] and an old man who was standing near by just sort of looked at me and said, '[critical personal comment]'. And you just think that there is an open licence for people to sort of say certain things about your body that you come to expect when your body is kind of outside of the ideal or a normative body."

Kay:

"Yeah! I often have this experience where people see me walking with a stick or crutches and they just really obviously start looking my body up and down and then they go, 'What happened to your leg?' or 'What's wrong with your foot?' And it makes me feel awful, humiliated. Because not only are they intruding on my personal integrity and experiences that I consider to be private, but they're just standing there finding fault with bits of my body and demanding I explain myself to them. There are so many layers to it: there is that association with the appraisal of the female body, a woman's success in embodying femininity, in which her legs are a crucial feature/fetish. So it feels very gendered to me like a public shaming for an aberration of gender. And then there is a more personal anxiety, I feel like 'God, does all of me look deformed then?' And I would love to be able to say back something like, 'Oh, what's wrong with your face?' Or, 'Why is your body like that?' Or, something, but I never do because I'm so crushed by what they've said. I feel bad, that I have to rescue the situation, when they have been really unpleasant to me. And I think that is where the power issue is so integral, its like that notion that the oppressed always have to take responsibility for the abuses of the oppressor (see Moane (1999) for a discussion of this power relationship and it's psychological and emotional consequences in a colonial context). And I've

even been at conferences and stuff and people will just walk up to me and either butt in to a conversation I'm having, or as a way of starting one with me, they'll go, 'What's wrong with you?' I mean what kind of thing is that to say to someone? Or sometimes people look at my stick or crutches and just start laughing at me."

Elaine:

"And in that situation, however much you may want to, it's very hard to say to people, 'It's none of your business!' (K: aha) And you get a sense of really pissed-off-ness and rage after, and the sarcasm comes after (K: aha, aha). And you want be able to say, 'For fucks sake! It's none of your business! How rude are you?!' You know? (K: aha) But you don't. And what always bothers me when people comment on your scars, it kind of, the way I would describe it, it cuts through all of your external toughness and it really goes to the heart of you. And you can't explain to friends why it upsets you so much (K: aha), and it really does. And in that second it knocks all your confidence (K: aha) and you can't explain you just feel awful, and it really bothers me that people can just do that to you. Complete strangers."

Kay:

"Yeah, yeah, I know that place. It's like people just crush you, and no-one really understands how awful it is, and how difficult it can be with people digging into your wounds all the time. How truly dis-empowering it is. And you're right, it's afterwards that you get really angry and you think of all the really cutting come-backs or responses. I have this idea that I'm going to write a paper called:

'Perceptual Retardation as an Outcome of Normative Embodiment'[5]"

[Laughs]

Maeve [laughs]

[5] Another version of this that I heard recently is "privilege as a learning disability".

Elaine & René [smiling]:

"What?!"

Kay:

"Basically it's an intellectualisation of just saying that 'normal' people are really ignorant!"

[Laughter]

"And that they are presenting a really serious social problem that needs to be addressed!"

Maeve:

"By us!"

Kay:

"Of course!"

Elaine: [smiling]

"For a while I did a similar kind of thing when people are gave me a hard time about my scars. Quite often I would say to people that - and this is a classic thing that I would say: 'Well do you actually know what scars are?' And people would go, 'No.' And I would go, 'They're too much collagen in the skin. They're a healing process. So actually what you're having an issue about is too much collagen. So really it's not that different from like a freckle, or your hair colour.' And people kind of go, '[awkward pause] Oh yeah', and don't say anything."

Kay:

"And does that make you feel ok about going out wearing [specific clothes], or are the feelings still the same? Because for me, even if I manage to give a 'smart'

answer, I still end up feeling bad, and I wish I hadn't been put in that situation in the first place."

Elaine:

"I've changed my opinion on it again (K: aha), in that I now don't wear [clothes that reveal scars] out very often. [....] I make an active choice not to wear them. Because I don't want to asked about my [scars] or, I don't want to feel uncomfortable. And the reality is that I do feel uncomfortable, and people do look at you, and whatever situation you're in, whoever you're around, [....] people will comment. And when you first choose to wear [clothes that reveal scars] then there's something very positive about choosing to wear them. Now I actually choose not to. Like I'm not saying that I don't [ever] wear [specific clothes], but [....] it's kind of different now. I choose not to wear them cos I choose to cover up my [parts of body] (K: aha) because I don't think it's anyone else's business (K: aha). If I want to wear [specific clothing] then I will buy [specific clothing] and not think about it. [....] But when you wear [clothing that reveals scars] and you're out [i.e. in public] people think they have the right [to comment], and that's never going to change, because people will always be nosey, curious, drunk, whatever. [....] So I would wear [concealing garments] if I choose to protect myself (K: aha). Cos I don't want to be asked about it. And to me that's a different place from wearing them to cover up the scars cos that's what you do."

Kay:

"Yeah, it's like taking control over it really isn't it, really?"

Elaine:

"It's a very active process I don't have to cover them up (K: mm), but, equally nobody wants to be asked all the time about something (K: mm) that is personal about them. And my [parts of body], if I don't want to cover them up then I won't cover them up, and if I do I'm not covering them up to make other

people feel more comfortable I'm covering them up for my own DAMAGE LIMITATION (K: aha). That's how I would describe it (K: aha). I don't want to be asked actually, anymore, about it so I would wear [concealing clothes] or what ever, or [non-concealing clothes] it depends on my mood (K: aha). Just because if I don't want to think about it and I think that there's a risk that people are going to be rude to me then I will wear [concealing garments]. Not because I don't want to see them but because I don't want to be asked or upset by others (K: yeah) or to think about it."

Kay:

"It's still amazing though, like you said, the way that people think they have a right to know, and it constantly pisses me off and blows me away at the same time the way people really do think they have the right to know"

Elaine:

"They do!"

Kay:

"Or to comment on other people's bodies, it's incredible! And then because of that there is the whole process you go through about how you are going to deal with the physical realities of yourself in different situations. It's like the concept of 'passing' that once referred to strategies used by people of 'mixed race heritage' (see Butler, 1993; Davis, 2003; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001) and which is now also used in relation to disablement (Morris, 1991) queer sexuality (Butler, 1993) and gender (Dent, 2002). And I think that our experiences - René, Elaine, myself - are similar to that[6]. I used to work really, really hard so that people didn't notice my disability and some of the time it worked, although I was often making things very difficult for myself in terms of physical pain and damage. But now mostly I don't even bother trying to pass as able-bodied - because knowing how ignorant they are I don't idealise or want to identify as one of them any more!! No,

[6] This would not be true for Maeve as it would be very difficult for her to pass herself off as normative.

seriously though, it has got almost physically impossible for me to pass, but there are still a few occasions where if I can I might still make that choice to pass. And a lot of being able to do that depends on what the situation is, and the physical environment, but my choice, [to Elaine] like you, to do that is based on who will be there. For example, recently I went to a bar-b-q and I knew that the woman whose house it was would be sensitive around me needing to sit and that kind of thing, and I also knew there were going to be heaps of people I hadn't met before. And I was nervous anyway and I knew it would make it worse if I was worrying if they were going to comment on my crutches. So I went without, and it was mostly okay, except at one point where I ended up talking about the (old) car I had just bought and this woman was like 'Why do you need a car? I thought you would know better![7]' And if I had my stick/s it would have been more obvious I guess, but I kind of felt a bit hurt and uncomfortable.

However, it also really re-iterates my point about how limited people's perception is, and that if someone is normatively embodied they really don't seem able to perceive other realities at all. And I think when you are outside the normal then you really do have a whole perceptual experience and capacity that other people don't engage. For example, Andrew Sparkes (2003) writes about how his experience of 'back problems' has made it possible for him to perceive similar pain or mobility issues in other people, even when they are concealing it. In a way it's the same for me too, I can spot people who are 'passing' or who have fairly invisible disabilities quite easily, and can also distinguish them from able-bodied people who are temporarily incapacitated[8]. It's like you gain a whole extra level of sensitivity and then you are confronted by the responses of normatively embodied people who only seem able to respond to people in such limited and offensive ways. So you have a huge process of having to negotiate your way

[7] Because I am a bit of a hippy, vegetarian, environmentalist type.

[8] While I may be aware of these issues it is not something I would externalise or make comments, or judgements about, in fact as with 'self-injury' it is 'knowledge' I would tend to be quite protective of. At the same time I do take some personal comfort from the unspoken recognition that sometimes takes place between people with similar experiences.

around interactions with normatively identifying people, and it can be really draining having to protect yourself in that kind of way all the time. For me it's like I don't want to have a discussion about my disability with anyone, but I need people to just accept it, and getting people to accept that balance can be quite complicated."

Kay: Conclusion, Summary & Afterwords.

This problem of balancing visibility and acceptance within the structures of gender norms is central to our experiences of non-normativity. In our different ways we are all excluded from the norms of gender/femininity and struggle to establish the integrity of self that the normatively embodied maintain as an exclusive privilege. In summary then, I hope that my re-presentation of our conversation has outlined the way in which this privilege is maintained, controlled and regulated through daily social practices and interactions. The consequences of non-normative embodiment include discrimination and shame inducing social responses, that fracture self-integration and result in the kind of hyper-objectified or separated subjectivity discussed in chapter three. This impacts at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro level it is evident for the individual, in terms of the diminished sense of self and the social anxieties it provokes. At the macro level, it reiterates binary and hierarchical social norms through dis-empowering of 'others'/ 'outsiders' and maintaining a normative, gendered ideal.

For me, a key issue that arises from this discussion is that many theorisations of body marking are based precisely upon these problematic assumptions of normative embodiment. Like the sociological analyses of the body-self relationship, this position results in a fundamental omission in the ways in which the marked body is approached. When body marking is uncritically theorised with cultural norms of body-self, or within binaries of agency-mutilation, then a limited and misrepresentative analysis results. To assume that individuals embody their selves, gender and life experiences in a generalisable way, which equates with a

privileged or normative position, misses the complexities and possibilities of analytical engagement and understanding that an embodied perspective enables.

Here, I have attempted to privilege embodiment as a means of knowing in terms of both the actual lived experiences and the methods of representing them. In the next chapter, I return to the theoretical discourse of body marking and reflect on the ways in which an embodied perspective moves beyond binaries of agency and mutilation, and away from objectifying knowledge. This critique enables a position of theoretical engagement which is holistic, intersubjective and grounded in feminist ethics of the body. For me, an embodied position is not only the most ethically viable, but is also the most effective in terms of the goals and applications of theorisation at a pragmatic level. In this way embodiment enables an understanding of the issues involved, and how best to engage with them, that I have utilised at a personal, theoretical and therapeutic level.

However before moving on, there is a final dimension to add to my analysis of the normative, gendered body. After composing this discussion it occurred to me that there is also another level at which this normative reading and policing of the body plays out which was described by my first research participant, Ciara. For Ciara issues of passing and normativity were problematic in an opposite and yet related way. As with myself, Elaine, Maeve and René she struggled with a contradictory experience of subjectivity which occurs when bodily appearance, in terms of normative readings, do not comply with subjective experience. However, for Ciara this experience was of assumed normativity rather than visible aberrations of it. Similar experiences of unintentional passing as normative, and the self-idenitificatory issues they raise, have motivated trans activists such as Stephen Whittle (1999) to advocate the use of the pre-fix 'trans' to their gender category. In this way they claim their non-normative gender status and history, at the same time as acknowledging, and insisting upon, their gender of 'choice'. For Ciara, her inadvertent passing means that people do not, cannot, or will not, accept the experiences that she knows to be formative of herself because her appearance is at

odds with the characteristics that such a person is deemed to embody. Ciara described how when she was working in the social/voluntary sector, many of her clients would have shared very similar life experiences to her own. However, because she was not visibly marked or physically altered by these experiences her clients (and others) found it difficult to accept her experiences in terms of their perception of her. She said,

> I really wanted to get one [a tattoo] because I was really aware - like I was doing a lot of work in [voluntary organisations], and I was working with people with actually very similar backgrounds to my own. I was working with them and I would be talking to them, and I mean obviously I had got kind of further along with dealing with this than they had cause they couldn't cope! [laughs] I mean they were finding it hard to cope. But when I was talking to some of them and I was working with them, I was saying that I'd also been homeless for example, they found that astounding, how could I have been homeless? Like that doesn't compute with them! [laughs] I didn't look like I'd been homeless, or I don't look like I'd been through the same kind of things, and I think that there is something when really you look like you've been through so much. A lot of the women that I was working with they really looked like they had been, and yet I'd been through very similar situations, and I didn't look like that. And I thought that was really interesting and I think it's really interesting the way people react to me, and they react to them because it's quite apparent that they'd been through things, and in some ways they're treated worse for that cause you can see it. Some of them would have been heroin users and stuff but not all of them [....] some of them would have been HIV positive, but some of them wouldn't be either of those, but they all had this [laughs] look. [....] And, you know, I did spend all this time on drugs, and I was homeless, and I was sexually abused, and I was raped, and I was going through all these things that these other people that I was working with [went through], but I didn't look like it. And I don't have any scars from that, you can look at any part of my body and you can't see any of that. And like from taking drugs as well, you know I didn't inject drugs so I don't have any scars from that and I don't have any scars from the abuse or anything, or from being homeless, and, so, in a funny kind of way it was like I wanted to have some mark. Its kind of like physically nothing has affected me in my life so far, even though emotionally and everything it has affected me very much, but like physically nothing has affected me

> really. I mean, even my finger-prints kept coming back![9] [laughs] I don't really have any scars or marks or anything like that, that that kind of I suppose shows the pain that I dealt with, and I only became aware of that when I was working with those people and the pain that they dealt with or are dealing with is really evident, and you can see so strongly in them that they are still dealing with it and they have been dealing with it for such a long time. And I don't I don't have this very strongly physically so in a way having a tattoo marks three areas of pain in my life in a way, it marks something, it's some mark. But in a way I'm happier to have a tattoo that I've chosen and chose to put there, rather than have like the negative effects of that obviously physically showing![laughs] You know, if you have to weigh it up having a tattoo is much nicer, but I felt like I wanted to have some mark of some of that.

Ciara's experiences are not only crucial in considering the multifaceted ways in which normative readings of the body deny individual subjectivity, but also because here she has begun to make some direct connections between subjective embodiment and body marking practices. I return to this theme (chapter six, below) when the four of us expansively reflect on the relationship between different forms of body marking and the ways in which they are connected to our specific embodied subjectivity. But firstly, I will attempt to incorporate embodied experience and method within a critique of binary analyses of body marking practices.

[9] Earlier in the conversation Ciara had told me how as a child she had regularly burnt her fingers in order to try and erase her fingerprints. We speculated about the connections with this and its identificatory implications for her at the time, see chapter five.

5. Who's Hurting Who?

Beyond binaries of agency and mutilation in body marking practices.

Introduction.

This chapter takes the first step towards explicitly integrating the three stands of my work. I draw on the embodied ethic of research, embodied experience, and engaging with this through a theory of embodiment. The ethics of knowledge and representation connect with the experiences in a holistic non-objectifying manner which has practical applications in terms of facilitating a person centred, harm reduction model of body marking. In this way the position of embodiment offers an ethically salient and a theoretically as well as pragmatically viable conceptualisation of body marking. This embodied perspective, which enables a move beyond binaries of agency and mutilation in body marking, also connects with the established themes of gendered embodiment.

So far I have considered the ways in which the gendered self is embodied, and specifically that gender difference - femininity - is marked on the female body, at the same time the female body is also directly marked and altered in order to create exactly this gender difference. However, in most considerations of body alteration the embodiment of gender is neither widely acknowledged or developed to its full potential. This neglect of gendered embodiment is, for me, intrinsically connected to dualistic theorisations of body marking located around the artificial polarisations of agency and mutilation.

In order to understand the ways in which a perspective of embodiment enables a move beyond binary definitions of body marking practices as either, 'modification' or 'injury' - agency or mutilation - I will discuss the work in this area, and highlight the ways in which analyses of body marking are uncritically grounded on an assumptions of a quantitative notion of 'mutilation'. There is, however, some divergence in the ways in which this measuring point of mutilation is developed, and this diversity facilitates some steps on the path towards an embodied location. I

develop these themes by distinguishing three key positions: firstly, where all forms of body marking are viewed as inherently mutilative and unhealthy, and here, medical and radical feminist theorists find themselves uncomfortable bedfellows; secondly, where body modification and 'self-injury' are seen to exist on a continuum that is measured by normative notions of a healthy body. This position critically addresses the social context in which the interventions take place alongside the social norms of embodiment and their structuring within dualistic discourse, and includes practitioners of both body modification and 'self-injury'. Finally, mutilation is also used by theorists who claim to be sympathetic to body marking practices yet at the same time emphasise the problems and limitations of such practices.

Having discussed these approaches I move on to consider the ways in which a position that is based in an embodied perspective not only undoes the binary of agency and mutilation but also presents a critique of normative positions of knowing. I draw on the experiences of my research participants as well as the groundbreaking work by Gloria Babiker & Lois Arnold (1997) in *The Basement Project* in Bristol in the UK. This embodied perspective which integrates the three themes of my work - theory, method and experience - also connects with the three strands of experience I bring to it through the academic, the therapeutic and the practitioners' perspectives. Without this connection through embodiment these positions of knowledge and experience may appear separate, contradictory and irresolvable, not unlike the dichotomies of agency and mutilation. Embodiment then, not only enables a shift beyond binaries of agency and mutilation but also facilitates a multifaceted way of knowing and experiencing these issues.

5.1 Agency & Mutilation: A Binary of Disembodied Knowledge.

- All bodily practices as mutilation.

There are two distinct schools of thought that fall into the position of regarding all bodily practices as a form of mutilation. They are a particularly interesting duo in that while the one, psychiatry (the medicalised perspective) is highly gendered, it does not overtly acknowledge this, and the other, radical feminism, is intrinsically gendered yet does not recognise its strange alliance with patriarchal thought.

From the medical perspective there are two key issues in understanding 'self-mutilation'. Firstly, that it is overwhelmingly a female disease, and secondly that a whole range of bodily practices, including body-modifications are viewed as pathological (Favazza, 1996; Levenkron, 1998; Miller, 1994). In this way issues of gender, illness and pathology become confused in an analysis which fails to recognise the cultural specificity of either the norms of gender, or in defining bodily practices. 'Self-mutilation' is an illness rooted in feminine dysfunction, a disorder which is linked with the intrinsic pathology of femaleness. The medical/psychiatric view is based on gendered and binary notions of normalcy and deviance: which define women as mad (Ussher, 1991); sick (Frost, 2000); and generally inferior to men in emotional, physical and psychological terms (Synott, 1993). Mental health is not only tied to rigid norms of gender but also specific bodily behaviours and practices, thus women who visibly deviate form the normative are quickly labelled as unwell. The connections between visible difference/deviance and pathology in gendered terms also links with the pathologization of homosexuality, where sexual deviance/dysfunction is deemed to be evident not only in appearance and behaviour but also from particular innate physical characteristics (Munt, 1998; Butler, 2004). Appearance orientated aspects of femininity have then been defined as means to determine the level of appropriate mental health functioning of women.

> Make-up and skirts, a hair-do and not 'letting yourself go' are the correct symbols of the sane woman, the necessary tools to construct sane identity. Cultural norms are crucial here. For example in the

> UK only a certain degree of looks engagement is an indicator of mental health. 'Too much' make-up, clashing colours or wild applications, clothing that is too girly or too sexy, may well be interpreted as a symptom of manic reactions, a kind of hysterical well-being expressed in over beautification. Equally spending 'too much' time in the process of constructing appearance might be suspected as indicative of an obsessional disorder.
>
> (Frost, 1999: 119)

Thus, in mental health institutions a huge emphasis is placed on women's appearance, and indeed, cultivating appropriate femininity is regarded as a therapeutic intervention[1]. "Doing looks is conceptualised as a self-determining experience, of benefit to women suffering from mental health problems" (Frost, 1999: 121).

This pathologization of femaleness, and obsessive surveillance and monitoring of women's bodily practices in a gendered society, where the very structuring of gender norms are ignored, constitutes a "psychiatrisation of everyday life", where, "at the margins what is stereotypical behaviour and what is a psychiatric condition is arbitrated by structural power relations which enable, for example, ... masculine perspectives to define 'normal' women" (Frost, 2000: 11). The normative definition of femaleness, and its uncritical location within the construction of femininity as pathological *per se* is evident in the medical literature regarding 'self-injury'.

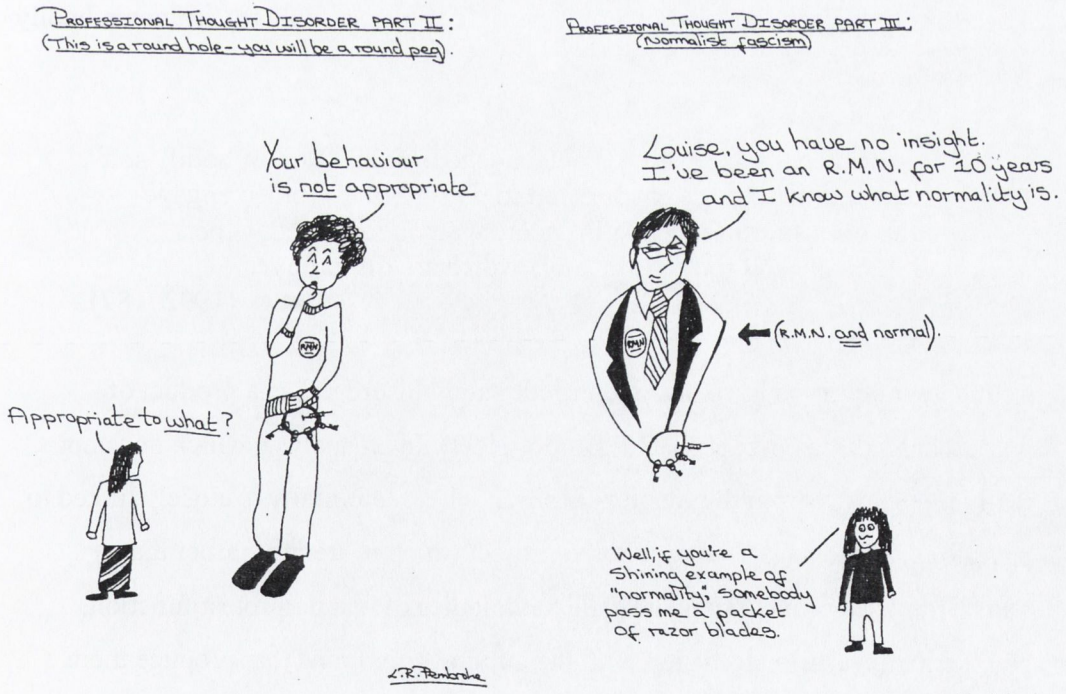
> A number of studies .... portray the typical wrist-slasher as 'an attractive, intelligent, unmarried young woman, who is either promiscuous or overtly afraid of sex, easily addicted and unable to relate to others .... She slashes her wrists indiscriminately and repeatedly at the slightest provocation, but she does not commit suicide. She feels release with the commission of her act.' .... Most self-cutters [are considered] diagnostically to be schizophrenic or borderline.
>
> (Favazza, 1996:167)

[1] I was always aware that my own appearance would, according to some psychiatrists, be evidence of self-abuse, mental/emotional instability, and/or some kind of manic reaction. I used to feel very strange in my role as 'staff' visiting my clients in psychiatric institutions who usually managed a much closer approximation of a normal appearance than me.

Liz Frost describes how this definition illustrates precisely the issues that are at the heart of the medicalised responses to women and their actions.

> This stereotype resonates with all the contradictory demands of what a young woman *should* be under psychiatry - attractive and available but virginal; intelligent but indiscriminate and lacking social competence, out of control and in need of help from the masculine science of medicine. It is just these kinds of contradictory prescriptions which young girls must negotiate and which .... impacts strongly on their ability to be comfortable with themselves.
>
> (2000: 26)

Likewise, in a series of cartoons depicting "Professional Thought Disorder" Louise Pembroke reworks the power to define pathology in a critique of the medical diagnosis and treatment of women who 'self-injure".



(1996: 16 & 20)

Radical feminists are equally concerned by the propensity of women to 'mutilate' their bodies. However, their focus is not so much in terms of the intervention for the individual, but rather a wider critique of the patriarchal structures which both directly and indirectly damage women's bodies. For example, Sheila Jeffreys (2000) argues that *all* bodily interventions are a form of "self-mutilation" which result from patriarchy. Jeffreys defines two distinct but equivalent forms of "self-mutilation". Firstly, "self-mutilation by proxy": that is where the 'mutilating' act is performed by another person, and in her definition includes female-to-male transgender surgery, body modification, cosmetic surgery, and sado-masochism. Secondly, "self-mutilation in private", behaviours which are conventionally understood as 'self-injury', and also 'mainstream' bodily practices including leg-shaving and eyebrow-plucking. These acts are: "a savage embrace of the most grave attacks [women] can make on their bodies" (Jeffreys, 1994 in Sullivan, 2000: 80), and are "practiced overwhelmingly by groups in society with unequal access to power or influence as a result of their sex, sexuality, or disability" (Jeffreys, 2000: 414). Likewise, Bonnie Burstow holds patriarchy accountable for women's bodily practices[2].

> In patriarchal society all women engage in some form of bodily self-injury and indeed are encouraged to do so. Some women engage only in self-mutilation that is encouraged or condoned. Others additionally self mutilate in ways which are disapproved of.
>
> (1992: 187)

In this vein feminists have also identified 'eating disorders' as a product of patriarchal culture (Orbach, 1986; Bordo, 1993). In an analysis which does not really move away from the medical position where femininity is closely linked to pathology, anorexia is seen as a failed project which re-iterates rather than transforms the norms of gender. "The pathologies of female protest function, paradoxically, as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produce them,

[2] Kathy Davis has described these views of women's apparent compliance with the norms of patriarchy as "the cultural dope syndrome" (1995: 57). Here, feminists fall into the trap of depicting women as passively acquiescing to the structures of their oppression, inadvertently defining them in ways which are not dissimilar from the very views of femaleness they seek to challenge.

reproducing rather than transforming precisely that which is being protested" (Bordo, 1993: 99).

Overall then, these views of bodily interventions as evidence of social and/or individual pathology are firmly rooted in normative binaries and ignore the complexity of the lived, embodied self. However, this is not to entirely dismiss the issues that are raised here. So that, for example, issues of power, confinement and sexual objectification may indeed shape the body-self relationship and relate to the experience of marking the body. In this vein Babiker and Arnold (1997) describe how while within the general population incidences of 'self-injury' tend to be significantly lower in men that women, in the prison system, where men are subject to intense control, surveillance, as well as sexual abuse and objectification, then rates of 'self-injury' rocket. Further, it would also be futile to deny that emotional distress is commonly experienced with 'self-injury', however the label of 'mental illness' or 'borderline personality disorder' is in no way helpful, illuminating or even descriptive in most cases. Thus, while issues of power and distress may have some resonances with body marking practices, where they are used in medicalised or pathologizing discourses they become unhelpful and destructive concepts which offer little in terms of theoretical understanding, or in terms of support for the individuals they describe.

- The Continuum

There are a number of perspectives which locate the varying forms of body marking on a continuum, with 'beauty practices' and body modification at one end and 'self-injury' at the other. This view is put forward by practitioners of body modification as well as writers with experiences of 'self-injury', who often seek to criticise or reverse the cultural norms of the body.

> The scarifier, the lacerator, the self abuser, the piercer all seek .... to do violence to the primary violence that deprives me of my body, the violence of representation, naming, abstraction, the alienation of the body into significance. There is an assault that goes beyond the

> attempt to efface and rewrite what is written on the skin: it is an assault on the bearer or scene of meaning.
>
> (Connor, 2001: 45)

Likewise, from a feminist, 'survivor's' perspective of 'self-injury' Marlee Strong suggests that: "A tattoo or piercing, like cutting, can be used to re-claim the body or one of its parts, to make it more beautiful or more sexual, to cover up and camouflage physical or psychological imperfection" (2000: 149).

In this way these theories to some degree recognise the cultural and gendered specificity within the definition of bodily practices, but none the less continue to regard 'self-injury' as a quantifiable, problematic or even pathological experience. The other group of theories in this category are those which are often put forward by practitioners of body modification. Here, the aim is usually to 'rationalise' bodily practices that are normatively viewed as at best extreme, and at worst sick and/or deviant. Body modification practitioners, such as Musafar (1996) draw widely on cross cultural practices to support their position. Indeed there are a number of writers who consider bodily alteration as culturally specific practices, often described as forms of 'body art' (Brain, 1979; Groning, 1997; Rubin, 1988 – discussed in chapter seven). Anthropologists, such as Robert Brain (1979), make use of the notion of the continuum of 'mutilation' in order to highlight both the universality of practices which damage the body as well as the cultural specificity that determines both the meaning and response to them. In some cases the writers go as far as to argue that body alteration constitute 'marks of civilisation' (Rubin, 1988; Vogel, 1988) and are precisely the practices which engender human culture and distinguish human beings as unique among other species (Brain, 1979; Ebin, 1979; Randall & Polhemous, 2000).

For practitioners of body modification, while these issues are referenced in attempt to demonstrate that body modification is entirely different from 'self-injury', they nevertheless continue to draw parallels between the two. Musafar, for example, argues that body modification is intrinsically a healthy, spiritual pursuit that can

lead individuals to a "state of grace" (1996: 334), while at the same suggesting that body modification can also act as a "safety valve" for individuals who 'self-injure' (1996: 330). Paradoxically, this view is also reflected in criminological and psychological texts where body modification is seen to demonstrate an inclination to criminal or psychological pathology that is marked in more 'severe' cases by less ambiguous forms of 'self-mutilation' (Sullivan 2001). This perspective is also reflected in the work of psychiatrist Levenkron (1998) who uses the concepts of body modification and 'self-mutilation' to illustrate the related, but nevertheless problematic, nature of the impulse to mark the body. The similarities and differences between these forms of body marking can, he suggests, be understood in terms of the "sick" motivation of "self-mutilation" and the "goofy" mentality of body modification (Levenkron, 1998: 23).

Approaches to body marking based on a continuum highlight some of the cultural and temporal specificity of the meanings of the acts. However, for me, these understandings do not go far enough in challenging the binaries of normalcy and pathology, as well as of appropriate gendered behaviour. In developing an embodied, feminist, position it is essential to understand the ways in which the definition of what constitutes 'self-injury' as opposed to 'beautification' or 'body modification' is fundamentally social, rather than linked to any intrinsic quality of the act itself. However, that these definitions are entirely relative and arbitrary must at the same time be tempered with two important qualifications. Firstly, that I do not wish to trivialise or dismiss the issues and often painful expressions that are worked out through body marking as 'self-injury' (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Strong, 2000). Secondly, nor do I wish to imply that 'self-injury' is the only form of bodily intervention where these forces may be present, and certainly they may be equally present for women shaping their bodies to meet norms of femininity (Davis, 1995; Frost, 2000), as well as within practices of body modification (Strong, 2000). Further 'self-injury' may involve none of these 'problematic' aspects, and may equate more closely with normative relations of bodily engagement. The point is then, that it is not the quality of the act that constitutes its

definition, but rather the social understanding and response to it, which subsequently impacts on the individual who marks her body.

The cultural and temporal specificity of the definitions of precisely which bodily practices are compulsory, which are gendered, which are considered deviant, abnormal, and sick can be illustrated with many examples[3]. In the Middle Ages it was expected that for a woman to be feminine and beautiful she would pluck out her entire eyebrows and the front of her hair-line (Bordo, 1993). Today, while women are expected to remove some of their facial hair, on the upper lip and part of the eyebrow - by plucking or hot wax - if women remove another part of the facial hair, plucking the eyelashes for example, this is described as 'self-injury' and evidence of mental disturbance. (According to Favazza, (1996) plucking of eyelashes is a common manifestation of 'self-injury' amongst women.) In a more contemporary comparison, the alteration of the female foot in Chinese footbinding practices is defined as a mutilative cultural practice (Brain, 1979) and a patriarchal abuse of women (Daly, 1979). At the same time foot alteration (where toes are amputated) in contemporary western society is seen as: self-injury that indicates mental illness (Favazza, 1996); a form of 'extreme' body modification (www.bme.com); or a fashion essential for women who wish to squeeze their feet into designer shoes (*New York Times* 12/07/03). This arbitrary definition is also evident in the way in which using bleach on the skin has entirely different connotations depending on whether a Black woman is lightening and hence 'beautifying' her skin, or a white woman is applying it to her skin for 'cleansing', i.e. 'mutilative', purposes (Babiker & Arnold, 1997)[4]. Finally, forms of 'body modification' which were at one time seen as marginal, counter cultural, or deviant become mainstream as the norms of fashion change (Clarke, 1996; Huck, 1997; Pitts, 2003). So that, for example, when I was in my teens body piercing was

[3] Elaine pointed out that in a culture that reified scarification she would be considered the height of female acceptability, a priestess or wise woman.

[4] In this way it is interesting that while there is general hysteria at the way in which Michael Jackson has become whiter skinned (Davis, 2003) that his female contemporaries who have equally 'de-racialised' their features are accepted without comment. Kathy Davis (2003) mentions Cher here, but other contemporary examples include Thandie Newton, and Jennifer Lopez.

considered outrageous and provoked very hostile reactions, indeed it was also so uncommon that it was almost impossible to find a 'professional' body piercer. Nowadays body piercing, and particularly the pierced navel, has become another of the mainstream fetishes of normative femininity.

It is not only the cultural meanings of body marking that are fluid in this way. In medicalised terms the same arbitrary and often contradictory rationale can be found. So that, for example, in the west, an individual's attempt at healing or spiritual expression through re-enactment of 'pre-modern' rituals which involve bodily interventions, such as the Native American Sun-Dance, are regarded with hostility and revulsion (Musafar, 1996; Myers, 1992; Pitts, 2003), while passing electricity though an individual's head in a psychiatric/medical setting is believed lead to psychological well being. Further, in mental health practices physiologically altering the body through medication is deemed to be an appropriate response to emotional, psychological or mental distress. Yet physiologically altering the body through 'self-injurious' practices - which may, in a harm reduction context, cause much less long term damage and side effects - is not only seen as inappropriate, but also as irrational and totally ungrounded in any reasonable response to an experience. Finally, even the border between what constitutes medical diagnosis and intervention, and what are cosmetic issues of appearance, are equally arbitrary, particularly when gender is at stake. Judith Butler (2004) describes how the practice of radical mastectomy is performed with great enthusiasm by the medical profession as both a 'cure' and 'prevention' for breast cancer, unless, it appears that the mastectomy is too easily accepted, and thus considered to constitute elective surgery for an undiagnosed transgendered woman. Likewise, breast implants for 16-year-old females are widely practiced as an enhancement of femininity, but not if the 16-year-old is a M2F transsexual seeking to embody femininity.

Overall then, the continuum offers, if not a complete response to, or understanding of, body marking, at least a critique of many of the dualistic and arbitrary assumptions that lie behind its definition.

- Mutilation as Limitation

The last group of theorists, which tend to be post-structuralist feminist analysis of the body, its practices and regulation, at the outset appear to have much potential in terms of considering the complexity of embodiment within the practices of body marking. These theorists look for the agency within women's bodily interventions incorporating both the social context and the individual embodied biography in which they occur. However, this approach, which has been used in attempts to 'de-stigmatise' both body modification (Huck, 1997; Pitts, 2003) and 'self-injury' (Kilby, 2001), ultimately fails to do so for two key reasons. Firstly, that each author is intent on drawing a conclusion which fixes the meaning of another's body for an outside audience. Such conclusions rest on objectification and simplification of individuals and their experiences, removing them from an embodied context. This fracturing of experience and analysis also tends towards self-contradiction, so that while, for example, Victoria Pitts criticises body modification in terms of the limitations of its "visibility strategies" (2003: 116), she fails to acknowledge that such strategies are exactly the premise upon which her own response is constructed. Secondly, these approaches ultimately fail to move a way from the notion that there is a quantitative, visible and finite phenomena that constitutes bodily mutilation. This fabricated phenomena is then used as a rigid starting point against which other bodily interventions are measured and understood. Ultimately, then, these theories rest on a re-iteration of the dualistic separation of two forms of body marking.

In her work, *The Adorned and the Ambivalent,* Verity Huck utilises her feminist understanding of the specifically gendered body-self relation to highlight issues of agency and self-empowerment within women's body modification practices. She points out that:

> Assuming women suffer from inequalities, the female body will too as it is the physical matter that distinguishes the body as female. Thus, it will be the female who experiences stronger pressures of outside control over her body whose performaitve potentials will be more constrictive than that of her male counterpart.
>
> (1997: 3)

In this context body modification can offer women a means of "control, stability and empowerment" and allow women "to overcome the oppressive potentialities that the female has through her own body" (1997: 3). However, she does not suggest that body modification is liberatory *per se* and argues that it can have equally repressive potential in terms of re-iterating problematic norms of femininity. She suggests that empowering potentials stem from individual motivation, and that "it is the human agency which is applied to it [body marking] that determines its consequences" (1997: 6). Nevertheless, Huck fails to capitalise on the potential she has opened up here, by going on to create a binary analysis of 'the meaning' of body modification based upon the pathologized measuring concept of mutilation. She asks "can body modification be seen as a means of personal survival when it closely resembles (or even substitutes) acts of self-mutilation?" (1997: 12).

Victoria Pitts considers women's practices of body modification in the context of a critique of radical feminist understandings of body marking as a destructive response to the social conditions of gendered embodiment.

> Any critique of women's body practices as inherently deluded and self-hating must reveal and critique its own assumptions about the truth of female embodiment and subjectivity. The arguments radical feminists make against body modification seem to be informed by implicit assumptions about the body as naturally pristine and un-marked.
>
> (2003: 75)

Pitts considers the ways in which women use body modification as a way of reclaiming and re-connecting with their embodied female self-identity. Her research includes extracts from interviews with women who have modified their bodies in order to reintegrate their body and self following experiences of sexual abuse, or struggling with their appearance in relation to the norms of femininity. In this context she argues that:

> women's anomalous body projects can provide ritualised opportunities for women's self transformation and for symbolically recovering the female body. Far from revealing women's self-hatred and lack of self-control, they argue, the practices demonstrate women's assertion of control over their bodies.
>
> (2003: 56)

However, Pitts is not convinced by these women's experiences and goes on to outline the ways in which their reclaiming projects may be limited and ultimately ineffective. Firstly, she uncritically draws on the notion of "mutilation" to highlight what she calls the "limitation" of these responses:

> The aim of symbolically recovering the body from victimization is limited by body projects because eventually, the woman must stop. Otherwise, the physical effect would be, even by the standards of body modifiers, harmful and not reclaimative.
>
> (2003: 78)

Secondly, she argues that the transformation is merely symbolic, it produces individual rather than social transformation. While it is true that body alteration does not in itself eradicate sexual abuse or the beauty imperatives, to ignore the social impacts of the marked body in this way constructs a one-way relationship between the body and society, and ignores the impacts of the marked (and non-normative) body at the broader social level. Finally, Pitts points out that that body marking cannot be viewed in isolation from the social context, and that the social meaning - determined 'outside' the individual experience - may reduce the power and effectiveness of this strategy.

> Body marks cannot be seen as solely ideological or autobiographical. Marking the body is not a process that involves simply an individual author executing a strategic design that is read in the way she intends by her readers. The process is intersubjective, and thus, to some extent, out of the hands of women themselves.
>
> (2003: 78)

Thus, while on the one hand Pitts acknowledges issues of gender, embodiment, and agency within body marking, she utilises the social context to critique the potential

and effectiveness of these practices. That the basis of her critique rests on a binary view of both the 'social context' and 'mutilation', misses the fundamental point of embodiment. That is, the transformation of the body-self relation is fundamentally social at both macro and micro levels, and to separate the social context and embodiment is to move back to precisely the position upon which her initial critique rested.

Finally, Jane Kilby's article *Bearing Witness to Self-Harm* is also based in a feminist critique of conceptualisations of the gendered body, and particularly the ways in which gender norms are reflected in medical discourse surrounding women who 'self-injure'. "The body and its testimony of cut skin is .... read (and erased) as the site for heterosexual (re)production or (re)generation of family time. There is no time for her and her skin, she is 'not worth it'" (2001: 127). While Kilby tackles some of the problematisations within both feminist and medical theorisations of women's engagement with their bodies though 'self-injury', and attempts to challenge some of the silences and assumptions therein, she remains trapped in a normative perspective from which she assumes the role of witness and arbiter of such acts. She assumes that her own difficulties in confronting the physicality of 'self-injury' are universal. "There is something particularly hard to witness here .... The act of harming one's own skin by cutting it up and tearing it a part speaks with a 'voice' so sheer that it is virtually *impossible* for *anyone* to bear witness to" (2001: 124) [my emphasis].

Kilby draws on the notion that there is a sense of agency within the act of 'self-injury', but an agency that she can only articulate in negative (i.e. binary) terms.

> The cut-skin testimony of self-harm is a bloody means of seeking the affirmation of an existence denied. [....] By their own hand, self-harmers attempt to re-draw the lines between testimony, trauma and skin and in doing so attempt to (re)establish the (violent) agency given the hand in the production of significance.
>
> (Kilby, 2001: 132 & 137)

Kilby struggles here in that on the one hand she understands 'self-injury' as an interactive strategy which uses the damage inflicted on the body to communicate with others, when at the same time she argues that its very nature defies the possibility of witnessing. Thus, she has become enmeshed in the same confusion around issues of visibility and sociality that are also evident in Pitts's account of body modification. It seems to me that if the notion of embodiment is privileged, instead of visibility, then a less objectifying and contradictory understanding of body marking practices is possible.

These feminist analyses then, have begun to develop an understanding of bodily agency which touches on some of the complexities inherent to it, which begins to open up the possibility of understanding the role of gendered, subjective embodiment. Unfortunately however, they have not fully developed this potential, and as such do not escape the binaries that are at the heart of the pathologization of some forms of body marking, and which privilege visual/objectifying forms of knowledge. Thus, these analyses of bodily practices are based, rather ironically perhaps, on dualistic and separated analysis rather than on an embodied knowledge.

In summary then, the three positions I have identified share common problems in terms of their location within a binary view of bodily practices and the fixing of mutilation as a quantitative measure of the nature, meaning and purpose of body marking. There are, however, also issues raised within these theorisations that are not altogether antithetical to an embodied approach. These include, firstly, the emotional factors that are played out in body marking, alongside issues of power and control, particularly in terms of gender. Secondly, that the social context in which the body is understood, and bodily practices are interpreted, are to some degree integral to the embodied self. And, lastly, that agency, self-empowerment and transformation can be achieved through marking the flesh, when it is understood within a concept of the social and the self as equally embodied.

However, in more critical terms, what all of these positions have in common is that they are theorisations *of* the body. They diminish the body, and neglect the complexity of embodiment. "The body comes to matter only in so far as its matter or materiality is veiled over in and through the clinical extraction of abstract and immaterial truths [....] and thus silences the voice of the other" (Sullivan, 2002: 20).

These theories have been constructed around a disembodied knowledge where the author - usually with a predefined agenda - has gazed upon the bodies of others and pronounced them to indicate certain behaviours, pathologies or abnormalities. Nikki Sullivan refers to this position as the "dermal diagnostician" (2001: 42; 2002: 13), and describes how "this form of reading writes the body of the other as the expression of the story of the other that it desires to read, that it authors and authorizes" (2002: 18). Thus, 'mutilation' of the body is viewed as a form of "corporeal confession".

> Cuts, scars, burns tattoos and so on, are read ideographically. That is as graphics which tell the story or the 'truth', of a subject's psychic interiority. This rendering of the body of the other as readable, and the interiority of the other an object of knowledge, involves a number of connected assumptions which I would argue are problematic.
>
> (Sullivan, 2002: 19)

These problematic assumptions are precisely those around the readability of the body, of subjectivity as somehow disembodied, and interior, or separate from the corporeal substance of the body. The body is then deemed significant merely as a text which can be read by 'experts' to reveal and diagnose the 'inner truths' of the individual. Because of this, and because such theorists are uncritically located within a mind body dualism, they ultimately reveal themselves to be arbitrary, contradictory and limited when questioned from a position and ethic of embodiment.

Working from a position of embodiment, which actively engages the lived, corporeal, subjectivity of both the writer and the practitioner (who may be one and the same) opens up a radically different perspective. It enables a move beyond the fixing of meaning within binaries - here of mutilation and agency - and facilitates an engagement with experience which can contain the complexity, ambiguity and the contradictions that are inherent within human subjectivity. In this way mutilation and agency become not defining, oppositional characteristics but integrated within an understanding of the fundamental, gendered, embodiment of body marking practices.

5.2 Beyond Binaries: Embodied Knowledge & Practice.

Kathy Davis (1995) has utilised the notion of gendered embodiment and its inherent complexities, to understand female body alteration. While she considers body alteration only in terms of 'beauty practices' and cosmetic surgery, the position she adopts in relation to her work, as well as the ethics and conceptualisations she brings to it, are incredibly useful for me. Her work is premised on a critique of feminist approaches to body alteration which render women "cultural dopes" (1995: 57), passively submitting to the dictates of patriarchy. She points out that "while contemporary feminist scholarship has made a strong case for linking beauty to an analysis of femininity and power, it has been less successful in finding ways to understand women's lived experiences with their bodies" (1995: 58). Davis is not however, entirely unique among contemporary feminists in noting how this traditional critique of the patriarchal control of women's bodily practices tends slip into the mind body dualism, offering over-simplistic and unlivable solutions, where the body becomes viewed as, "a distracting diversion from a woman's real self, located internally. [And] that appearance is detachable, something women can simply *not* have anything to do with if they *choose*" (Frost: 1999: 122-3) [my emphasis].

These theories imply that there is a disembodied, "true self or core self, pure and uncontaminated" (Bartky, 1992: 325) which women can experience once they have

unencumbered themselves from the values of society, or developed healthy psychological functioning. And that women are, "dividable into 'real' selves, located somewhere non specific inside their bodies, and that their bodies [a]re inauthentic, compromising, misleading and distorting this real self which was the ontological underpinning" (Frost, 1999: 133).

In this way the dualisms of the mind/body and gender are viewed within the very binary terms which much feminist scholarship has sought, and even claimed to have overcome. Kathy Davis, in contrast, begins from a position of embodiment in order to fully engage with the complexities of women's experiences of body alteration. This position includes, "an empathic understanding of how it might actually feel to have a body which is perceived as different or alien to an individual's sense of self and of the suffering which this perception may entail" (1995: 169). It is precisely this position of embodiment which enables research ethics and theoretical positioning to become mutually generative and complimentary. The researcher does not gaze upon the bodies of others in order to access objective truths and to develop theoretical abstractions, but rather, is enmeshed within the process and experiences she encounters. For Davis this is both an ethical and empirical position based upon "a conception of morality that is self-reflexive" (1995: 171), where

> learning to endure ambivalence, discomfort and doubt is a pre-requisite for understanding women's involvement in cosmetic surgery. ..... [It] prevents the premature theoretical closure which is antithetical to responsible scholarship. ..... [Further] it is precisely at this point of discomfort - or own and other women's - that a feminist analysis .... needs to begin.
>
> (1995: 181 & 67)

Because Davis allows herself to enter into the messy reality of human embodiment, she is able to understand the manifold depths of body alteration, its complexities, ambiguities and contradictions, rather than simply locating practices in dualistic conceptualisations. Davis arrives at an understanding of women's engagements

with cosmetic surgery which incorporates the structuring of gender through the norms of femininity, the self as embodied, and the agency that is subsequently inherent to bodily transformation within these conditions. For Davis, cosmetic surgery enables women to move "from objectified body to embodied subject" (1995: 93).

Here, the notion of agency resists an easy definition as either positive or negative. Rather, agency is enmeshed within, and inseparable from, all aspects of embodiment: self, society, power and emotion, and is fraught with ambivalence that cannot be easily defined or fixed within normative categories. In cosmetic surgery "it intervenes in the disempowering tension of western feminine embodiment - the entrapment of objectification" (1995: 113). As such body alteration is "an understandable step in a woman's experiences of embodiment and of her possibilities for taking action to alter her circumstances" (1995: 163).

Bodily interventions are then fraught with tension: on the one hand they occur within and are mediated by a restrictive set of social norms in which the limitations of gender are integral; yet they also offer a radical and tangible means of asserting agency, self and control through the body.

> Cosmetic surgery is symptomatic of a culture where it is possible to view one's body as separate from who one would like to become and as a site, particularly for women, to negotiate their identities in the context of structured hierarchies of power. ..... [It is] an expression of the objectification of the female body and of women's struggles to become embodied subjects rather than mere bodies.
> (1995: 60)

I will now consider how this understanding of agency, located in an embodied perspective, can be applied to the experience of body marking which is normatively defined as 'self-injury'. This enables a move beyond the notion of mutilation, and into an understanding which is empathic, embodied, and avoids objectification and pathologization. In this vein Nikki Sullivan redefines 'mutilation' as "fleshy

(dis)figuration" in order to capture the experience of embodied practice/knowledge which undoes the dualisms inherent within diagnostic or disembodied classification. (Dis)figuration is "the 'unknowing' of knowledge as truth, as abstract, static, disembodied and graspable" (2002: 15).

The approach to 'self-injury' which I develop here draws heavily on the conceptualisation of embodiment that I attempted to locate as the basis and ethics of my theoretical and methodological position. It moves away from the premise that forms of body marking are distinguishable by some intrinsic quality of each act, and focuses instead on the way in which body marking intervenes in, shapes, and articulates the embodied and gendered self. When 'self-injury' is considered in this context, it becomes less polarised from other forms of body alteration, and indeed may even reflect some of the very factors described (above) as central to the difference between them. I hope to demonstrate that a reconsideration of the notion of agency and the gendered social context of body practices, from an embodied position, ultimately goes beyond the binaries of agency and mutilation and opens up an understanding that is empathic, holistic and intersubjective. In order to fully engage at the level of experience, the voices of the participants are present in the developing analysis.

The links which Davis articulated between issues of gendered embodiment, agency and the ambivalence, that are integral to body marking practices are also central to the work of Gloria Babiker & Lois Arnold (1997). The authors, a psychologist and a sociologist respectively, have developed a radical, feminist based understanding of 'self-injury' that is not only articulated at a theoretical level but is also the basis of their ground breaking work with women in *The Basement Project* in Bristol in the UK. Their understanding of 'self -injury' has also been integral to the training workshops I facilitate for working in a client centred, harm-reduction model of 'self-injury'. To me this position is fundamentally rooted in an embodied ethic, one which privileges lived experience rather than analytic tidiness and dualistic categorisation. Babiker & Arnold's (1997) understanding of 'self-injury' exposes

agency within body marking in terms of the social symbolism and context at the macro and micro levels, that is the structures of gender as well as the subjective life circumstances of the individual. It also connects with the fundamental embodiment of the self, emotions and the role of the body in articulating and transforming that self.

Fundamental to Babiker & Arnold's view of 'self-injury' is the notion of the body as a social as well as individual entity and specifically the ways in which the norms of gender impact upon the embodied self.

> Cultural values are represented in the body. For example women's bodies, faces, and voices frequently conform to the values and ideas of society concerning acceptable characteristics and behaviour for women. .... At the same time the body can be seen as an active agent as well as a passive recipient and reflection of cultural values. .... In this more active role the body registers and expresses meaning. Self-injury can often have a purpose for the individual of recording history. .... in our view self-injury may serve a similar function for society.
>
> (1997: 35)

'Self-injury', then, is not simply an individual act but is enmeshed within social structures of the body, self, gender and power. The social meanings and symbolisms of the body are often connected to the specifics of the injury inflicted and its location on the body (see also Favazza, 1996). Babiker & Arnold (1997) describe the ways in which the stigmatisation of particular experiences around gender or sexuality for example, are often worked out through related forms of injury.

In Ciara's experience the social symbolism of the body is intrinsically connected to how she understands the ways in which she 'injured' herself as a young girl. Firstly, she described her experience:

> I used to burn myself when I was a kid. (K: really?) Yeah, [laughs] talking about detached! Yeah. I didn't mention it cause I have no scars from it or anything (K: right, right). It wasn't so much trying to

> make a scar as I used to frequently - you know the cigarette lighters in cars? The little push in ones? (K: yeah, yeah) I used to push them in and burn my fingertips, and I was trying to erase my fingerprints, and I'd burn them consistently. I used to be quite like - if you could hit it right in the right kind of place right on the tip you could get this perfect circle, just right there [gestures to finger pad] and I used to try and specifically [laughs] to get that. I kind of liked that, and I would do it, and you know I would just have blisters, and I would try and get rid of my fingerprint but it kept coming back! [laughs] (K: right) So I'm not scarred at all.

We then discussed her understanding of it.

> I don't think I had really thought it through, but like I mean now I can look back and think that well I did know that fingerprints are unique and you're kind of traceable through them I suppose, and I don't know, they're kind of like a part of your identity. I mean it's a bit different now but at that stage that's how people were always traced, now they can do DNA tracing (K: aha) and all sorts of things, but at that stage that was part of your identity, and a traceable part of your identity. So I don't know if it was that something to do with that. I don't think that I had any particular theory at the time. I was just doing it.

Because the body-self relation is social, and occurs within the structure of gender and femininity, Babiker & Arnold, like Davis, highlight the ways in which body alteration is complex and ambiguous, and often enmeshed within contradiction. The female body is the site where these ambiguities are negotiated, they are enacted upon precisely the surface of the constraints of femininity. "In injuring her own body a woman spoils the thing which society both values and despises" (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 40). In this way the interconnections of gender, agency and body marking can only be fully articulated within an understanding of gendered embodiment. Body marking for women may be a process of negotiating an embodied sense of self-identity within the social construction of femininity.

> Female identification with the body and the contradictions and problematisations which must be negotiated mean that alterations of the body may be the only way in which women, and especially, young women may experience some freedom of expression or

> choice and may reflect the only readily accessible source of any sense of agency or self determination.
>
> (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 80)

The structures of gender and femininity which are present in both the body-self relation, as well as the interpretation and diagnosis of bodily practices, are also evident in the participants' understandings of 'self-injury'. Indeed, in Elaine's experience gender is crucial to both the responses to 'self-injury' as well as the diagnosis and treatment of it.

> A lot of the shock factor that the medical profession has when dealing with women who self-harm is that it doesn't fit with their idea of what women do. Self-harm is a very violent act, and it's against yourself. They would have less problem dealing with a man that hit somebody[else] (K: aha) when the act of that is far more traumatic: to be violent towards somebody else, than a woman who cut her arm or something. Or ideas around, I think, ideas around who it's ok for to be personally violent. It's a lot easier for the medical profession to justify women self-harmers as hysterical behaviour, whereas [....] if it was a man, a man self-harming, cutting his arm then they would find that difficult to deal with more so than if he'd hurt someone else. (K: aha) Cos men shouldn't [i.e. hurt themselves], you know. It's almost that kind of thing like, 'Oh my god!' you know, 'There's something really wrong if a man's doing that to himself.' I think there is a big unspoken, different view that doctors have in their heads in the way that they judge men and women. I would say there would be a complete difference (K: aha) really into the way they rationalise the bloke self-harming compared to the woman, (K: aha) especially if, you know, the woman's more [visibly] upset. [....] I think there are a lot more women are categorised a lot quicker than men. [....] And there would only be certain categories of self-harm.

René also thought about the implications of body marking in gendered terms but for her the emphasis was much more on the extent of female incidence - from a feminist position - rather than a critique of the medical focus on gender.

> I've met so many women since I've started thinking about this that would have done something a long the lines of [self-injury]. I mean not necessary doing that same thing, but would do things over the

> years to injure themselves, whether it be cutting themselves up, or bulimia, or, I don't know there are so many different kinds of ways that women try to injure themselves.

Social structures of gender are integral to the incidence, interpretation and experience of this form of body marking. And because normative gender is so complex and contradictory the embodied agency of body marking may be overlooked, located dualistically, or pathologised. Likewise the elements of body marking which connect with the specific emotional and physical capacities and strategies an individual's circumstances require are also often neglected. 'Self-injury' may be a process which utilises whatever agency an individual has within her specific circumstances to develop the qualities she needs to live and cope with those circumstances.

> Injuries may provide evidence of courage and endurance as well as of suffering. This may explain why people who self-injure can feel proud (as well as ashamed) of their wounds and scars. ….. [Or that] while some people injure themselves in the hope of receiving a sympathetic response, others seem to do so in order to communicate the 'badness' they feel to be inside themselves. Perhaps they wish to repel others. Alternatively they may want to show what they feel to be their 'real' but unacceptable (for example, angry, hateful, out of control, not coping) selves.
>
> (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 79-83)

Agency itself, then, is specifically linked to the individual biography within a social context, rather than any external or quantitative function or quality of the action, and this was evident to both Maeve and Ciara as they understood their practices.

Maeve:

> In terms of cutting, its not something that I did [….] for a long period of time, and I didn't do it - I mean I had friends who cut themselves a lot. I think for me it was to <u>see</u> <u>how</u> <u>much</u> <u>I</u> <u>could</u> <u>take</u>. It wasn't like, you know you hear these narratives that it's the physical pain is preferable to the emotional pain (K: aha) that sort of thing, but it was to sort of to test myself out, and to sort of push my own boundaries and scare myself a little bit I think. Because I felt probably a little bit dead the rest of the time, so it was about creating

> some sort of, I don't know, some sort of macabre experiment, you know, to sort of to feel (K: aha) in some respect I guess.

Likewise for Ciara there was a sense of purpose in her actions.

Ciara:

> I mean I was obviously quite distressed as a child anyway and I was very much detached from my body, and didn't feel any emotions. I think part of it is about feeling something as well, feeling things, (K: mmm) cause I would feel it when burnt, I wouldn't react to it, but I would feel. But I also had this thing kind of about fear as well, and I used to train myself not to be afraid. And, I would do this in a few different ways, and I think that was kind of part of my overall training of myself to not react to pain.

In developing her relationship with fear and pain Ciara also touches on the experience of emotions as embodied and integral to body marking. The emotionality of the body is central to understanding the agency of body marking practices, because the meaning of the marking may not always be articulated at a cognitive level. In this way agency is present in terms of dealing with complex emotional processes through the physicality of the body, which, if left unresolved in this way may become increasingly problematic for the individual. Body marking, then, accesses and articulates corporeal, emotional, experiences on many levels.

> The body is a highly significant stage on which emotions and conflicts are played out. .... For girls and women .... self-injury may become a means of attempting to take ownership of their bodies[/selves], of making them feel more known and under their control.
>
> (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 39)

Elaine touched on these issues when she discussed how important her scars and wounds became to her when she was institutionalised during her adolescence.

> There were times when, you know, I would just feel really, really awful if the scar was really small because at the time self-harm is a form of communication about something. (K: aha) [....] It's about

> something that you can't express in any other way and when it [the wound or scar] is gone, or it's really small, it's not right, you know?

She went on to describe how the increasing length of time spent in an institution impacted upon relationship with her wounds exacerbated the degree of injury she would inflict.

> I had all kinds of sets of rules: it was only self-harm if it was over ten stitches. I upped it, and I upped it, and I upped it (K: right). It was only self-harm if I was stitched, or it was only self-harm to the point where at the end it was only self-harm, it only mattered, it was only worthy, it was only important, if it was big injury. [....] Or, you know, a small scar that didn't require a skin graft wasn't good enough.

In terms of agency then, the relationship of emotions, embodiment, social context and injury is complex. While on one hand I would suggest the practice makes sense through an understanding of the emotional body, it is a fractured or hyper self-objectifying working out of the emotions. To rework Judith Butler's expression it is "a way of doing the [emotional] body, [but] a way of doing the body as disembodied" (Butler, 2004: 172). Likewise, Elaine also reflects on the ways in which 'self-injury' is intrinsically emotive, and yet in such a way as to avoid the emotion. It is almost that emotions become contained, and thus made safe, in a wound or scar, rather as remaining volatile within the body.

> Self-harm is shutting off (K: aha). And whilst it might be a vent for the emotion like while you're cutting your [body], you're not feeling the emotion (K: aha) you're suppressing it. [....] Whereas even though self-harm is visibly expressive in terms of the scar that it creates, the point of self-harm is visibly expressing with a scar an experience the whole point of self-harm is to dumb down, to stop feeling (K: aha, aha). Even though you think at the time that you're expressing it, you're just passing off the emotion you're not actually getting it out. You're not dealing with it, you're turning it into an injury, you're not the dealing with the emotions. The emotion's still there (K: mm) you just create a physiological reaction in your body, adrenaline, pain, which effectively cuts off what you feel. And you might think the scar's expressing whatever you feel but a scar at the end of the day is only really a scar (K: aha). Because what you

> actually feel is still there, you just had an injury to distract you from what you feel (K: aha). As self-harm would be a wonder cure! You know! (K: yeah, yeah) But it isn't, and all it does is delay, like you delay the sorting out process (K: aha). If people express something in a normal way then they wouldn't self-harm (K: aha). I mean some people might view their scars as positive things, as a reminder of how courageous or strong they have been, but I don't really personally see them in that way because it's a negative way, it's the wrong way of coping with something really. It is very much about pushing something down, it's not about freeing yourself, (K: aha) it's about looking in (K: aha). And unfortunately you can't actually sort out that stuff and express it with the scars, so you are effectively kind of doing quite a negative thing because [of] the negative associations through scars that you're going to have to live with forever. I remember just having that moment one day thinking, 'Oh my god! I'm going to be an old woman and still people are going to be asking me about them!' And that's not really a nice thought, you know, (K: aha, mm) I've had people say really unpleasant things about them and that's not a nice thing. It kind of carries on the negativity and it slightly carries on the being a bit unpleasant to yourself because by having the scars you're allowing other people to be unpleasant to you, (K: mm) and it's not nice.

René also recognised the complex relationship between emotional and physical pain and the embodiment of both.

> I wanted to feel something, I felt like so out of control in my - I mean it's hard to analyse it what I was feeling and why I was doing it, but I think that I was so hurt and I was so upset and I felt out of control, and I felt like - this calmed me down, I know its really weird, but I felt like I had no control over my emotional hurt and my emotional feelings but if I could make myself feel this physical pain it would calm me down and it would take my mind off or it would control the other bigger pain I had.

This working out of the emotions through the body is something that Babiker & Arnold (1997) make frequent reference to in terms of understanding 'self-injury' particularly in recognising the actions as a coping strategy. The damage to the body, often misconstrued as attempted to suicide, is they suggest, an attempt to survive and cope by whatever means possible, and both René and Elaine recognised the ways in which 'self-injury' worked for them as a coping strategy. For René, our conversation was the first time she had fully articulated this, largely

due to her sense of secrecy and stigma around 'self-injury', while for Elaine understanding her actions as a coping mechanism was much more developed and had been intrinsic to her reconciliation with herself. I think these two quotes which describe 'self-injury' as a coping or survival strategy most clearly demonstrate the way in which bodily damage, can, in certain contexts be a constructive or positive option, and, in this way radically challenges notions of agency and mutilation as oppositional.

René:

> [At the time] I always thought it was self-mutilating, literally, it was damaging myself and I never felt anything positive about doing that. It was like I always felt it was a weird, really weird kind of bad thing that no one should know about. [....]
>
> [But] in the broad scheme of things, yeah, it's a coping strategy. In the sense that it did always calm me down really. It made me feel better, it calmed me down. Because of the physical intensity of the pain I think you can't sit there and just go into you own mind about how miserable you are and how upset you are because the only thing you can relate to is the pain going on, the physical pain, so I do think that it worked. I've never thought of it before as something that could be positive, but, I suppose in a way I'm lucky that I didn't do something else.

Elaine:

> It might have positive implications in that you're coping at the time [....] you're doing it as a means of coping. [But] I guess the way that I would see self-harm, certainly after stopping using it as a coping mechanism, [is that] it kind of takes away from you.

In summary then, a position and ethic of embodiment facilitates empathic engagement with the lives and experiences of the research participants and radically impacts on the knowledge produced. The objectification and pathologization of women and their experiences is replaced with an empathic representation and enables an understanding of agency which moves beyond the simple dualism of agency and mutilation. Consideration of gendered embodiment means that women's body marking practices can be interpreted in an understanding

of the corporeal and social contexts in which a "whole range of possibilities exist within which the active female agent can manoeuvre" (Frost, 1999:123). The possibilities here are not simplistically positive or negative, productive or destructive, but in each case are complex and specifically connected to the location of that individual. To ignore the issues that are raised from an embodied perspective is to return to reductionist and dualistic formulations of gender and the body. It is also to

> build on a whole tradition of medicine and psycho-medicine interpreting and intervening in women's involvement with their own bodies. The danger is that in the end labelling such activities [....] 'abnormal' or even 'ill' may invalidate positive feelings and instead make women feel guilty, isolated and deviant. Such patholagisation may ignore the link between control of appearance and overall sense of identity for women.
>
> (Frost, 1999: 125)

Thus while not wanting to underplay the specific difficulties that are often experienced in the context of 'self-injury', I suggest that on close examination, from an embodied position, there are not quantitative factors that make up a bodily mutilation, but rather a combination of factors, social and personal that are embodied within the individual and read off in a social context. 'Self-injury' can be understood as a bodily practice which "*continues* the discourse of a person's life. .... [and] is one part of a large repertoire of behaviours *that involve the body*" (Babiker & Arnold, 1987: 1-2). The oversimplified, dualistic analysis of women's engagements with their bodies neglect the fundamental level of embodiment at which a more complex understanding of agency is realisable.

> Looks engagement/body alteration may be rebellion in minor or major ways, a strategy for re-identifying self at periods of major life transition, or even an art form. .... The tendency to equate looks with either oppression or psychopathology is simply too limited.
>
> (Frost, 1999: 127)

In constructing oppositions of agency and mutilation, which are read off from the bodies of others, many theorists have taken on the role of "dermal diagnostician"

(Sullivan 2001; 42; 2002: 13) and assumed that the outer surface of the body is a readable text from which pathology, deviance or dysfunction may be read. From an embodied position the response is radically different. An embodied location enables a radical and transformative understanding not only in terms of the practices themselves but also in terms of the very processes of knowledge production that claim to define them. In Sullivan's terms, "an ethics of reading fleshy (dis)figuration allows for a critical exploration of the ways in which reading and writing might be complicit in the production of knowledge, identity and social relations" (2002 : 27).

In this way I hope I have demonstrated that the simplistic notions of agency and mutilation that are so quickly attached to body marking practices do little to understand the complexity or depth of this human experience. I hope I have also demonstrated that adopting an embodied position, one which does not demand that we instantly resolve contradiction and ambiguity within a finite and linear solutions, facilitates a much better position from which to engage with and understand these experiences. However, I leave the last words of this section to Elaine, who articulates this understanding of embodied, socially located agency, incredibly poignantly in an account of her relationship with her scars.

> There's a scar that springs immediately to mind, and I'll show you, this scar here? (K: Oh yeah) I really hate it with a passion. It dips in it's big, (K: aha) and yes it is faded but it's really ugly. [smiles] And the rest I can kind of cope with, but that one always – I hate it! (K: aha) But you know, I've become comfortable with it, but I really don't like it, and that's the one that always springs to mind out of all of them, and I had to have really big skin grafts and everything! And still - its so ugly and it dips in and it looks so - I don't know. And for me at the time that would have been an achievement. [....]
>
> Once you stop self-harming you go through a process of - well not everyone does, a lot of people would find it too hard to go through that - but for me I felt like I had to deal with what I did. And I found it very hard. I refuse to beat myself up for doing it because I did it for the reasons I did it at the time, and had I not done that I might not be sat here today (K: aha). And you know, and I don't see the point of having regrets (K: aha). You make the decisions you

> make at the time, and you do pretty much what you can with the knowledge and the strength that you have at that moment, and there's not a lot of point in regretting stuff that you've [done] (K: aha). I don't really have any regrets about it. I perhaps wish that I had been able to do something different, but I have the understanding that I didn't, couldn't. [....] And there is no point when you're not self-harming in beating yourself up for doing that to yourself and, (K: absolutely, yeah) you know, I might wish that I didn't have them. [So] the stance I take on my scars is that I try not to think about them too much because [....] I can't change the fact that they're there. I think people waste a lot of time going, 'Oh, I wish I hadn't done that! Oh I'm such an idiot! I'm such an idiot! I wish I hadn't done that!' Yeah, I could sit here till I'm blue in the face, I could spend the next ten years of my life hating myself for doing it, (K: aha), but what's the point? (K: aha) In that I did that at the time because that was right for me at the time, and it wasn't healthy, but I didn't have the tools to do anything else. (K: Absolutely) [....] And if I'd been able to do something different then I would have done something different, you know? (K: aha) In the same way that ten years on I'm better equipped, I choose not to do it.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, then, I have attempted throughout this chapter to demonstrate how a position of embodiment draws together theory, methodology and experiences of body marking in a way which resists objectifying and pathologizing binary categorisations, particularly in terms of agency and mutilation. This embodied perspective informs the key layers of engagement and experience which I have aimed to integrate in my work, that is the academic, the experiential and the therapeutic. In adopting this embodied position I have moved away from the oppositional binary of agency and mutilation and have considered agency in terms of the embodiment of gender, self and social context. Considering agency and embodiment in this way raises the possibility of symbolic and transformative potentials within body marking practices which I discuss in chapter seven.

Finally, in re-thinking 'self-injury' in this way I have led a path back to many of the issues that were raised in terms of gendered embodiment and women's bodily

practices and are further re-considered in terms of non-normative feminine embodiment and body modification in the next chapter. But here I will close with a poetic reflection on the experience of tattooing which draws on many aspects of body marking which are often used to locate the experience within a normative and pathologizing binary.

Biography of Denial.

There is a man on my back
and I am bleeding.
He carefully teares away the surface of my flesh
and impregnates me
with something I believe I have chosen.

My blood, and my sweat
coat his fingers
I am rigid with not showing the pain
not feeling the fear
and the humiliation:
He is behind me,
and I bleed.
If only the channels of blood
would wash him away
erase my flesh
of his taint, forever.

But I only repeat, more intricately
every scar he made upon me.
I weep alone
with my bandaged flesh and shame,
building a barrier of scars and patterns
so intricate
he can no longer pass through:
From the outside in
Or the inside out.

There is a man on my back
and I bleed,
in the colours of my own making:
Blood Red,
and Purple-Yellow bruises,
Pink keloid scars.
Ripe broken skin seeping puce green bile,
a rainbow of a battered heart

shrivelled to a sour brown fruit.

There is a man on my back
and I am weeping,
tears of blood and ink.
Where broken flesh and ruined bones
scab into an armour
That will never wash away.

6. Policing the Body:

A conversation from the edge of normative femininity.

Part 2: Non-normative Embodiment and Body Modification.

Introduction.

So far I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which an embodied position enables a move beyond the normative dualisms of body marking practices. Here, in the second part of the conversation "Policing the Body", I add a further layer of embodiment. Our discussion demonstrates not only the limitations of theories which are based on dualistic understandings of agency and mutilation, but also problematises those which uncritically work from the privileged position of normative embodiment. When normative embodiment is presumed as a universal experience, a whole layer of possible engagement with the experiences of body marking practices is omitted. Thus, in the same way that Nick Crossley (2001 - above) presumed embodied subjectivity to universally correlate with normative experience, regardless of the corporeal markers he identified, body marking has likewise, largely been conceptualised within a very narrow range of embodied - and gendered - experience.

As in the previous section which shares this title, the dialogue is based on embodied experience and methods of engagement and representation are intended to reflect an equally embodied position. Nonetheless the dialogue is shaped through me, as I structure the discussion, add in some theoretical reflections and write in my own experiences. In both form and content, I hope that this piece adds a further ingredient to the move beyond binary and disembodied analysis of body marking, and continues the process of opening up spaces of connection which facilitate rather than close down possibilities for understanding and experiencing body marking.

Kay:

"Having described the ways in which we as non-normatively embodied women are, to use Butler's (1993, above) terminology, 'policed and shamed' in terms of gendered corporeality I now want to add a further layer to the discussion. Thinking about our experiences of 'body-modification' in the context of selves which are already problematically located underscores both the normative context and the limitations of theorisations of women's experiences of bodily interventions. Body marking has been defined as: resultant from oppression and patriarchy (Burstow, 1996; Jeffreys, 2001; 2003), and the related yet limited opportunities for female empowerment (Huck, 1997; Pitts, 2003); a form of self-destruction (Burstow, 1996; Jeffreys, 2001; 2003) in a mental health context (Favazza, 1996; Miller, 1994); as a plea for the recognition of inarticulatable experiences (Connor, 2001; Kilby, 2001); as integrally connected to gendered embodiment (Davis, 1995); as adornment (Clarke, 1996; Brain, 1979; Rubin, 1988); as a process of self-expression (Hewitt, 1997; Sweetman, 1999) art (Hewitt, 1997; Groning, 1997; Rubin, 1988); as spiritually motivated (Musafar, 1996); or related to belonging to some kind of subculture (Vale and Juno, 1989), or sexual minority (Myers 1992; 2001 Pitts, 2000; Rhandall & Pollhemous, 2000); or just plain "sick" and/or "goofy" (Levenkron, 1998: 23). Yet none of these theorisations have reflected upon the normative context and idealisations of embodiment upon which they are based and reiterate. As such they contrast sharply with our lived experiences.

[To René] "One thing I was going to ask you, you had said about going to teach and being conscious about [your bodily appearance] do you feel in the same way conscious about your tattoos? And I think maybe I'm asking because I saw you go to give a class one day this is a long time ago (R: oh right) and you had on this long sleeved top and"

René: [interrupting]

"aha, long sleeves"

Kay:

"and a long skirt, and I was just aware that it covered up all your tattoos (R: aha, yeah, yeah), and I was wondering is it the same kind of feeling or was it a different feeling?"

René:

"It's different."

Kay:

"In what way?"

René:

"It's funny now, because the class that I have been teaching now for two years so that I would know a lot of the students, I don't cover up my tattoos that much anymore. If I cover my arms - the top of my arms, and cover my legs it would be more to do with the body hair than tattoos, much more to do with body hair (K: right). In fact when I'm with my students I would actually have liked it when they have seen my tattoos cause they think it's really cool and they like them, and they think I'm more interesting and more cool cause they've seen my tattoos. I feel much more hesitant about them knowing that I don't shave than seeing the tattoos. [....] Because somehow in this day and age to get a tattoo, as a woman, it would be common enough, but to not shave is still a really big taboo (K: aha, aha), or not pluck your chin, or not pluck you eye-brows (K: aha). It's actually more abnormal than any of the body modification things cause many people have tattoos now (K: aha). So it's not body modification, cause it's letting your body be the way it naturally would be; but you can't. It's not acceptable.[....]

And I'm sure this never occurred to me consciously about the point of why I was getting tattoos, but it does go along with that whole idea of you're never going to have the Barbie kind of image anyway, and you're never going to fit

in, so you may as well do something else, like get a tattoo, or get a piercing, just to sort of heighten - I don't know, I'm not, I'm not - I'm trailing off - but"

Kay:

"The difference maybe?"

René:

"Yeah! as long as your not going to fit in you might as well make yourself different. And of course nobody can achieve the Barbie dimensions or hairlessness [laughs] for that matter, and this silky smooth plastic skin [K: laughs], tan orange, and really long blonde hair you know! It's kind of like, you know as a person I'd always prefer one extreme to the other, rather than just being in the middle. So instead of trying to be like normal which I'm never going to be, you might as well go to the other extreme in search of an identity or in search of a way of looking, [....] and I guess I would see it all as being part of the same attempt at finding an identity that was outside the normal and striving for some kind of beauty that was outside the normal."

Maeve:

"Yes for me I think piercing worked in the same kind of way; rejecting the norms of female beauty. To me it [piercing] was just about making visible my own anger and revolt, I guess, at expected ways of feminine being in the world."

Kay:

"Almost like visibly demonstrating that you don't even want to try and be like"

Maeve: [interrupting]

"NO"

Kay:

"feminine"

Maeve:

"NO. No. That's it! And it doesn't mean that you can detach yourself from discourses that prescribe those ways of being, but still you're angry enough to kind of try! [smiling] Do you know what I mean?"

Kay:

"Aha, aha, yeah. That is something, and sorry I'm just thinking about mine now, there is something that's very unfeminine about having metal in your face"

Maeve:

"yeah"

Kay:

"which is yeah, it has that sense of"

Maeve: [interrupting]

"I also felt a lot more powerful - in terms of my nose piercing - I always felt more powerful when I had a ring in rather than a stud in. "

Kay:

"That's interesting"

Maeve:

"Like, I always felt that it reflected how I knew I was for some reason. Whereas a stud was all a bit pretty, and girly, and sparkly, but when I had my ring in I felt a lot more defiant. (K: aha) I mean it's no big deal now, but for me at the time that's the way it felt."

Kay:

"Yeah, I can relate to a lot of that actually."

Elaine:

"Tattoos and piercings to me would be something that I very actively thought about and something kind of, that is very, very kind of personal and spiritually connected, at very specific times and [for] very specific reasons. [....] I would see them [tattoos] as an extension of myself and not something that's just there. I always feel that they're a part of me cos they've all come from quite personal reasons (K: aha). I can't really explain it. They're not a decoration (K: aha) they're more part of me, now, that's how I would describe them. [....]

And my tattoos are all positive kind of re-affirming things to make me, to remind you, I think, or to, kind of make a positive claim over something that was negative. So, like the one on my [place on body], for me my [parts of body] have been for a very long time about scars and self-harm, and for me I wanted something else there that was actively put there and not in a negative way (K: mm), I wanted something else to be there. (K: aha). And because I couldn't change my [parts of body], they're scarred, rather than focus on the negative and not being able to change them, by putting a tattoo there that I chose specifically, it made them more my [parts of body] again (K: aha, aha) if that makes sense? (K: aha [nodding]) [....] And I would say my tattoos have been normal expressions of something. Like, one of mine means survivor. Like that's a normal expression of where I've been, it's a reminder to myself when I'm under pressure that I am and can be [a survivor]. It's a normal, you know, it's an expression of something that feels positive (K: aha). I would say, the immediate association with the self-harm would be negative, whereas the tattoos would be a positive thing. They [tattoos] would be outward, they would be expression, whereas even though self-harm is visibly expressive in terms of the scar that it creates, the point of self-harm is visibly expressing with a scar an experience the whole point of self-harm is to dumb down, to stop feeling. "

Kay:

"Another issue that I think is important here connects with the ways in which people judge and respond to the non-normative aspects of our bodies and the possible relationship of tattooing and piercing with that. Body modification research frequently describes how multiple body modifications often invoke responses which are at odds with the individual's sense of self or meaning of them (Fisher, 2002; Grongard, 1994; Myers 1992; 2001; Pitts, 2003; Sweetman, 1999). This kind of research is located unquestioningly within a normative context; it both assumes and re-iterates that the bodies and experiences of them were 'unproblematic' prior to the modification."

Elaine

"People always say about tattoos like, 'Oh what about if you regret it?' Or, 'What will happen when you get old?' And, and I have a lot of scars, so to me I have already had to go, 'Oh my god!' I didn't think about the long-term effects of that. And I had to go through that 'Oh my god, what the hell did I do that for?' And all of the difficulties that come with that and then the acceptance, and the kind of annoyance at yourself, and then, you know, I will forever and a day have to deal with the fact that I've got scars (K: aha). So to me a tattoo is the opposite side to that it's a positive, and if someone notices your tattoo it's like, [sarcastic] 'Big deal!' You know, that's positive. Already I have to deal with people noticing my scars, and to me a tattoo has positive associations and the scars have negative associations for me. So I'm not really fussed about the permanence, you know, the scars are permanent so..."

Kay:

"Yeah me too, sometimes people do all that, 'It's permanent! You'll regret it!' kind of shit. And while I may sometimes feel ambivalent about some of my tattoos – in the same way that you [Elaine] described[1] – because my body was

[1] Elaine said "I don't think I would regret any of my tattoos. I mean sometimes I would be ambivalent about them and go over the reasons why I had them, kind of re-evaluate that."

irrevocably altered through enforced medical procedures, the marks that I have made myself are insignificant in comparison. And to me this really re-iterates my point about the assumption of normativity at the heart of many responses to body modification, which is irrelevant outside of that context. If your body has never been the kind of 'sacred, blank canvas' that people revere, then altering or intervening in it is an entirely different experience.

Something else that really annoys me, which is kind of related, is that people seem to find it really hard to accept that I have a congenital disability. Sometimes when I try and close down the 'What's wrong with you?' conversations I say, 'I have a disability' in the hope that would silence people. Unfortunately this often just provokes the response, 'What from? What happened?' It seems that people can't accept that someone who looks like me would be born with a disability; if I had been born disabled then I can have no other visible/corporeal identity. And because of the way I look, my piercings, tattoos etc they think I must have been 'a person' before I got disabled. They can't accept a disabled person can be anything more than a disability. And then it's strange because on one hand I think that in a way I have used that in the past to make easier for me to 'pass', and yet at the same time it really enrages me! And then I do sometimes wonder if on an unconscious level my desire to change my body is both linked to what has been done to me and also a desire to try and both redefine and to camouflage that.

[To René] I remember for quite a long time I was very taken with the way you described your tattoos as a reclaiming of your body after very damaging experiences with the medical profession. And contrary to Pitts (2003) very critical analysis of the value of women's 'reclaiming narratives' it really helped me to articulate (for myself) a more positive rationale in the face of hostility from people about my body modifications[2]. But now I'm not so sure. If it was connected I think it was very unconscious."

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[2] When I first started piercing myself, when I was fifteen, 'body-modification' was much less common and socially acceptable than it is today, and I would have often quite angrily been accused of mutilating myself.

René:

"I couldn't tell you either if it was conscious or unconscious. [....] But I had had several doctors saying really inappropriate things to me, like, you know, that it was my own fault that I had this happen [cervical cancer], that it was because I wasn't careful having sex, and I shouldn't have been having sex, and this kind of thing. And I remember that I was involved with someone at the time, and I asked [the doctor] - because it had been a few months since the surgery - and I wanted to know if it was ok to have sex again and I asked this woman doctor and she said, 'What?! Do you want to do infect the rest of the western world?' Like she was just awful really awful, made me feel like I was really dirty, and like why was I thinking about sex when that was the problem in the first place, and basically turned me off sex for a really, really long time. [....] So I went through a bad time in that time period of feeling really dirty, and [....] I've pretty much gotton past it but it became this thing that had a really big impact on my life and I felt very [bad]. I just felt like there was something wrong with me and that I was infected and weird. I felt very bad about myself.

And somehow, in my mind, I remember the first year I was out of college, that the month after I graduated from college I went and got my first tattoo. And I don't know why but it became linked in my mind with feeling I'm going to beautify myself instead of having these things done on me like surgery and self-harm which I had also done. [....] But instead of doing these bad things to myself I wanted to celebrate my body and re-claim my body, cause during this whole time that I felt really bad about myself, there was definitely this split where I felt like there was this line going around my neck, like this was my head this was the important thing and I just didn't want to know about my body. I just didn't want to think about it. I just felt like my body was worthless. So somehow getting a tattoo, I don't know why it was, but suddenly I felt like I was re-marrying my head and my body, like I was going to take charge of my

life at this time [clears throat] and I know there's probably many different ways that people do that, but for me getting a tattoo, and then a few more [chuckle] became really important! "

Maeve:

"I think it's a really difficult question to kind of decide why you get tattoos. I think that for me in a way it was to make my body visible in a different way, which was what I was saying to you [Kay]. Because I guess that the way that my body is always received is received as a [non-normative] body, [....] and with that comes a whole lot of assumptions about what [non-normative] means; that I'm unhealthy, that I'm you know slothful, unclean, whatever. So out of anger and dissatisfaction with those kinds of assumptions I guess tattooing was a way of marking out for myself ways of renegotiating, I mean sort of that Sedgwick idea re-negotiating that contract between myself and the world and being visible in a different way. So the [non-normative] body is going to be hyper-visible so then the tattooed body is going to be visible in a different way, and I think that the combination of the [non-normative] and the tattooed body also has assumptions with it as well. But, yeah, I mean if somebody sees my tattoos then that somehow is a focus that actually makes me an embodied subject in a different way; outside of an embodied [non-normative] subject. [....]

I think with my first tattoo, the more I think about it, it was to do with [....] making beautiful my skin; transforming [non-normative] flesh and making it beautiful. And I do think that as I've sort of grown older and I look at that tattoo I do think that it's interesting that the tattoo is of a [normative] female form, and I sometimes wonder about that because I think that that's quite interesting (K: aha), like what's going on there? (K: aha, aha) Like why did I do that? Why was it an unconscious thing that I associated in my own mind beauty and decoration with a [normative] body? And that's something that I think is really interesting. And as I've grown older I kind of like that because I

think it displays the split sense that you have and the kind of ways we embody certain ideas of beauty, even when we're angry with those very ideas. [....] So my tattoos - if I'm wearing a shirt that you can see the one on my [describes part on body] - or, when somebody sees the one that's on my [describes part of body] it's overturning a response to my body: there's a certain kind, there's a certain chain of responses that come with [non-normativeness], and I guess my [non-normative] female body is kind of, that response to it or that negative response to it, I think maybe my tattoos in some ways pre-empt or over turn, in terms of their visibility and what they mean and what they signify."

Kay:

"And do people comment on your tattoos like they would about your non-normativity?"

Maeve:

"Yeah, I guess in terms of my tattoos people do comment on them, but generally sort of quite banal things like, 'Oh, that's pretty isn't it?' [....] It's not often I [talk about them] because I suppose people close to me know the stories anyway so"

Kay:

"Mmm. But the comments about your tattoos would be kind of more positive maybe?"

Maeve:

"Oh yeah! Definitely more positive. And I guess that reinforces the sense of making visible in a more positive sense (K: mm) of overturning the negative response to your body, yeah."

Kay:

"Aha yeah, yeah definitely, and having a real impact on what people say to you?"

Maeve:

"Yeah, yeah"

Elaine:

"I was actually thinking the other day that I've never been asked to cover up the tattoo on my [part of body] (K: right, right), in any job. And I find that weird, cos normally jobs are [un-accepting of tattoos, and] they know I have it, and like the area manager has come over and seen it and stuff and not said anything. And [....] the other day there was a little girl and her mum, and her mum was buying something and the little girl was getting really agitated and I was like [pacifying], 'Oh, here, have this sticker.' And her mum was like, 'Oh, put it on your arm and that will make it into a nice tattoo.' And her mum didn't have any tattoos that I could visibly see (K: aha). As I was handing over the change the mother said to the little girl, 'Oh look at that girl's lovely tattoo on her [part of body].' And that was the first time anyone has ever commented on it! [smiling] I think, ever (K: wow) [smiling]. And it was like, it was really strange, and for a mother to say to a little girl 'a lovely tattoo.' I kind of thought that was (K: mm) quite an unusual thing to hear (K: yeah, yeah). It's normally more like, [severe]'Don't look at that! You don't want one of those!' You know? (K: aha) So, I couldn't see any tattoos visibly (K: aha) on her, you know, that was the first time anyone [yawning] has ever commented. "

Kay: [to reader, in **Conclusion**]

I chose to interrupt and close the conversation with this particular extract because the experience that Elaine describes is both unusual and, I think, very significant. To me this entire interaction seems to resist normativity in a variety of ways (aside from the fact it takes place within a retail enterprise, a typically gendered setting). The tattoo, which is at the centre of this interaction between the three females, is located on Elaine's body in such a place should the tattoo be visible then some of her scars would also be clearly evident. The two women and the girl clearly reject the norms of femininity in which tattoos - and scars - may be problematic or even an 'issue' and the three engage with each other outside of those norms. Further, and more significantly, both mother and daughter can respond positively to the markings that are for Elaine generative aspects of herself, and because they do not react to her non-normativity, they connect with her as equally embodied subjects. This interaction, in which body marking is central, allows Elaine to become visible as herself, rather than an objectified and disempowered other. To me this highlights the ways in which body marking and the non-normative female self, in the context of an embodied engagement with them, have a much more complex and potentially transformative relationship than normative positions allow.

Overall then, in both form and content I have formulated the two sections of this conversation "Policing the Body" in an effort to move towards an embodied position which highlights the disjunctions between lived experience and theoretical fixings of meaning. In this way I attempt to re-iterate the importance of knowledge that can incorporate the fluidity, ambiguities and complexities of embodied subjectivity. Thus, I do not draw on this aspect of my research in order to fix specific conclusions which contrast with or supersede all other possibilities. But, rather, to focus on the ways in which an embodied position increasingly opens up further questions and possibilities of being and knowing. Throughout the two sections of the conversation "Policing the Body" I have located these questions around three main themes. Firstly, the ways in which embodied female subjectivity is confined to very limited and rigidly policed borders of acceptability and

normativity. Secondly, the experiences of those who fall outside of these parameters, and thirdly, the ways in which normativity is re-iterated within both research and social contexts around body-marking. Finally, this aspect of my work is also fundamentally connected to an ethics of embodiment in terms of how far it is possible and/or desirable to separate self-knowledge and experience from the research process and abstract theorisation. As such I have struggled to reconcile my discomfort with self-revelation at the same time as overtly acknowledging the ways in which I have been involved with, and moved by, my research process and participants.

However, I give the last words to Maeve, as she describes the ways in which she experienced the process of her own (self)knowledge in relation to non-normative embodiment and body-marking. She said, "I think it's like walking a path and only seeing that you've left a certain pattern after you've walked it."

7. Skin Deep?

Embodying blood, pain & gender.

Introduction.

In this chapter I attempt to draw together the themes of an embodied position, in the ethics of a non-dualistic theoretical approach, and a methodology that engages with the complexity of experience, and its representation, and engenders the possibility of transformation. The transformation that is made possible through this methodology is also reflected in the transformative potential of body marking itself, which is particularly evident when body marking is considered in terms of performance art. Since art and performance have already been referenced in terms of creative sociology (in, for example, Williams & Bendelow, 1998 - above) then considering body marking and methodology in this context highlights not only the possibilities of transformation within both, but also suggests an interesting connection between the two. Body marking is then shifted from an individual abnormality or pathology into a complex experience which embodies symbolism and transformation, at the social, individual and analytical levels.

This chapter develops the themes of gendered embodiment raised in chapter three, and the move beyond binaries addressed in chapter five. In chapter five, as a part of the embodied critique (set up in chapters one and three), I touched on the cultural specificity of body marking in terms of the meaning and interpretation of the practices. Here, I suggest that while 'cultural comparison' is often used in order to separate 'western' and 'non western' body marking practices, some of the themes identified work in precisely the opposite way. From an embodied perspective the issues and experiences that are defined as integral to body marking practices in 'non-western' cultures may prove useful means of understanding some of the complexity, symbolism, and the embodiment of the body marking practices which I discuss in the context of gendered 'western' culture. As with the binary of gender I reference the culture dualism in order to problematise it at the level of essentialism, without denying its impact at the level of embodiment.

In this vein I explore the embodiment of gender, blood and pain in body marking and the ways in which these embodied experiences befuddle simplistic, binary conceptualisations. I also highlight the ways in which cultural scripts of gender are integral to the experiences of blood and pain and consider some of the ways in which these corporeal experiences may be transformative at both the social and symbolic levels as well as in terms of individual embodiment. This focus is intended to further disrupt the agency/mutilation binary and to re-connect and deepen some of the issues raised in chapter five. So that while most of the sources I draw upon maintain a separation of 'self-injury' and body modification - the primary exception being Kim Hewitt (1997) - I continue to use the generic term 'body marking' throughout. This strategy is intended to highlight the ways that either body modification or 'self-injury' could equally be read into the issues discussed, and that indeed doing precisely this is crucial to the embodied position I adopt. This position engenders an understanding of the experience of body marking which continually breaches the binaries of normalcy/pathology, agency/mutilation, decoration/damage. Acknowledging these issues further undoes the categorisation of certain bodily practices as distinct and problematic, and also highlights some of the complex ways in which the gender binary is inherent to them. I aim to demonstrate that from an embodied position the culturally specific scripts and binaries that create normative categorisation are revealed as arbitrary, inconsistent and hierarchical. Finally, an embodied position recognises the body and its practices as generative, a site of individual transformation as well as social symbolism, representation and change.

7.1 Body making in a 'cultural' context.

In order to re-figure some of the key aspects of the experience and interpretation of body marking practices within an embodied context I will highlight some of the specific themes that have been used to distinguish 'western' and 'non-western' cultures. Obviously this terminology, as well as the practice of dividing the world into a binary of the normative (i.e. 'western') and other (i.e. 'non-western') is hugely problematic. However, as with my use of the term 'self-injury' I feel that the requirements of communication necessitate a semantic compromise, despite the political problems therein. My use of the term 'non-western' here refers to small-scale, non-industrial, non-capitalist cultures, while 'western' refers to industrial and post industrial, capitalist, large scale societies. Further, I operationalise this dualism only temporarily, in that I go on to consider that ways in which an embodied perspective re-connects many aspects of body marking practices which are normatively separated along this binary. In this way, gender, and the symbolism of blood and pain may be equally central across the range of body marking practices despite the cultural specificity of their interpretation and evaluation. Further, as I discuss the ways in which gender is marked on the body in 'non-western' cultures I intend this consideration to correlate rather than contrast with the themes of gendered embodiment in 'western' cultures I outlined in chapter three. So that while it seems that gender and femininity are marked covertly in 'western' cultures and overtly in 'non-western' societies, the imperative for the embodiment of a binary of gender remains consistent, and problematic, in terms of the limitations such binaries iterate.

Anthropologists (Brain, 1979; Ebin, 1979; Randall & Polhemous, 2000; Rubin, 1988a; Vogel, 1988) as well as advocates of non-mainstream body modification (Musafar, 1996) have often looked to 'non-western' cultures to idealise, exoticise or simply expound upon the range of human bodies and their practices[1]. Whatever

[1] Anthropologists have a much longer history of both engaging with the human body, it's symbolisms and practices, as well as the cultural specificity of gender and sexuality than many other disciplines, including sociology (Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; Turner, 1984; 1996;

the intention, such approaches may be easily construed as voyeuristic, objectifying and patronising, positions I would be anxious to avoid. I draw on this work then, in the spirit of an embodied ethic, which seeks not to make a spectacle of the other but rather to "enhance our appreciation of the body's contingency, and help us to recognise and eliminate appropriations of the body" (Frank, 1991: 96).

Anthropologists have highlighted the specific cultural symbolism and rituals of body marking in a range of societies with particular reference to gender (below). It is also widely noted that, in contrast to 'western' cultures, body marking practices function as key integrative social practices in 'non-western' societies (Brain, 1979; Ebin, 1979; Randall & Polhemous, 2000; Rubin, 1988b; Vogel, 1988). Body marks have fixed social symbolism which are integral to social cohesion and indicative of an individuals status within that culture. Body alteration "tends to indicate social status and social structure, emphasizing the continuity and way of life of a particular tribal group or class. It nearly always, however, follows aesthetic as well as social canons" (Brain, 1979 :70).

The most widely practiced forms of body alteration are tattooing and scarification, but amputation, branding and alterations of the genitals and facial features are also commonly practiced (Brain, 1979; Ebin, 1979; Favazza, 1996). Indeed, the very means by which marks are inscribed upon the body reflect specific values and practices. Traditional Maori tattooing is performed with a chisel to create a tactile and visual design (Gathercole, 1988; Randall & Polhemus 2000), while Inuit tattoos are made by threading pigment through the skin (Gritton, 1988; Randall & Polhemus, 2000). In Europe and America tattoos have been based on practices of 'pricking and inking' (Caplan, 2000), firstly by hand, and later as technology developed, with a rotary mechanism and electronic needles (Govenar, 2000). In the same way, the words which describe body marking also reflect the cultural value and symbolism of the practices (Brain, 1979; Ebin, 1979; Jones, 2000; MacQuarrie,

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2001)Sociologists of the body (such as Frank, 1991 Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; Turner, 1984; 1996; 2001) make extensive reference to the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas.

2000). For example, tattooing is referred to in "Irish Celtic" culture using a variety of expressions.

> There are two words used to describe tattoos and/or tattooing in medieval Irish literature: the word *rind* more commonly used to mean 'point', 'pupil', or 'star', but also 'cut' and 'satirizing', and the word *crechad,* which usually denotes 'raiding' and 'plundering'. A third word, the noun *cruth* ('shape or form' as in the name *Cruthne*) may also convey tattoo.
>
> (MacQuarrie, 2000: 33)

Similarly in the 'British Isles', "the word 'Briton' may even derive from a Breton word meaning 'painted in various colours'" (Brain, 1979: 52). The more recent word 'tattoo' which was brought into the English language is believed to derive from "the Tahitian word *tatu* 'to strike'.... [which] refer[s] to the technique of holding a sharp pointed instrument against the skin and tapping it with a small mallet" (Ebin, 1979: 83). However, because in the 'west' body marks have often been associated with or used to denote the 'other' the terminology carries ambivalent status. In the early Greek and Roman period the word 'stigma' was used for 'tattoo' and this "has passed into our own language with the sense of 'mark of infamy' or 'moral blot'" (Jones, 2000:1).

While the various types of body alteration, their location on the body as well as the specific meanings they inscribe are all culturally specific, there are some consistent themes integral to them. The symbolism of gender, blood and pain are central to these practices, despite the variation of meaning and value applied to them.

> Male and female body markings symbolise and ritualise the clear distinction between gender roles. Women's designs are focused on the personal, family aspects of life; men's are linked to the wider social structure, based on descent, and to the clan and ritual and ceremonial role.
>
> (Brain, 1979: 173)

Male body markings are usually inscribed to indicate a separation from the maternal/female realm into adult masculinity. This requires taking on the social role and responsibilities of adult men in that culture as well as demonstrating the psychological, physical and emotional strength to do so (Brain, 1979; Ebin, 1979; Favazza, 1996). In the Ndumba of New Guinea, young males are bled as a passage into adulthood to rid them of maternal blood and to purify them into adult manhood (Favazza, 1996). Boys become recognised as adult men through the physical marks they wear and having borne the ritualised endurance they symbolise. In Polynesia, for example,

> tattooing was associated with rank and chiefship: the more tattooing a man took or was allowed to take, the greater his social standing and the respect he could command. Designs signified social status and in this way social structure governed the style and amount of tattooing.
>
> (Brain, 1979: 57-8)

Among the "Cree Indians" enduring the process of extensive tattooing and the bleeding and pain it necessitated had special, mystical symbolism and status.

> Cree men with special powers received tattoos to help them communicate with the spirits. .... The ability to withstand the painful and tedious aspects of tattooing, which often lasted for two to three days, confirmed the tattooees' courage. Blood shed during the process was believed to possess magical power and was absorbed by a special cloth and kept for future use.
>
> (Hewitt, 1997: 69).

For males adulthood and status is not recognised in terms of developmental markers - as is the case for females - but rather through demonstrating the embodiment of the necessary capacities in a ritualised context. Female body markings, in contrast, seem to be almost universally associated with the specifics of the female reproductive life cycle and its status within in that culture. The developmental stage at which the marking takes place, the ritualised context, the

location on the woman's body, and the symbolism of the marks are all interconnected.

> In many parts of the world, but particularly in Melanesia and Africa, the tattooing of nubile girls is not a matter of pure aesthetics but a recognition of their future biological role. At the menarche, a girl becomes a woman who can now marry and have children, and frequently it is the critical parts of her anatomy - breasts and belly - which are decorated.
> .... In Africa, Nuba girls, from southern Sudan undergo a series of scarifications which is also related very closely to their physiological development. The first series of marks is a pattern of scars cut on either side of the abdomen, joining at the navel and continuing to a point between the breasts. At puberty, when the breasts begin to fill out, the girls are taken by older women to the mountain side, where they remain in isolation until the scars heal. A second set of cuts is made at a girl's first menstruation and consists of a series of parallel rows under the breasts which is continued round to the back and over the whole torso. After the weaning of the first child, a final scarring takes place, and the woman is marked all over the back, the neck, the back of the arms, the buttocks and the back of the legs to the knee.
>
> (Brain, 1979: 50 & 70)

Not only the female reproductive role but also her sexuality, and its regulation, is marked through body alteration. Among the Gujurat, tattooed women are believed to be both more desirable and more faithful to men (Rublin, 1988b), likewise in "Native Alaska" tattooing functions as both a sign of "nubility", but also indicates the vulnerability of female sexuality and predicates the threat of rape (Gritton, 1988: 188). Femininity and the contradictions of the desiring and desirable female body are then overtly inscribed through these body marks. Because such overt body alterations form an essential script of gender, those who do not comply may be subject to hostility and ridicule. For example, among the Hemba, where scarification is integral to gender role and status "girls who have not yet received scarification were teased, their smooth bellies compared to men" (Roberts, 1988: 45). Finally, gendered practices of body alteration may also be linked to emotional experiences and their integration into the social body. So that individual as well as

community grief and mourning are acknowledged and embodied through the alteration of the female body. In Hawaii,

> the tips of the tongues of women were tattooed as a sign of mourning on the death of a chief or any other calamitous event. .... At a royal funeral many disfigured themselves as a sign of grief by knocking out their front teeth and branding their faces with red-hot stones. ....
>
> [Aboriginal] women sometimes wound themselves at funerals by jabbing their skin with a digging stick, or if a child has died they may amputate a finger joint.
>
> (Brain, 1979: 58 & 81)

Females then, not only embody the meanings and symbols of sexuality and reproduction but also the ritualised emotional needs of the society. Gender then, seems inherent to the practices of marking the body, both in terms of the meaning and function of the role that the marks symbolise, as well as the places upon the body where they are located. Even the ingredients that make up the pigments, or the rituals and contexts in which they take place are inherently gendered.

> Pigment for the tattoo sometimes had magical qualities; it could be prepared from the milk of a nursing mother - preferably a woman nursing a daughter since the milk for a girl is said to be more soothing and cooler - and its strengthening properties which help the child grow and flourish, would impart similar benefits to the wearer of the tattoo.
>
> (Eben, 1979: 86)

Because gender difference is fundamentally and overtly embodied through these practices, both the experiences they symbolise as well as the physiological processes of blood and pain are also intrinsically linked to the structure of gender. Thus, while in some societies, menstruation, birth and lactation are associated with powerful magical and mystical forces, in other cultures these same processes are regarded as dangerous, animal, and base. The marking out of these aspects of the lifecycle and the process of wounding, bleeding and healing which they necessitate are often symbolically linked to the blood shed during menstruation and childbirth. Thus, where this shedding of blood is valorised men may mimic this bleeding in

ritualised practices that are intended to endow them with some of the qualities that women embody.

> On the 'Island of Menstruating Men' in Papua New Guinea, it is believed that women are healthy because of their menstrual bleeding. Men, in order to maintain their health, strength, and attractiveness, mimic the natural cycle of female self-purification by inducing periodic nasal haemorrhages.
>
> (Favazza, 1996: 227)

Likewise, "in New Guinea, Wogeo men periodically incise themselves [i.e. the penis] in emulation of the purification women experience during menstruation" (Favazza, 1996: 184). Female bleeding in child-birth is similarly mimicked: "South American Indian fathers sometimes bleed themselves in the couvades (when they, instead of their wives, lie in childbed) in recognition of their new status of parenthood" (Brain, 1979: 178). Blood and bleeding, and the pain associated with it has mystical and social significance, and the fluids of the body are highly symbolic and gendered. Ritualised bleeding may signify potency and power in physical or mystical terms or act as a form of purification.

> Young boys from the Agwa tribe in New Guinea develop into men by engaging for ten to fifteen years in a series of rituals that include body purging and penis cutting. .... Their penises are gashed open with a knife. .... The profuse bleeding and intense pain endured during this ritual are thought to enhance the life force in the initiates' bodies, to strengthen against the dangerous and powerful female substances that are contacted during intercourse, and to induce the production of semen.
>
> (Favazza, 1996: 124-5)

Pain, like blood, is integral to the symbolism that the marks embody in the individual. The ability to endure the pain of the wound and its healing is important in that it symbolises the physical emotional and social capacities of adulthood. However, as with the aesthetics of the body markings, the meaning of pain is highly gendered. Thus, male endurance demonstrates the ability to take on the social role and status of the adult man, usually associated with prowess as a hunter,

warrior, or tribesman. For females the ability to endure the pain of the marking is connected with their maternal role, symbolising their reproductive or sexual capacities (Brain, 1979; Favazza, 1996; Rubin, 1988a; 1988b; Drewal, 1988) The "element of pain is an essential part of the marking of the body during th[e] most critical passage rite[s]. As the boys are changed into men, and the girls into women, they become permanently and painfully aware of their new role" (Brain, 1979: 183).

In some cultures, then, the link between the social, the individual, and emotional is much more openly acknowledged and integrated through the corporeal markings which embody these cultural values. In these 'non western' societies the body is positioned as integral to cultural practices and belief systems, unlike in the 'west' where the body occupies a much more ambiguous status in relation to the social structures and values. Indeed the sociologists of the body have already described at length the ways in which 'western' culture has sought to transcend the body, and the dualistic fracturing of human experience, as well as the hierarchical value system, that results (Frank, 1991; Shilling, 1993; Synott, 1993; Turner, 1984; 1996; 2001).

Overall then, anthropological work in the area of body marking raises some interesting issues for an embodied position. And despite the problem of terminology, there appears to be some evidence of more open acknowledgement and integration of embodiment within 'non western' cultures, as indeed for those who write about them. Further, in 'non western' cultures gendered embodiment is marked out in much more overt - if not necessarily more egalitarian or liberatory - practices, where the necessity of embodying the cultural scripts of gender through body alteration is openly acknowledged. Gender is so deeply embedded within the body and culture that even physiological experiences of blood and pain do not escape its symbolism. The practices which mark the centrality of the body to both self and culture, and the ritualization of significant social moments or experiences upon the body, have important connections for understanding body marking in

'western' cultures. These themes also enable an increasing move beyond diagnostic approaches to body alteration.

7.2 Gender & the marked body

Body marking practices in 'western' cultures are widely seen to have a very different social role and history compared to 'non-western' societies (Brain, 1979, Caplan, 2000; MacQuarrie, 2000; Randall & Polhemous, 2000; Rublin, 1988a; 1988b; 1988d). There is, however, some historical evidence that the origins of cultures which are now regarded as 'western' may have included body marking practices, particularly in northern Europe, including Scotland (Jones, 2000), "Celtic Ireland" (MacQuarrie, 2000), Medieval Britain (Flemming, 2000), and, more generally, 'early Christian cultures' (Gustafson, 2000). These marks indicated membership of a particular tribe, warrior caste, community of believers, or social group. However, in more contemporary 'western' culture body marking has been more widely and more recently practiced as a means of marking social 'others' particularly criminals, vagrants and slaves (Gustafson, 2000; Jones, 2000; MacQuarrie, 2000; Schrader, 2000). And while these practices also led to countercultural value systems among those marked other, including certain criminal groups (Schrader, 2000) spiritual or religious belief systems (MacQuarrie, 2000; Flemming, 2000; Gustafson, 2000) or even occupational groups such as tradesmen or seamen (Brain, 1979), the overriding status of the marked body in 'western cultures' has been negative. This status impacts not only on the practices themselves but also the ways in which they are theorised and understood.

> Tattooing alone has had an extended, if discontinuous history in Western culture. At the same time it has occupied an uneasy and ambiguous status within dominant culture in which body-marking was usually treated as punitive or stigmatic rather than honourable or decorative. Partly for this reason, there is a deficit of knowledge on the subject, compared with societies where its status has been more secure or its aesthetics more complex.
>
> (Caplan 2000: xi)

Analytical conventions have also made the issues of gender and body marking equally ambivalent in historical terms. Outside of anthropology, the general failure to overtly acknowledge gender leaves a presumption that the practices referred to are primarily male, because female tattooing (as with the feminine in general (see Spender, 1989)) is referenced specifically by gender[2]. For example, Charles MacQuarrie describes "the discovery in the 1950s of the frozen body of an elaborately tattooed Scythian warrior in Siberia, which is dated to the fifth century BC, and more recently of a tattooed *woman* 'poet' from the same region" (2000: 34) [my emphasis].

The culturally specific and gender-skewed analyses of body marking have also been significantly influenced by the criminologists and medics who until recently maintained a monopoly on defining tattooed individuals. These analyses are of course based on a very specific, segmented and pathologised portion of the male population (Sullivan, 2001; Caplan 2000a). Finally, 'western' practices and their gendering have often been regarded through an ethnocentric/racist lens which divides the world and its cultural practices into a binary of normative and other.

> The propensity to deform or alter the natural shape of the body is a universal one. .... [But] Westerners regard self-mutilation as a sign of psycho-pathology and have always taken a poor view of its manifestation in both our own and exotic [sic] societies.
>
> (Brain, 1979: 84 & 73)[3]

However, during the last thirty years or so there has been something of a transformation in the view of body marking in 'western' societies - ironically at the

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[2] Ronit Lentin (2000) also discusses the impacts, problems and politics of specifically identifying gender in terms of representations of the Shoah.

[3] Brain describes how in the 'west' body practices are defined in such a way as to separate them from those performed within other cultures. "In the West, mutilation [i.e. body alteration] is most commonly confined to cosmetic surgery, although foot, waist, chest and skull deformation have been practised in the past largely through a crushing desire to conform to stereotyped but ever changing body ideals. In many other societies mutilation has a less frivolous basis, and involves religious beliefs; but even in the West, blood-letting, flailing and scourging and other sado-masochistic attacks on the body have been associated with Christian devotion and penitence" (1979: 84).

very same time that practices such as scarification and FGM are being outlawed in their native cultures (Pitts, 2003; Randall & Polhemous, 2000). This changing relation to body alteration in 'western' culture has been described as a "tattoo renaissance" (Caplan, 2000; Gans, 2000; Gustafson, 2000; Rubin, 1988d; Randall & Polhemous, 2000), as a subculture of "new tribalism" (Randall& Polhemous, 2000: 24) or "neo tribalism" (Wojcik, 1995), or part of the 'modern primitives movement' (Musafar, 1996; Pitts, 2003; Vale & Juno, 1989). According to Rubin (1988d) this "tattoo renaissance" has transformed 'western' tattooing in terms of its practice (methods), structure (professionalization) and patronage (client group). As such body modification has become a part of mainstream "*avante garde*" culture, enjoying a broad appeal and a professional status. However, this is not the first time in 'western' culture that tattooing has occupied a more positive status. Upper class Victorians similarly embraced the tattoo as a mark of avante garde status, and indeed, both Queen Victoria and her husband were reputed to be tattooed (Bradley, 2000). However, during both the Victorian as well as the contemporary 'tattoo renaissance' only certain forms of body marking are subject to this re-evaluation. Home made tattoos, and those associated with penal institutions or working class culture, such as the 'borstal spot' remain stigmatised (Brain, 1979; Govenar, 1988; Grongard, 1994). Further, non-mainstream forms of body marking including cutting, branding and scarification remain widely problematised and associated with deviance, perversion or sickness (Favazza, 1996; Pitts, 1999; 2003; Musafar, 1996; Myers, 2001). Overall then, despite the recent resurgence in popularity of (some forms of) body marking in 'western' cultures it continues to co-exist with "a lingering sense that tattoos[/marks] are signs of degradation, criminality and deviance, and thus their appearance is deemed an assault on the viewer" (Gustafson, 2000: 17).

In the following analysis, in contrast, I adopt an embodied perspective to reflect on some of the themes that are inherent to body marking practices. I will consider how the issues of gender, blood and pain which are described as integral to 'non-western' practices are also present within 'western' body marking. In this way I

continue the problematization of binaries of self ('western')/other('non-western'), agency/mutilation, pathology/normalcy.

- Gender and contemporary body marking.

If, as I argued in chapter three, gender difference is embodied through socially prescribed forms of body alteration, then it may also be crucial within the meaning and practice of body marking. Contemporary theorists of body alteration clearly reference gender, and indeed often argue that it is integral to the location, design and even the experience of body alteration (Fisher, 2002; Grongard, 1994; Huck, 1997; Myers, 1992; Pitts, 2003; Randal & Pollhemous, 2000). Indeed there are even specific practitioners publications such as *Tattoos For Women* which focus on gender appropriate designs and locations for tattoos. However, gender is only referenced within normative structures and assumptions of the gendered self. Here, as in chapter three I consider gender as crucial to the embodied self but do so in ways which complicate normative binaries and incorporate issues of (gender) ambiguity and transformation within the process of body marking.

Within normative discourses (academic as well as cultural productions) body marking practices are frequently seen as marking out the binaries of gender and sexuality. Body marking is commonly interpreted as, or implied to fall within simplistic binaries of the normal and the perverse. Thus, mainstream forms of body marking, discreet or "designer tattoos" (Benson, 2000; Sanders, 1988) which may be easily concealed are seen to fall within mainstream norms of the gendered body. Body marking which is less mainstream, such as multiple, visible, or "sexual" piercings and tattoos as well as branding and scarification are defined as perverse - in association with some kind of queer and/or SM culture, or in terms of mental illness and deviance (Myers, 1992; 2001; Pitts, 1999; 2003; Sweetman, 1999).

Clinton Sanders argues that contemporary tattooing is gendered both in terms of the location and the function of tattoos. The area of the body tattooed is significant in that "for men the arm is by far the most popular choice. .... Women on the other

hand tend to choose more private tattoo locations on the breast, shoulder, or hip" (1988: 222). He argues that women's tattoos tend to be small delicate and for the private aesthetic pleasure of herself or those with whom she is intimate. Further, women are careful to have designs and locations for their tattoos which "will not be defined as deviant by strangers or casual associates. .... [While for men] tattoos publicly assert masculinity" (1988: 223). Likewise, Jill Fisher argues that despite

> about 60 per cent of tattoo clientele being women .... one of the enduring sex differences in tattooing is in the location of the tattoo. Most women choose a location on their bodies for the tattoo that they will be able to conceal relatively easily. The torso, especially the hips, buttocks, or breasts, is the most common location for women, while men usually place their first tattoos on their arms.
>
> (2002: 100)

The location of such gendered tattoos has also been assumed to correlate with the motivation for it. So that Catherine Grongard (1994) argues that for women tattooing tends to be erotic, drawing attention to erogenous zones, while for men, if there is any sexual element to a tattoo it is depicted in the image itself. These gendered readings of body marking permeate the whole range of body marks so that while scars may be considered antithetical to femininity, for men "scars reflect masculinity" (Brain, 1979: 73). Or, where body alteration is pathologised and associated with psychological disorders and mental illness it is "depicted as especially problematic for women and girls" (Pitts, 1999: 2003).

Gender norms are then inherent to the ways in which theorists as well as individuals within daily interactions seek to categorise and understand body marking in very limited and limiting ways. However, the pristine, white, normative and normatively gendered body is not an achievable, or indeed even an aspirational goal for many individuals. Nonetheless, the embodiment of the gender polarity and the binaries of normalcy/other form inescapable conditions through which the relationship with the body-self, and the ways it is marked (voluntarily, physically, culturally) are worked.

In this way, for women (as described in chapter five), body marking "spoils the thing which society both values and despises" (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 40), and signifies a complex relationship with the gendered body and the social norms of sexual difference. One of the women who participated in my research through the group discussion at the Tattoo Convention commented on her own tattoos in a way which resonates with this understanding of gender and the marked body, asserting that "my tattoos are not pretty". Thus, while the experience of body marking may be gendered it is perhaps not so simplistic as the binary positionings imply.

The gendered stereotyping of a tattooed individual, and the way the stereotypes contrast with embodied experience is something that a number of writers have commented upon, although usually more in terms of a critique of the individuals themselves than of the stereotypes they reference (Fisher, 2002; Grongard, 1994; Myers, 1992; Sweetman, 1999). Many of my research participants have also commented on the assumptions regarding tattooed individuals and particularly women. Growing up, Mary was acutely aware of the gendered norms around the tattooed body, and felt that this impacted on the length of time it took her to become tattooed herself. "I would have seen a lot of men with those [traditional, working class] tattoos on them but it would have been absolutely unheard of for a woman to get tattooed." She also said that, "I suppose a lot of people might still be of the idea that piercing and tattooing is almost defiling the body, I think a lot of my friends would think that, that it's actually a destructive thing. I certainly wouldn't think that, I think it's a creative thing."

In another 'childhood' recollection, from when she was twelve years old, René highlights the ethnocentric and gendered readings of the body which render females as pathologically sexual.

> I wanted to have [my ears] double pierced. It was the cool thing to do in those days, and I wanted it too, and my best friend was going to do it too. We were going to go to a place in the mall where you could get your ears double pierced, and my father was going to take us, and he just didn't think anything of it, but mum found out and

> she was furious! And she forbade me to get my ears double pierced. And, I just, at the time I remember I couldn't understand it cause she had taken me to get my ears pierced in the first place, but, she kept saying, 'You'll look like a gypsy!' And, I was just like, [laughing] I can't figure out what she meant, except I thought that she might have meant slut .. or whore or something.

The four women who I met at the tattoo convention recognised and mocked the stereotypes of tattooed women (in chapter two). Likewise, both felicity and Lucinda were also emphatic that their tastes and interests did not comply with the common assumptions about tattooed individuals. In this vein, and in the context of her own specific cultural milieu, Lucinda described how people frequently respond when the see her tattoos.

> People kind of go [in surprise], 'You have tattoos?' You know, cos I don't listen to heavy metal music and I don't come across as a rebel or a revolutionary. You know, cos I'm sure with you, I'm sure people wouldn't be surprised if you had a tattoo because you've got [visible] piercings. So society says that someone like you, who's got a lot of piercings, you're obviously a rebel, socialist, activist, I dunno, you're probably a vegetarian, [chuckling] you know all these stereotypes? (K: mm mm) [....] So you have tattoos too cos you're a rebel. So if you don't conform to that kind of rebel stereotype people are like, 'Oh my god you have tattoos!' And then they presume that you had a moment of madness sometime and they're like, 'Oh, right. Do you regret getting them?' And I'm like, 'No, no, I really like them actually and I'm thinking of getting another one', and they'd be like 'why'? So, you know, they expect you to conform.

Lucinda's mother also responded to her tattoos in terms of gendered stereotypes.

> One of the big, huge things my mum said to me when I first got my first tattoo was [very serious] 'Fellas hate tattoos!' (K: right) She was like, 'Oh well, you're lucky it's somewhere that people can't see it'. When I got the one done on my [visible place on body] she was like, 'Tut, men don't like tattoos!' So, I'm making myself less attractive to men. I was like well if a guy doesn't like my tattoo well, you know, I don't want to be with him, or a person, or whatever, you know, it's like a part of me.

This has also impacted on Lucinda's feelings about the gendered appropriateness of her tattoos and what they symbolise for her.

> Even when I get married, or if I get married, [in mischievous tone] I'm going to wear a top that shows it off, and have it on the photos! (K: Excellent!)[both laugh] Ah no, I'll probably be persuaded into covering it up with some body make-up or something. But it's like that whole thing of [mock grave], 'People don't find them attractive', you know? (K: aha) And I mean for somebody like me who has a history of eating disorders and that kind of stuff, that should have been a really big determinant, 'Oh people wouldn't find me attractive, I can't do that!' But it didn't at all, cos I thought well feck it (K: aha) it's something I really want to get done and if people don't find it attractive, well, so what. Which it is a huge, big thing for me to do, I think that in a way that was kind of it too, maybe it was a kind of way of being defiant.

How a woman experiences and locates herself in relation to the norms of gender can impact in the ways in which marking her body can work for her, visible markings can work as an intentional or incidental re-figuration of femininity, as well as simply conforming to such norms as has been suggested[4]. In this way Ciara describes the gendered consequences of having a visible tattoo, and comparing her own experiences with that of her friend.

> I think though with mine it's different, though, nobody gets to see it very often, but with hers it's so, so strong. I think that a lot of women get [tattoos] that are hidden or that are small and that they are under their clothes. And to actually have such a big one in such a visible place is kind of like quite a defiant act as well. The only negative reaction she actually - or not even really that negative but, vaguely negative reaction she got [was] from a man. She was

[4] In Randall & Pollhemous's work a number of women speak in gendered terms about their experiences of and motivations for body modifications. "Blue: 'I was out of touch with myself and quite insecure but the tattoos have given me strength ... they've been a rite of passage for me. To be a woman and highly tattooed takes considerable courage and for me to be able to deal with people's reactions has required that I discover that in myself.' Sally: 'A lot of people have said that I'm spoiling myself, 'you'd be such a pretty girl if you didn't have these!' But chances are if I looked like everyone else they wouldn't have noticed me.' Fran: 'I like looking tough. When you're a female who looks butch you can get a lot of hassle on the street so it helps to look as if you can take care of trouble ... and I can ... but I'd rather not have to fight every time I go shopping, so I use my appearance to back people off'." (2000: 27- 44)

> working with some young people with from different backgrounds, and one of the guys from a different culture was just kind of saying, [incredulous concern] 'But you'll never have a husband!' Like this, [laughs] you know, 'With this, [the tattoo] how?' You know, you're basically cutting off your nose to spite your face, or whatever. He's like, 'You'll never you'll never get a husband! With this kind of thing, you'll never be attractive to men!' And she was like, 'Well that's not necessarily a problem!' [we both laugh a lot] Whatever, but that was the only, only man like - and it was kind of interesting that he was, 'No, that's [bad].' Whereas other men would see it like it was nice and that it was a very strong design, or whatever, and that she was very strong and she was worth respect, but he was like, 'But you're not getting married now, are you'? [we both laugh again] 'You've gone and blown it!' And he was telling her that she should wear long sleeved things so that you wouldn't see it!

In terms of less mainstream forms of body alteration - which include as well as extensive tattooing and piecing, branding, cutting and scarification - the issues of gender also work in contrast with simplistic conventions. A number of writers have considered the gendered elements of body marking as indicative of sexual subcultures or minorities (Myers 1992; 2001 Pitts, 2000; 2003; Rhandall & Pollhemous, 2000). And while these writers, not unlike those who discussed 'self-injury' and agency in chapter five, claim to de-stigmatise these practices, the strategies that are employed to describe them re-create an objectifying spectacle of the abject/other rather than a normalising or empathic engagement. So that James Myers claims that among "nonmainstream" body-modifiers who practice "genital-piercing, branding, burning and cutting .... the single largest group [i]s composed of SM homosexuals and bisexuals" (Myers, 2001: 183-5), who are "for the most part, barely subdued exhibitionists" (Myers, 2001: 186). In "Visibly Queer", Victoria Pitts makes some similar although more complex observations around queer culture, body modification and SM, but nonetheless invokes similar images of "SM lesbians who use body modification" (2003:111). The objectified, perverse other is set in contrast to Myers, "a straight, male anthropologist" (Myers, 2001: 185) who is considered "extreme" for engaging with such outlandish people and behaviour: "it is not just the topics studied .... that are extreme, but also the research strategies that were used to study them" (Miller & Tewksbury, 2001: 205).

The resulting analysis are not only objectifying but also over-simplistic and become dangerously close to implying a causal relationship where non-mainstream body alteration can simply be read off the body as an indication of sexual 'perversion'[5]. Indeed, Victoria Pitts argues that this very association (alongside the ethnocentrism of the practitioners) is precisely the point which undoes the radical potential of queer body modification which seeks to "display symbols of nonnormative pleasure, eroticism and gender on the body" (2003:101).

This association of perverse sexuality with body modification reiterated by such theorists can be a source of frustration for women who experience these implications as objectifying and intrusive in day-to-day interactions. Lucinda complained about instances where such interpretations occurred, using this example of a situation which involved a friend of her brother.

> My brother and his friend were drinking, and he [friend] was like 'Ooh she's all into pain!' And it was all this big sexual thing, which, you know, was just so annoying, it really was, it just had to be like s&m, if you like tattoos then you're into leather and whips and all that - which is grand as well if you are into that - but I'm not.

Further, as René has already pointed out (above), it is more often the *non* alteration of the female body that identifies it as lesbian/queer/other. Likewise, the idea of queering or perverting the body depends upon the assumption that it was normative in the first place, a position that has already been problematised by René, Elaine, Maeve and myself in chapters four and six (above). For me, this connects with the experiences of body marking practices for those who are already deemed 'perverse', gender queer or 'abnormal' by virtue of their non compliance with the binaries of gender[6]. Randall & Pollhemous provide imagery and testimonies from a

[5] I discuss these issues in more depth in "Carved in Flesh? Inscribing body, identity & desire" (forthcoming, 2007).

[6] Tattooing as something outside of gender norms was also a feature of the phenomena of 'the tattooed lady' who up until early last century existed as circus or side-show 'freaks' alongside other women whose bodies rendered them spectacularly abnormal (Otterman, 2000; Garland Thompson, 1997).

number of individuals whose body marking is linked much more to gender ambiguity than specific sexual subculture, identity or practice.

> Jed 'Looking at these pictures you've taken is a real eye opener ... I look like a queer boy. I like it. I look like someone who can take care of themselves ... someone you wouldn't mess with.'
>
> Ben the Wendy 'My identity crisis has caused me much pain through lately I've been wondering if this long journey through the darkness is actually leading me back to my masculinity rather than gender re-assignment.'
>
> Sam 'I like looking androgynous. My name is too ... could be a boy's name, could be a girl's ... take your pick.'
>
> Fabian 'I'm a dark angel, a sexual creature born from my own private fantasies. I'm not gender specific when I recreate myself that would be too limiting ... not enough!'
>
> (2000: 107-115)

Likewise, the photographer Dela Grace Volcano[7] who documents transitioning and gender queer bodies presents images in which tattoos and other body marks are also commonly visible. And while tattooing is not explicitly discussed in this context, and I would not like to imply some definitive connection here, I have often noticed body marks as significantly present on non-normatively gendered individuals (for example: Agid, 2004; Cameron, 1996; Dela Grace Volcano, 2000; Prosser, 1998; and the Channel Four documentary *Make Me a Man*). These marks are also on occasion explicitly referenced in this context (Agid, 2004; Prosser, 1998), for example, Jay Prosser uses an autobiographical case study of a F2M trans-person to highlight the connections between the non-normatively gendered body and the need for corporeal markers which correlate with the experiential self. The individual, named "Thompson", while still pre-operative "tattoos his skin as if he would have

[7] Del Lagrace Volcano has a website as well as book publications of his work, at http://www.body.arc.co.uk/body5/mutation.html

his body bare/bear the true hidden self with his authentic signature" (1998: 74). The tattoos are self-inflicted with pins and Indian ink.[8]

Thus, while gender is intrinsic to the body, and indeed may be integral to the embodiment of different marking practices, the relationship between the two is not necessarily as deterministic or readable from the body as normative positions imply. Indeed the non-normatively gendered may experience some degree of normalisation or de-stigmatisation through the very processes that are being argued to mark them as other within the gender binary. Felicity (the tattoo artist who I met at the tattoo convention) described how a woman client had, following a double mastectomy and botched re-constructive surgery, used tattooing to rework her relationship with her body and her sense of femininity.

> One woman came to me and she had had a mastectomy, a double mastectomy, and she'd had them re-built and it had gone wrong, so she had no breasts. And she was kind of a spiritual lady, and she wanted a design on the scars because she decided that she wanted to be on the beach and instead of people going, 'Look at your scars!' She wanted to be able to say, 'Look at my tattoo!' Anyway, I became quite involved with this woman. [But initially] she had just walked up the street, and she saw me and she grabbed hold of me and she said, 'You're the one! I know who you are!' She says, 'You're the one who is doing my tattooing!' And I went, 'Oh right ok, [surprised/interested] are you going to tell me more about it?' sort of thing, because I didn't know anything about it [at that time]. And I did tattoo her. And to her it was quite a healing thing. I didn't charge her, I wouldn't take any money for it.

Gender is inherent to the reading of the marked body, and while because gender is embodied it would be impossible for it *not* to impact on the experience of body marking, it may do so in much more complex ways that are normatively prescribed. Body marking may be a means of negotiating or transforming the gendered self beyond the confines of these binaries. Further, considering gender and body

[8] A similar story was depicted in Channel 4's documentary *Make Me A Man* which followed four individuals in the process of female to male surgery. Scott, who we see undergoing a double mastectomy, also reveals his arms marked with scars from self-cutting and which have since been tattooed over.

marking in this way not only connects with the themes of gendered embodiment but also the ways in which I attempted to move beyond the binary of agency and mutilation. The complex and ambivalent experiences of, and responses to, the marked body are integrated as a part of the process of the embodiment of a gendered self. These issues are highlighted further in considering the corporeal process of body marking and the experiences of blood and pain that are integral to them. Blood and pain may be transformative in terms of the social/symbolic elements they embody, and yet are also read and experienced through the social scripts of gender which in turn also shape their interpretation.

7.3 Blood, pain, gender & transformation.

- Blood, gender, culture.

Writers who have discussed body marking practices in 'non-western' cultures have focussed as much on the ritualised process of inscribing the marks as of reading the symbolism of the inscription itself. The context in which the marking takes place and the corporeal aspects of it, the blood, pain and healing process are considered intrinsic to the social and individual meaning and experience of the mark.

> Blood-letting, of course is a major factor in the difference between temporary body arts (painting) and the permanent (tattooing and scarification) and it is accompanied by pain. .... For this reason .... tattooing and scarification are ideal for marking important status changes where at the critical moments of life, such as puberty, the necessity for courage plays a part in operations which demand proof of initiates fitness and endurance. And along with the pain there is the blood. Some societies stress the importance of the piercing of the skin and the drawing of blood, the blood carrying away the imperfections or the evil contained in the body. (The Nuba girls are scarified in isolation on the mountainside above the village because the blood is considered evil and polluting.)
>
> (Brain, 1979: 75)

Writers who focus on body marking in 'western' cultures only occasionally consider these aspects of body marking, and usually in the contexts of perverse desire (Myers, 1992; 2001; Pitts, 2003) or sickness (Favazza, 1996). Paul

Sweetman (1999), alongside Kim Hewitt (1997), is quite unusual in that he considers the process of becoming tattooed or pieced as integral to understanding body marking as, "invasive procedures involving pain, blood and the penetration of the skin" (1999: 167). Kim Hewitt reflects on the centrality of blood in practices across the cultural binary in terms of body marking as both modification and 'injury', and suggests that, "blood is intimately connected with practices of body alteration" (1997: 16). And while both Hewitt and Sweetman tend to 'read' the bodies of others and the meaning of their marks, they emphasise the embodied elements of blood and pain. "Tattooing and piercing can involve a considerable degree of pain, discomfort and/or 'heightened sensation' during their initial application .... and during the subsequent healing period" (Sweetman, 1999: 170). This can be a "cathartic experience" where "the necessary physicality of the process is key to their overall motivation" (1999: 171).

> The painful and bloody nature of the procedures involved and their subjective and corporeal effects, are central rather than peripheral to the experiences and motivations of many contemporary bodymodifiers, and that to focus solely on the effects that tattooing and piercing have on the appearance of the 'outer body' would be to miss much of what constitutes the lived reality of such practices. .... Were tattoos and piercings motivated solely by fashion, then the stress would lie simply with the finished body decoration, as a purely visual signifier, and not with the wounding and healing involved in its acquisition, or its effects on the corporeal subjectivity of the tattooee or piercee. In this context a tattoo transfer, or clip-on piercing, would be as meaningful as the real thing.
>
> (Sweetman, 1999: 181-182)

Bleeding is integral to body marking, and in the 'west' we are no less superstitious, or enmeshed within any less elaborate symbolism around the meanings of blood and blood letting. Blood and bleeding has been associated with both healing and protective practices (Babiker & Arnold, 1997) as well as pollution, and specifically the menstrual cycle and the abject status of the female body (Grosz, 1994; Hewitt, 1997; Kristeva, 1982).

Historically, much 'western' medical practice was based around a belief in the potency of blood and that bleeding patients would rid them mental, emotional or physical illness.

> Mutilation of the body in order to release evil forces, bad 'humours' or blood believed to be implicated in disease has a vast history. Blood-letting (through the cutting of veins or leeching) to cure and prevent disease was traditional in Europe from the second century through to the 1800s and even up until the 1920s in some areas.
> (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 21)

In contemporary society while bleeding may no longer be considered curative, the shedding of blood has not altogether lost the social and bodily symbolism and mysticism that accompanies it. "Body mutilation, pain and the drawing of blood have had (and continue to have) a range of deep and powerful symbolic meanings" (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 20). These meanings are integral to both spiritual as well as medical belief systems. "The Christian scriptures are full of references to the necessity for the shedding of blood and mortification or mutilation of the body in order to avoid or atone for sin" (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 25). "Blood customs are among the oldest known to mankind. Blood has awesome symbolic and physiologic powers, as evidenced by its role in religious sacrifice, healing, the formation of brotherhoods and blood feuds" (Favazza, 1996:7).

Generally, in 'western' culture the shedding of blood is rendered taboo, it is considered a pollutant and a transgression of the borders of self /other and inner/outer.

> The act of shedding blood is perhaps the most universally powerful example of crossing the barrier between the external and internal body. .... Our visceral reactions to body fluids betray our fear of destroying the unity of the [masculinised/normative] human body.
> (Hewitt, 1997: 16)

This barrier can be read in terms of the binary of self/other, masculine/feminine culture/nature, so that it becomes apparent why in 'western' culture the process of

body marking is met with such abject horror. Body marking traverses the binaries upon which the norms of gendered being are established and maintained.

> Blood is associated with pain, injury and the mystery of death, as well as with the enigmas of menstruation and childbirth. Many cultures have taboos concerning menstrual blood, or menstruating women, although the global diversity of celebration and stigma concerning menstruation testifies to the differing contexts for different kinds of bloodshed. Fear of AIDS has caused blood and other bodily fluids to be thought of even more frequently as sources of possibly fatal contamination.
>
> (Hewitt, 1997: 17)

This symbolism, mysticism, and taboo of blood has inspired artists to work with it as a provocative and symbolic medium of communication. Artist Franko B describes his use of blood thus, "The blood strategy was an attempt to make work that mattered to me. It is about using my body physically and metaphorically as a site for things that matter, such as beauty and ignorance and shame and society. It is not a stunt or a spectacle" (in *Irish Times* 3/9/2005). Likewise, in 2002, the exhibition "Blood: Art, Power & Politics" explored the "compelling emotional, social, cultural and scientific power of blood" (Bradbourne, 2002: 7).

Gender and blood are most directly connected through menstruation, and menstrual blood and women's periodic bleeding remains the final taboo of the body in 'western' cultures, and is subject to intense medicalisation, pathologisation, stigma and shame (Brown Parlee, 1994; Frost, 2000; Martin, 1989; Treneman, 1988). 'Western' menstrual taboos are such that women are deemed emotionally unstable and physically debilitated when bleeding (Brown Parlee, 1994; Frost, 2000;) as well as dirty, smelly and shameful (Treneman, 1988). Menstruation is viewed as antithetical to femininity and women are expected to refrain from sex during menstruation as well as to take great pains to prevent men becoming aware that they are bleeding (Frost, 2000; Treneman, 1988). Julia Kristeva points out that the particularly abject status of menstrual blood in 'western' cultures contrasts with

other bodily waste, such as tears or semen, precisely because menstrual blood is the marker of gender/sexual difference.

> Menstrual blood signifies sexual difference .... [and] stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalisation, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference.
>
> (1982: 71)

Menstrual blood both signifies the developmental onset female sexual maturity at the same time as the disgust and horror of the female body, and the threat of contamination through contact with its fluids (Grosz, 1994). Menstruation is symbolic of gender difference and pollution and has been viewed as definitive of female instability and inferiority (Ussher, 1991). Indeed, menstruation has even been linked to the apparent propensity of women to engage in cutting and blood letting as a form of 'self-injury'. "Women who experience dyscontrol of their blood during their periods may cut themselves not only to prove that they can at least control something but also to attempt to divert the blood away from the vaginal area" (Favazza, 1996: 278).

French feminist theorists, such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva have described how the abject status which is ascribed to femaleness, and particularly associated with the female body and its reproductive processes, epitomises the defilement which associated with being inseparable from the other. The association of fluidity, "leakiness" (Shildrick; 1997), or "mucosity" (Irigaray, 1987: 127), with the female body and the threats of defilement and pollution are integral to 'western' notions of gender and sexuality[9]. Interconnection, defined as integral to a feminist metaphysics (Young, 1990 - above), as well as radical disability theory (Shildrick, 2002 - above), is rendered abject in 'western' patriarchal norms. Thus, separation

[9] Luce Irigaray describes how, "the only words we have for women's sexuality are filth, mutilating words - consequently, the feelings associated with women's sexuality will be anxiety, phobia, disgust and the haunting fear of castration" (1987: 247).

and blood sacrifice have been associated with rationality, order and "restoring paternal authority" (Kristeva, 1982: 56). In this way the definition of the "sacred", wholeness, or humanity in 'western' culture has been constructed upon the symbolic and physical exclusion of that which pollutes and defiles: the feminine. "Prohibitions are supposed to afford protection from defilement .... Ritualization of defilement is accompanied by a strong concern for separating the sexes, and this means giving men rights over women" (Kristeva, 1982: 70). The ritualised separation of the feminine/fluid/other from the masculine subject is also present in the social symbolism surrounding male homosexuality and AIDS[10]. Both are seen as a pollutant transferred through blood and semen which contaminate and feminise the normative male subject. In popular culture the threat of the homosexual is often symbolised through the vampire who, through his 'unnatural' bodily act, contaminates the blood of his victims, irretrievably and forcibly converting them into his perversion (Hanson, 1991).

In this way Paul Sweetman has argued that choosing to experience a violation of the integrity of the body through body modification is also read and experienced through a lens of gender. He suggests that body marking, and the bleeding and pain involved constitute a transgression of the norms of masculinity, in terms of both the experience of the wounding and healing as well as the "remapping and reintensifying of the body's erotogenic sensitivity" (1999: 179). Tattooing and piecing, the corporeal processes of blood and pain as well as the "intimacy" (1999: 178) of the procedure are seen as a process by which the male subject becomes feminised and abject.

> The act of becoming tattooed or pierced might thus be seen as contrary to the process of 'phallicization', implying as it does a certain level of exposure, vulnerability and permeability. Flows of bodily fluids are important in this regard: .... the bleeding associated with tattooing and piercing .... might again be said to question the notion of a tightly-bounded impermeable self. (1999: 178-9)

[10] Indeed, initially AIDS was known as "GRIDS: Gay Related Immunodeficiency Syndrome" (Pitts, 2003: 89).

The violation of the *female* body, however, may be experienced much more closely to normative scripts of gender, sexuality and power. In these extracts from my research three of the participants describe their experiences of being tattooed. It is a situation that is highly gendered, which maybe experienced as either sensual and positive, or, intrusive and unpleasant.

Aoife

> The woman I go to, Y, I feel totally at ease with her. I always draw my own [design] and I bring them up, and you know, she knows. I post it up to her maybe a month before, and she gets used to it and then, and I'm just at ease with her. It's like men are sort of, you know, [mimicking male sleazy voice] 'Does this turn you on baby?' and all this kind of shit, 'Are you into pain?' [ditto] And all this, I'm sure that's just his individual self and I'm not being sexist in that I wouldn't go to other men, but, personally, you know, when they have their hands all over your body I'd prefer it to be a female.

Mary

> He [the tattooist] got really kind of tender and really nice, and, erm, I actually found it kind of sexy: the experience of actually being tattooed. I mean he was very cute so that helped, [laughs] enormously! And I kind of had half my dress off, which helped also!

Lucinda

> We all went out for a drink that night, and the guy who did the tattoo [for a friend] came out for a drink as well, and we just got talking. I was talking about white ink and I really liked it, and he had a look at my skin and he was like, 'White ink would really suit your skin!' And he started going, 'Your skin's beautiful it would really take well to ink'. He was like 'Your skin is a tattooists dream, it's lovely and pale and soft'. And [chuckling] like he kind of seduced me into getting it done I think! Cos I was like, 'Oh yeah! I'm canvas!' [both laughing] 'Work on me!'

The agency or violation of the gendered integrity of the body experienced during body marking connects with the symbolism of both gender and blood. And while for some the shedding of blood may be transformative it may also symbolise a breach of the self's containment (Babiker & Arbnold, 1997; Hewitt, 1997; Strong,

2000 Sweetman, 1999). For René, even in her 'injurious' practices the shedding of blood symbolised a transgression with which she was unable to reconcile herself. She said "I never did it in such a way, I never did it enough to draw blood".

The shedding of blood is then deeply symbolic at both the individual and the social level. However, because in the 'west' blood is predominantly associated with the feminine/abject, dirt or pollution, the deeper symbolic, mystical and healing qualities that may be experienced with the shedding of blood are often overlooked. Blood and bleeding are highly symbolic and, at the level of embodiment, blood can have similar transformative qualities as have been ritualised into healing and mystical experiences throughout the world. In this way the experience of body marking may be symbolically and ritually significant and transformative.

> Blood is the most symbolic of all body substances .... blood, pumped through the body by a beating heart is the essence of life force. The spilling of blood both gives life, during birth, and takes it away, at death. Throughout time, blood has been used in religious ritual to demonstrate suffering and salvation, piety and enlightenment: from blood sacrifice to crucifixion, mortification of the flesh to the martyrdom of saints, from ecstatic stigmata representing the wounds of Jesus to the drinking of wine representing Christ's blood at Holy Communion. Bleeding has always signified healing, from the blood letting of early medicine to the psychological release of ill will known metaphorically as 'getting rid of bad blood'.
>
> (Strong, 2000: 34)

The symbolism of blood as purifying, transformative, healing, and self-identifying breaks down some of the binaries between the different forms of body marking practices. In this way an embodied understanding of the experience and symbolism of blood and its shedding has been used to explain some of the complex issues involved in self-injury as a coping, emotive, and transformative process (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Hewitt, 1997; Strong, 2000) as well as providing similar experiences within body modification (Hewitt, 1997; Myers, 1992; Pitts, 2003; Sweetman, 1999; Strong, 2000). Three extracts illustrate this experience, the first two are in

relation to cutting as 'self-injury', the second is a cutting as 'body modification', and the third is a tattoo[11]. The parallels between the three, in which blood and transformative emotional processes are experienced as connected, to me re-iterates the problematic nature of normative distinctions of body marking practices.

> When I see the blood, it's such a relief, it's like all the awfulness is coming out and I know I'll be all right now.
>
> Having cut myself I feel cleansed and pure
>
> (in Babiker & Anold, 1997: 72 & 81).

> I felt that the physical manifestation of my experience would be a mental and spiritual release.
>
> (in Pitts, 2003: 65).

> The whole being bled process, the bleeding and the pain .... brought me to the realisation that every emotion in life is just the same, whether it's the emotion hate [and] love, pain and happiness, it's all the same.
>
> (in Sweetman, 1999:175).

Symbolism and ritual around the marking itself, the preparation, enaction, and healing are also common experiences between the various forms of body marking (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Favazza, 1996; Miller, 1994; Stong, 2000). "It [i]s not unusual to hear both the practitioners and the recipients of body alterations to use religious/mystic reasons to account for their involvement in the process" (Myers, 1992: 295). Marlee Strong provides a number of case studies of "self-mutilators" for whom the ritualised aspects of their making are "almost religious" (2000: 17). The careful ritualisation of the marking process is evident across the board of body marking practices.

> Tamara starts each cutting session by laying out her supplies - razor blade, alcohol, cotton balls, bandages, a towel to keep her blood from dripping on the carpet - handling each item with the care of a forensic scientist. She sterilizes the razor blade and her arm, and

[11] Since I have been making an issue of gender I should perhaps also note that the first three are women and the fourth is male.

> then presses the blade lightly against her skin to measure off how much she is going to cut.
>
> (Strong, 2000: 70)

Rituals also take place before tattooing and aesthetic cutting and branding (Pitts, 2003; Myers, 1992; Sweetman, 1999) and likewise map out the symbolism of blood and its shedding. Victoria Pitts describes how, "Like the body modifications of other the women, Jane's was .... ritualised. .... Jane decided to organise her cutting event with things and people that, in her words, 'meant something to me'. She set up her home as a ritual space" (Pitts, 2003: 67).

While I did not specifically discuss ritualised aspects of body marking with my research participants, some implied connections are evident. Elaine, Ciara and Lucinda all referred to the spiritual aspects of their body marking, while René, Mary and Maeve expressed the importance of these practices as a symbolic means of marking out their experiences, and that this symbolism was particularly important in the first tattoo (see chapter two). On a personal note, I also recognised some of these connections when I had my largest tattoo. After my tattoo was complete the tattooist, as is usual, went over the importance of 'after care' procedures to ensure the proper fixing and healing of the design. The process, which includes careful bathing and applying of lotion two or three times a day, felt very much like a ritualised healing process. These methods of self-care also reminded me of the techniques that are recommended as a part of a harm reduction approach to 'self-injury' (as well as for IV drug users) (see, Babiker & Arnold, 1997). Self-care is promoted in these contexts to facilitate emotional and physical healing and transformation.

Finally, like pain, the physiological experience of bleeding releases endorphins in the body and thus creates a 'high' and which has been described as integral to the experience of and motivations of body marking as 'self-injury' as well as in terms of body modification and ritual (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Brain, 1979; Favazza, 1996; Musafar, 1996; Myers, 1992; Pitts, 2003).

Overall then, from an embodied perspective, the physiological, social, symbolic, and emotional dimensions of blood shedding and blood itself are connected not only to the polarities of gender and the experience of them, but also the transformative possibilities embodied within body marking. In 'western' culture blood symbolises issues of gender as well as transformation and healing, which are enmeshed within the experience and embodiment of practices which mark the body. Likewise, pain has also been considered as a gendered, symbolic and transformative experience.

- Pain, gender and transformation

In 'western' cultures pain has gendered social and symbolic meanings, and historically women have been defined as weaker than men in terms of their ability to endure both physical and emotional pain (Bendelow, 2000). "Since antiquity women's pain has been interpreted within patriarchal cultures built upon myths of male power and female fragility and weakness" (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 166). However, while contemporary conceptions of pain remain equally gendered, the associations of pain and gender have reversed. In contemporary 'folk wisdom' women are seen as both specifically bound up in, and more resilient to pain because of their reproductive functions (Bendelow, 2000). Pain and gender are also linked in 'western' cultures within issues of appearance and the realm of the feminine where pain is a pre-requisite to creating an appropriately gendered body (Synott, 1993; Davis, 1995). Gender and femininity are then bound up in ambivalent and contradictory expectations of physical suffering and endurance as well as weakness and fragility. Indeed, Gillian Bendelow's (2000) research indicates consistent gendered patterning in individuals' response to and perception of pain - both their own and others.[12] For example, both males and females tend to see women as having a higher ability to tolerate pain yet at the same time tend to downplay the degree of pain experienced by women compared to males. Bendelow also noticed a

[12] Bendelow (2000) argues that rather than being an essential quality of gender difference in the perception and response to both emotional and physical pain is culturally determined through learnt adjustment patterns.

tendency to view physical pain as more 'real' than emotional pain, and again the ability to both bear and experience emotional pain was perceived through gender roles.

Gendered perceptions of pain pervade accounts of contemporary 'western' body modification. According to Clinton Sanders "most tattooists maintain that women seem less bothered by the pain than men" (1988: 225) and believe this to be because of their reproductive functions (see also Gans, 2000). These ideas about gender and pain are evident in this discussion from my research, where the group of four women, (one of whom works in a tattoo studio (number 3) and another who is a professional piercer, (number2)) describe the difference between male and female reactions to the pain involved in these modifications.

> 3: Women are <u>brilliant</u>, they can tolerate the pain more [laughter] //
> 1: Yeah, yeah definitely! // 2: Yeah, with piercing as well men can't take the pain in the same way. Men pass out a lot more than women.
> // 3: Yeah men pass out <u>a lot</u> more than women!
> [lots of loud laughter]
>
> 2: They do! [more laughter] The amount of guys you have to catch! Aye!
>
> 1: Yeah, talk about tiocfaidh ar la! You know, for women, like!
> [more laugher and nod of agreement]
>
> 2: You're going [concerned], 'Are you Ok?' And they're, [stoic] 'I'm Ok, I'm Ok', and the next thing they're gone! [i.e. fainted]

The gendered relationship to pain is also present in Felicity's account of some of the gendered meanings and contradictions around pain and the experience of tattooing. On one hand she feels that there is a quantitatively different experience of pain depending on whether one is being tattooed by a male or a female, and puts this down to the interaction that takes place. She makes clear that she does not think it is a sexual interaction, yet it is the gendered/sexual nature of the encounter that supports her original assertion.

> It does feel different, it's less painful with a woman [tattooist], definitely.
>
> K: less painful?
>
> Yeah, when I've tattooed people nine times out of ten they say, 'Oh that's funny that wasn't as painful as my last tattoo!' And then I think it's to do with you as well, cause a lot of the time if someone is struggling with a tattoo you help them out. [....] So if someone puts their hand on my thigh, for example, and they go, 'Oh I'm just putting my hand there cause there's no where else to put it', right, I play it by ear I can tell, you know, that this guy actually was in a lot of pain, and he was struggling with the tattoo and he wasn't doing any harm so I left it there cause it took his mind off what I was doing [chuckle] (K: right). And it kind of helped, and so I said, 'Well look when you're in pain just squeeze my thigh', and he thought, 'That's good', and we had this sort of thing going, and it wasn't sexual at all, but it sort of helped.

Gender and pain have also been connected to sexuality terms of both the association of a perverse "sexual enhancement" (Myers, 1992: 291) with the pain of body alteration (see above), as well as in terms of gendered sexuality. Eric Gans[13] argues that women "characteristically" experience a "rush" upon being pierced which is linked to their sexuality:

> Although some [women] seek of piercing itself as an erotic experience, pain and mastery of pain are more often seen as sources of pride and guarantees of future sexual enjoyment. .... In contrast men tend to react primarily to the change in their outward appearance.
>
> (2000: 166)

For both Mary and Lucinda the pain of tattooing *is* significant, but in a non-sexual way. Indeed, Lucinda had already firmly rejected any associations between sexuality and the pain and tattooing (above) when she went on to talk about the importance of the experience of pain for her.

[13] This research was based solely on internet postings.

> I loved getting it done (K: yeah?) [giggling] I really liked the pain of it, like, it was a nice feeling, kind of, I dunno it was nice, maybe kind of makes you feel human or something.
>
> K: Like the pain of the // L: Yeah! Yeah, I kind of liked the pain of it (K: aha) It was interesting. [....] It just feels different, it's like something that you wouldn't normally feel every day. [....] It just feels amazing, something that you feel (K: aha), that you wouldn't normally feel. Different. You know that way? (K: aha) I dunno I can't really explain it. Maybe I need to go and get another tattoo [laughs] and I could explain it properly then! [....] I remember when it was finished I was like, 'Is that it?' and this one was a lot more painful than the other one cos it's a lot bigger, but I was like, 'Is that it? [disappointed] Oh, ok, right, I have to go now.' And then I felt like having another one done just so I could kind of capture the moment, cos it was over before I had really thought about it.

Mary also felt the pain was important, but again in a way which is non-sexual.

> I suppose I've always felt it [i.e. the physical process/pain] says something about [a person]. I think a tattoo on a person says something about them, given the fact that they've gone in, and no matter what it is and got something on their body that they're going to have to live with for the rest of their days does say something about a person.

Body marking and its association with pain and endurance may also rework gendered notions of strength and vulnerability. Ciara discusses the reading of the gendered body and pain in terms of the experiences of her friend, Donna. She describes how having broken her arm, which Donna described as the most painful thing she had ever experienced, she subsequently decided to have a half sleeve tattoo over that arm.

> She said she's had an astounding response primarily from men to her tattoo. And that men see her as being much stronger, they see her as being really strong, because she's chosen [to undergo the tattoo]. It obviously took quite a long time to do, I think it took about four hours, but she's chosen to sit through that pain for four hours, and it's very visible, and so there's like there's something really strong about that. I think men seem to pick up and comment a lot, and she said that most of the reactions she had is men, [and] men

> really liked it, and were really impressed that she'd done it. And she said that it wasn't any kind of sexual thing, they weren't coming on to her they were just actually really impressed [chuckles] by her tattoo. Which is really interesting because when she had her arm broken and she was wearing it in a sling (K: aha) she got such a lot of hassle from men. (K: Oh right?) Cause she was obviously seen as being vulnerable at that point, she got loads of hassle, and it was very sexual and very aggressive. Even like, she went to the bus stop like beside where she lived and even like standing at the bust stop she was getting hassle from this guy, and it's kind of funny how it changes (K: mm). That when she wore a sling she got this kind of sexual hassle, and was like seen as being vulnerable, and there to be taken advantage of or something - I don't know exactly where it was coming from - and then when she had the tattoo it was like they were impressed and seen her as being strong and worthy of respect. So I thought that was really interesting.

Pain, while being construed through cultural norms of gender may, in elective situations such as body marking, go beyond these norms and become a part of a transformative process[14]. Pain is often described as central to body marking practices in this way, both those which are construed as 'self-injury' (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Favazza, 1996; Hewitt, 1997; Strong, 2000) and those which are considered modifications (Hewitt, 1997; Myers, 1992; 2001; Pitts, 1999; 2003; Sweetman, 1999). In Victoria Pitts's work with non-mainstream body modifiers many of her respondents, such as "Mandy", suggested that "the pain of cutting and other forms of body modification can be .... intimate, cathartic, and transformative" (2003: 111). Babiker and Arnold's clients make similar points, "When I cut myself it takes away all the self-hate and all the feelings I have inside. It's like a self-release" (1997: 74) For René the issue of pain was integral to her experiences of self-piercing, as well as 'self-injury'. In piercing herself she said "part of it was I wanted to see if I could stand the pain", and she used her relationship with physical pain in order to manage the emotions she was struggling with.

[14] Williams and Bendelow (1998) describe the creative potential of pain, however, certainly in my experience at least, it is very difficult to translate the experience of chronic pain into anything remotely creative.

> I wanted to feel something, I felt like so out of control [....] I was so hurt and I was so upset and I felt out of control, and I felt like this ['self-injury'] calmed me down. I know its really weird, but I felt like I had no control over my emotional hurt and my feelings, but if I could make myself feel this physical pain it would calm me down and it would take my mind off [it], or it would control the other bigger pain I had. [....] It did always calm me down, really, it made me feel better because of the physical intensity of the pain you can't sit there and just go into your own mind about how miserable you are and how upset you are because the only thing you can relate to is the pain going on, the physical pain, so I do think that it worked.

Pain, which is commonly divided into the binary of the physical and emotional (Bendelow, 2000), is not always experienced in such dualistic terms, and indeed distress in one is often manifested as pain or a symptom in the other. The links between emotional and physical pain, and the attempt to articulate or transfer one through the other, is something that is widely discussed in body marking practice. The working out of inarticualtable emotional pain through cutting and bleeding the body has been understood as integral to the ways in which both 'self-injury' (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Favazz, 1996; Strong, 2000) as well as body-modification (Hewitt, 1997; Musafar, 1996; Pitts, 1999; 2003; Sweetman, 1999) are meaningful and transformative for those who practice them. In this way both 'injury' and modification can be understood as a process of transformation of emotion through and into the physical body (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Hewitt, 1997; Favazza, 1996; Miller, 1994; Pitts, 2003;Strong, 2000; Sweetman, 1999). Indeed the physical manifestation of emotional struggles is quite generally accepted as a part of the psycho-somatic make up of human beings within 'western' medical discourse (Babiker & Arnold, 1997), yet at the same time this relationship with pain has often been the very issue that has been used to define the activities as deviant, perverse or sick (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Musafar, 1996; Myers, 1992; Pitts, 2003)

The role of pain in body marking may also be more ambivalent. Paul Sweetman (1999) pointed out that many of the people in his research did not focus on the pain of the experience, but rather saw it as something to be endured to achieve their

ends. Likewise, in 'self-injury' the individual is not always present within their pain or directly experiencing a relationship with it during their act (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Favazza, 1996; Miller, 1994; Strong, 2000). However, regardless of the immediate experience of the pain itself, the healing process has been noted as significant across the range of body marking practices, and symbolic wounding and healing may be a transformative process (Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Strong, 2000; Sweetman, 1999).

> The period following self-injury[/body marking] may, for some people provide their only opportunity to experience physical caring and comfort. Whether or not there is physical pain, the person feels they have been through something and so now 'deserve' some special caring.
>
> (Babiker & Arnold, 1997: 78)

In marking the body, and through the healing process, a bodily sensation is evoked which is linked to a translation of experience into a permanent image or mark of articulation. While the marks associated with 'self-injury' are commonly stigmatised, their embodiment for the individual may not necessarily be that different from those body-self changes which result from other 'modifications' (chapter five). Body marking

> can act as a powerful memotic device, connecting the tattooee or piercee with their past, in part through the permanency of the mark thus acquired, but *also* as a consequence of the invasive nature of the process itself. .... The process can also lead to significant changes in the body modifiers' understanding and experience of the (embodied) self.
>
> (Sweetman, 1999:174)

These symbolic aspects of physical transformation were at the heart of Mary's tattooing and piercing following the break up of her marriage.

> It was like a physical representation of the fact that I had changed. [....] It was completely conscious (K: aha), an absolutely conscious desire for an expression almost. Like how else do people - ? I have - I suppose it's an awful thing to say - but I often look at people that I

> call like the 'Marks and Spencers' people [....] like some of my school friends would be very conservative and they've gone through marriage break-ups and that, and they still look the very same, and I can't understand that! I keep saying to them, 'Did you not feel like changing, completely?' Like this big change had happened and, 'Did you not feel like looking different as well? As well as this big change that had happened mentally, to actually look different as well?' And they don't seem to have any desire to do that. I do, you know (K: mm), as I say it would always be [a need to change]- if I've cut my hair, sometimes painting a room, I think this even painting over the week end is probably because I'm waiting for the results of the college interviews I did [smiles], so it's an outward expression again.

The difficulty of articulating the experience, meaning and symbolism of pain is not only evident in the way corporeal strategies are used to mark out emotional struggles, but also in linguistic terms. For example, Lucinda (above), was not alone in struggling to articulate the experience of pain and how for her it transgressed the binaries normally associated with it. In Victoria Pitts's research, one of her respondents tried to communicate the impossibility of explaining the experience to her. He said, "I could dance it better, I could paint it better, than just trying to explain what the experience is like" (2003: 103), (see also, Myers, 1992; Sweetman, 1999). Pain is an embodied experience which links the physical, social, emotional and symbolic aspects of personhood in an experience which defies simplistic articulation or explanation, particularly in language or text. "Pain destroys language. .... it resists becoming an object of language" (Fuentes, 1995: 12). Pain is "anti-language" an experience which "deconstructs our world", "shatters the self" and renders "all meaning meaningless" (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 210).

Simon Williams & Gillian Bendelow argue this problem of articulation is precisely the reason, that the work of artists such as Jo Spence and Frida Khalo is so powerful in evoking the experiences of pain that cannot be captured in language. "Khalo is able to express and impart a life of passion and pain through her own body" (1998: 203). Likewise, "Spence's frank photographs concerning her bold

struggle with cancer vividly illustrate the experience of 'fragmentation' and the battle against reification which encounters with biomedicine and the ravages of the 'diseased' body bring in their wake" (1998: 204). Pain, is a complex human experience that is not easily translated into linguistic forms. Images[15] are one of the means by which pain - physical/emotional - can be expressed and conveyed in material form, both privately as individual self-expression[16], or publicly as an art form.

> Pain may also, however, signal something creative, not only in the sense of childbirth but also in terms of physical, emotional, artistic and spiritual achievements, or it may serve as a much needed catalyst for important changes, *using* pain rather than becoming passive victims of it.
>
> (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 163)

Over the last few decades performance artist have increasingly worked specifically with the interconnections between embodiment and symbolism through pain and wounding the body. Artists such as Ron Athy - who is gay, HIV +, and "a former heroin addict" (Hewitt, 1997: 107; Pitts, 2003) Kathy Acker (Frank, 1991) and Gina Payne (Hewitt, 1997; O'Dell, 1998) have made use of their abject embodiment as well as the symbolism of blood and pain to embody and communicate political messages through the medium of their own bodies.

> The self-injuring performance artist uses gesture instead of language to convey as message. The message of the performance artists is directed to society at large. Gina Payne draws her own blood in the hopes of breaking through the social anesthetization of her audiences, and pushing them to think about the violence contained

[15] In order to avoid solely privileging visual forms of knowledge and experience it is also important to recognise some of the none visual non-linguistic means of communication. Music for example is often used as a form of communication and is particularly evocative in terms of convey experiences of emotional pain.

[16] Indeed, the transformative potential of creative acts that originate from embodied pain/experience is intrinsic to the purposes and methodologies of practices such as art therapy (see, for example, Hogan, 1997).

> in everyday imagery that numbed them in the fist place.
>
> (Hewitt, 1997: 105)

Social, individual and emotional transformation are the intended outcome of these performances. Kim Hewitt argues that these acts are at once transgressive, spiritual and socially confronting events, "self-mutilation is a transgressive performance and act of rebellion against modern social norms of body and self because purposefully maiming, defiling and defacing the human body is a profanation of humanistic values" (1997: 106).

Acts of body marking, be they construed as 'self-injury' 'body modification' or 'art', share many features, not just in terms of the experiences of blood, pain and gender but also the social symbolism and possibilities for transformation which they embody. Working with the body in this way, as an emotive, social, symbolic as well as subjective entity, which bridges both the public and the private realms is intrinsically connected with what it means to be embodied. Here, the embodied sociological method and the practices of marking the body share a transformative potential in terms of the social norms and binaries that they critique and transgress, as well as being fundamentally located within an experience of embodiment. Their transformative aims and potentials are intrinsic to their intersubjective symbolism and communication. Finally, if pain destroys meaning, then a corporeal remnant or representation of pain may be very powerful indeed. Scars, cuts, tattoos, brands and piecing powerfully evoke what it is to be embodied, and the struggles to negotiate a self within normative social hierarchies.

> The piercing of the skin; the flow of blood and the infliction of pain; the healing of the wound; and the visible trace of this process of penetration and closure. In their capacity to enact the interiorising of exteriority the exteriorising of interiority - and to *fix* this mediation in the form of corporeal transformation - these are symbolic practices of great power, permitting a rich and complex mediation on issues of agency, autonomy and control.
>
> (Benson, 2000: 245)

Conclusion:

Blood, pain and gender and their embodiment of corporeal, emotive and social symbolism in practices which mark the body, transgress the binary categorisations of body marking which emanate from the perspective of the disembodied, objectifying gaze. In this context body marking practices challenge the normative, linear constructions within which the 'western' cultures orders emotion, body, self /other and society. The marked body physically articulates a moment where a non-linguistic symbolic representation is fixed into bodily meaning and an embodied self.

A position of embodiment, rather than a binary objectification or a reading of the bodies of 'others', transforms the way in which we make knowledge and relate to experience. The binary of gender, notions of agency and mutilation, the fixing and reading of the bodies of others, as well as the embodied aspects of marking the flesh can all be refigured. This has implications for an embodied sociology as "one that, healthy or sick, happy or sad, epic or tragic, is never simply *about* bodies, but emerges instead *from* bodies and their praxical engagement with a social world of hope and despair" (1998: 204). In this way Williams and Bendelow describe performance art – not unlike body marking - as a process which may offer a crucial experience of embodiment/knowledge.

> Art, in its manifold forms, ... constitutes a key site of (embodied) 'resistance' to prevailing modes of discourse with their 'normalising' assumptions. In these and many other respects, the boundaries between art and social theory, science and morality, begin to blur if not collapse, thereby opening up new spaces and possibilities of 'becoming' (other). Indeed it is this emphasis on 'embodied praxis' (i.e. performance art) and 'visual narratives' (i.e. autobiographical art) that, we, have argued, provides an important counterweight to the predominantly textual forms of representation within sociology to-date. Perhaps most radically of all, art, in its manifold forms, opens up wider possibilities for a critical celebration of embodied *sensuality* - one in which reason is no longer prioritised over emotion, and new ways of 'being', 'seeing' and relating to the world .... can freely evolve.
>
> (Williams & Bendelow, 1998: 205-6)

An embodied position transforms the position and structures of knowledge making processes, merging sociological and art practices. In doing so it also transforms understandings of body marking and connects with it as a process of being and becoming. In this context I will finish with a poem in which the embodied self is iterated through blood and pain in contrast to the cognitive transcendence and abstraction captured in Descarte's "cogito ergo sum".[17]

A Life in the Day of Normality.

Just a normal day:
the moon sinks
and the sun rises,
I cut through the surface of my flesh
and blood flows
a horizon on my skin.

Another set of hours
bloodied tissues
flushed quietly away.
Sore flesh chafes
against the uniform
of a normal day.
And I am friends with the pain
of my scabbing wounds.

A life in the day
of normality
smile, speak, sleep,
Cut. Bleed. Feel.
You will never hurt,
or hurt me,
how I hurt myself

Another day

Blood
Flowing

I cut

I bleed

I Am.

[17] Cited in, for example, Crossley (2001).

8. A Day in the Life:

'Fictional' Ethnographies of a Dublin Tattoo Convention.

Introduction.

This final chapter shares many of the aims and intentions of the one which preceded it, but uses an entirely different means to achieve these ends. I have worked the position of embodiment which incorporates a methodology, theory, ethic and experience into a representational strategy which is most befitting to an "embodied tale" (Smith, 2002; Sparkes, 2003). This chapter also replaces the conventional concluding section which draws together and closes the issues addressed, the meaning and purpose of them, and indeed the thesis itself. Here, I aim to re-connect with body marking in a way which reflects the complexity of the experiences themselves, as well as the ethical and theoretical imperatives of engaging with them, in a holistic manner which avoids premature foreclosure. In this way the imperatives to analytic tidiness, dualistic categorisation and the reformulating and fixing of experience are replaced with an open, fictional and messy text. I have written the experiences of a diverse range of women into a series of ethnographic fictions which are interlinked through the very specific setting of The Third Annual Dublin Tattoo Convention[1]. The tattoo convention itself is 'real' in that it exists in the time and place described, and indeed some of the events also took place as narrated here. However, I have used this setting not simply as a convenient means of creating a shared environment in which to connect the women, but rather to highlight the diversity of lives and experiences that converge in such a place. This is intended to problematise simplistic readings of the environment, its participants, as well as the

[1] The women whose lives are re-articulated here include; friends, co-workers and colleagues, clients of social services providers as well as participants in the 2001 convention and similar events. As well as these personal experiences, these pieces are also influenced to some degree by some of the survivors and self-help/support testimonies by women who 'self-injure' (Pembroke, 1996; SASH newsletter; http:// survive.org.uk/selfharm.html) None of the women, as they are constructed here, would be easily recognisable to anyone but myself; I have fictionalised enough of their immediate biography for the person who appears on these pages to be entirely distinct from the individuals I have encountered. However, the themes of their original stories remain true - or at least to the way in which I understood and interpreted them. Finally, I hope that if self-recognition was to occur, then it would arise in a context which is generative and empathic.

'meanings' of body marking that often result from more conventional ethnographic (or even interaction-based) to work which I have made extensive critical reference throughout this project. Thus, the purpose of this piece is not simply to provide an 'insight' into the lives and experiences of 'others' for an outside audience, but rather to facilitate openness, connection and empathy. In this way I share Lisa Tillman-Healy's (1996, above) intention that working in this way may be construed as a means of engagement which facilitates comfort and support as well as increased understanding, and even perhaps the possibility of transformation and change.

Because of my intentions for this piece, the writing strategies I adopt, the experiences I convey, and my relationship with both, I am unavoidably entangled within these stories. The separation of author and text is relinquished and I am present in all of these 'fictions' as author, subject and sociologist. This "messy text" (Denzin, 1997; Smith, 2002) which crosses the borders of fact and fiction, truth and knowledge, research and experience not only transforms the relationship between author and text, but also shifts the border between reader and text. "Active readership" (Sparkes, 2003: 69) is invited, not only in terms of drawing the reader into feeling responses, but also through provoking these responses precisely as the means of connecting with, and making sense of, the stories. Pertinent silences, gaps and spaces in the narrative enable the reader to draw connections and to make meanings within the text, opening up multiple possible interpretations of it. There is no single 'truth' or 'meaning' of these stories, and I relinquish the position of the directive author. The reading is subjective, it is related to the reader's relationship with the issues themselves as well as their responses to my preceding formulations of them.

In places, the key characters are narrated through the position of another person, a companion or a 'detached' observer. This strategy is intended to further highlight the ways in which the articulation and making of meaning from what is both seen and unseen is contentious, context-dependent, and enmeshed within subjectivity and projection which can never be ultimately validated as finite or objective truth. Finally, my presence as ethnographer is conspicuous and apparently disconnected

from my environment, subject to the gaze of the reader and the characters around me. I reposition myself in this way in order to highlight, and to some extent rework, the traditional direction of the ethnographer's knowing gaze.

Overall, then, these stories are an attempt to textually engage an embodied position in representing and understanding issues of gender and body marking. The purpose is generative, intending to open up possibilities of knowledge and transformation rather than to close them down. It is a gesture that is intended to unsettle the normativity of our roles as reader, author and participants, to enable us to connect with experience, and to leave us with thinking and feeling questions.

The Third Annual Dublin Tattoo Convention:
Leopardstown Racecourse, November 21st – 23rd 2003.

Pauline.

It's one of those mornings that still has the power to take her by surprise, it catches her off guard and throws her back into the sensations of her first lonely and confused week in Dublin, some fifteen years ago now. That week, after she had literally left everything and everyone she knew across the other side of the world, and tried to start over again. Those days when she was looking for something, without even knowing exactly what it was, but sure if only she tried hard enough 'it' would surface and meet her half way. Those Sundays while she was still staying in the hostel, insomniac for weeks and weeks until she finally got her flat, and when she spent hours walking the city streets learning each twist and turn, each short cut, each house, street, or building, famous for who lived - or died - there. How silent Dublin was on those chilly spring mornings, the only evidence of any human life formed in the shapes of the homeless men and women, damp and groggy in doorways, and the bewildered tourists desperately seeking distraction from the hushed chaos, ruined plans and abandoned day ahead of them. Now, Dublin Sunday mornings are also populated by recent immigrants, who work the hours that the privileged sleep, or still

unaccustomed to the full extent of what Pauline has come to think of as 'the national day of hangover'.

There is always so much sky in Dublin, especially on these fresh cloudless mornings when the sun scours the city clean with it's piercing light. So much so that despite the greasy news papers, spatters of vomit, and broken glass that litter the Sunday morning pavements, and the odour of stale alcohol competing with the low-tide stench of the Liffey, the city still feels breathtakingly fresh and beautiful. And, today, even though it is November rather than March, Pauline is transported back to those early days, with sunlight so intense it cut into her eyes, and she would squint into the silent hours feeling as if she was coming down even though she had been sober for months by then.

She climbs into her car and turns the ignition, eighteen years old and still starts first time, she smiles, drops it into gear and pulls out. This morning, for once, she has not been jammed in by her neighbours' cars. When she first bought her house here - for a sum which twelve years on wouldn't even get you a parking space - no-one on this street had a car at all, and if they had it would have been stolen or set fire to. Now, the streets are lined with 01 and 02 registration cars, and the houses are owned mostly by optimistic and childless couples who would have grown up recoiling at the thought of living even temporarily in Dublin's North inner-city. She crosses the Liffey on the new James Joyce bridge. As she waits at the lights she stares at the partially restored Georgian terrace in front of her. The building is shielded with a façade which both hides the construction work and announces the impending opening of the James Joyce Museum in honour of the pending centenary of Bloomsday. A flame of anger catches in her stomach. Even though it is some time since she first read of the suspicions about Joyce having an incestuous relationship with his daughter, her sense of outrage is still raw. The way that *his* reputation as a cultural icon and his honour must be protected regardless of what he did, and with no consideration of the impact his actions and their concealment had upon his victim. *She* can be simply stuffed away in some institution and written off as insane. Just

clear away any shameful human debris, and protect men from the blame and consequences of their actions.

Pauline's teeth are clenched and her knuckles white with the force with which she grips the steering wheel, her eyes fixed at the building in front of her. Then a car behind her beeps and she realises the lights have turned green. She switches her focus to the present and pulls away, the flame of rage damped for now, but not extinguished.

She takes the back roads behind the Guinness brewery, through Rialto and Dolphins Barn and turns onto the canal, watching the scenery shifting with the ever-increasing privilege as she drives through Dublin 6 towards Ballsbridge. Once on the N11 the traffic has picked up, and she concentrates on the cars weaving around her until she arrives at Leapordstown. The racecourse seemed to her a particularly peculiar choice of venue for the convention, but it certainly has its advantages. The sweeping dive past the old manor house - now offices for rent - and the airiness of the green surrounds of the suburbs has made it feel a bit like a week-end in the country. Even so she is tired and will be glad when it is over. The long days which merge into the seemingly endless nights become particularly intense in the windowless arena, packed with so many people high on blood, pain or alcohol. But at least today is the last day and it will be over, and she has done reasonable enough business and met a few interesting people.

She has two appointments today, the first a slightly annoying middle-aged biker type she is half hoping wont show up. Sometimes she feels distinctly uncomfortable tattooing men; the blurring of the boundaries of their bodies and the intensity of their reaction can lead her to experience the encounter as quite threatening or disturbing to her groundedness. Sometimes she thinks that men act in particular ways in order to maintain some kind of power, in case they become disarmed by the fact of being hurt by, and being vulnerable to, a woman's hand. Almost like an act of re-creation or re-

birth takes place that threatens to shatter, for a moment, the taken for granted hierarchy of authority and bodies.

She pulls into her parking space and shivers, maybe she is just being over sensitive, and she chides herself for her ability to read a sex war into absolutely everything around her. She clicks off the ignition. The movement of her wrist tugs at the sleeve of her jacket and the tattoo on her forearm peeks out from under it's hem. Her first tattoo, inscribed when she was seventeen - more than half her life ago now - and living in Wellington with her boyfriend of the time. That had been the beginning of all kinds of things, including her freedom from the four-and-a-half years that had felt like an eternity in the children's home. She runs her fingers over the tattoo, if she concentrates she can still just about feel the scar that it covers. The scar from when she had tried to kill herself, after her brother and his friends .... she still cannot form the words even to herself, in the privacy of her own mind. The scar that she had worn with shame and anger for five years, and then when she finally began to feel free of the control forced over her life she had had it covered with a tattoo. Her boyfriend, at that time, was half Maori, half pakeha, although at that point in his life he thought no more beyond the poor suburb in which he lived or the music he played with his friends. Yet by the time they parted company, less than a year later, he had immersed himself entirely into his Maori culture and was already wearing a full Moko.

Her own tattoo, which had been designed and inscribed by his cousin was based to some degree on traditional Maori design, but not so much as to be problematic on the arm of an entirely (as far as she knew) pakeha woman. But, importantly, still significant enough for her to feel that she could belong to - or become - something other than her history had made her.

As she steps out of the car, her mind wanders back to the day ahead of her, and the second appointment she has. The young woman, with sad eyes, who has been quietly and solitarily wandering around for the whole weekend. She has come to Pauline's booth many times, leafing though her folders, quietly watching her at work, and yet it

was not until yesterday evening that she finally began to negotiate a tattoo for herself. She obviously had a good memory and a pretty artistic eye, and she had drawn out a very interesting and workable adaptation of one of Pauline's colour designs, which she was to have as a band around her right arm. She had said very little, and yet somehow Pauline felt a particular and yet hard to define warmth towards her, almost maternal. She had the sense that this was something of importance to this woman, not just a decoration or an (anti?) fashion statement, but something in which she had a lot invested.

She steps out of the car and pauses. Without thinking she cradles her forearm for a moment and takes a deep breath, holding her wrist over her heart. She exhales and straightens her posture, picks up her bag and walks into the convention arena. Instantly she is absorbed into the music, cigarette smoke and the buzzing of electronic tattoo needles.

Siobhan & Niamh.

Siobhan looks anxiously around her. This is not quite what she was expecting, and she scans Niamh's face for equal signs of disappointment. Niamh is wriggling out of her coat despite the fact it is not very warm and that all she has on underneath is a sleeveless and backless halter-neck dress. The dress of course was picked to display her tattoos to full advantage, which have progressed in the space of less than twelve months from a single emblem on the back of her neck to full sleeves down each arm, a full back piece and a design across the upper part of her chest. Siobhan always experiences a mixture of jealousy and fear when she looks at what Niamh has had done to her body.

Her jealously is perhaps more to do with the fact that Niamh's boyfriend both adores and encourages her tattoos and treats her like she is some kind of ornate and exotic goddess. Although Siobhan could see that same beauty clear as daylight when Niamh was still in her grungy purple sweaters and jeans. That jealousy is something that she finds herself throwing back at Niamh, in a small, spiky ball of resentment, any time

Niamh gently teases her about her unwillingness to get any more than the two small tattoos she has hidden on her body.

Then there is the fear. When she looks at Niamh and how much she has changed in such a small space of time. It's only a year and a half since they left school, where they had both been un-cool and unpopular, Niamh the more so, subject to constant teasing about her weight and the size of her breasts. And now, and especially since she had been going out with Tom - who claims to be ten but Siobhan often thinks probably closer to twenty years her senior - she has morphed into a tattooed and sparsely clad, often aggressively self-confident stereotype of 'girl power'. Siobhan can't help worrying about her. Nor is she entirely convinced that beneath the new tough exterior and sexually confident and experienced persona that it is not just the same old unconfident and self-hating Niamh more convincingly disguised under a thicker camouflage. The same Niamh who would look at the curves and rolls of her body and cry bitterly, spending hours fantasising about the surgical remedies in which she would indulge if only she had the money, and lamenting the possibility of ever being loved or desired.

Niamh has stuffed her coat into her bag, and is tugging her dress into place. She looks up at Siobhan, who is still a couple of inches taller than her despite the spike heels, and strides down the steps.

The setting is industrial. Concrete floors with some kind of rubber looking covering, and a low ceiling with pipes and girders exposed, from which flaking paint reveals dents of rust and dirt. In places pairs of television sets cluster around the beams where anxious punters would normally watch their money trotting away upon badly chosen horses. To the left of a flight of open concrete steps that has been cordoned off with tape stands the bar: the only vaguely attractive and very out of place feature in the building. The bar is made of wood which has been painted a kind of night sky turquoise and has a matching backdrop to it which houses two large shiny mirrors. Above the glass the wood rises to pointed apex which houses a nautical style clock.

The bar and the semi-circle it occupies looks like it would more rightly belong in a small rural hotel rather than in the cold harsh expanse of the racecourse. In front of the bar an open space has been filled with mismatched tables and chairs, cluttered with empty bottles, pint glasses and over flowing ash-trays. It's only mid afternoon and so there are still plenty of vacant chairs, and most of the tables have only pairs of people sat at them. At one table towards the far end of the room, where a security man stands guarding an exit to the track itself a woman sits alone. She[2] is bent over an A4 note pad writing intermittently but furiously, pausing every now and then to drink from a bottle of water or to spend a few minutes gazing around her surroundings. She is wearing a long black skirt, and a cropped fur lined nineteen-sixties style jacket. Her hair is put up in two knots like cat ears on her head, and even from a distance a glint of silver in her ears and nose is apparent. At her feet lies a small over stuffed black back-pack, and two discarded crutches decorated with purple fur.

At a table near-by, a group of three women have spread themselves out, they are distinctive by their appearance and the confident way in which they occupy the space around them. They are chatting animatedly using broad gestures and laughing with open mouths and bodies rocking. Two of the women have long, wide hair extensions; one in a black leather mini skirt and 'cyber punk' boots has electric blue streaking the fine black dreadlocks which are lifted into a high pony tail sprouting from the top of her head. She has creases around her mouth and her eyes which remain even after her smile has disappeared, and in places her eye-liner has begun to seep into them. In contrast to her hair she wears a semi transparent pink, mesh top and over it a black cut down top not much bigger than a bra. Close up the tattoos on her arms and legs would be partially visible, but she wears them with an unselfconscious manner un-needful of showing them off. To her right is her companion who also has hair extensions, but this time in blond and red, and worn loosely down her back. The third woman at the table has short spiky hair streaked with bright pink. She wears a ring in her bottom lip and her nose, as well as a stud in her tongue. She has a tight faded

[2] This is me.

black long sleeved t-shirt slashed in places and held together with safety pins. She has a thick metal belt around her waist over a fishtail skirt that rises at the front to reveal mesh tights and chunky boots.

Siobhan realises she has been staring at these women with a kind of awe, they look so confident so sophisticated in a 'fuck you' kind of way, she feels a longing to be part of that group. But there is also something else, she can't take her eyes off the woman with the short pink hair; her face, the curves of her body, the way that she moves, and how her nose crinkles when she laughs. Siobhan feels something knot in her stomach and a warmth spread on her skin. She pulls her attention away, shocked and ashamed. She presses the nails of her fingers of her left hand into the palm of her right almost puncturing the skin in four neat crescent moons. She glances anxiously at Niamh to see if she has noticed. Niamh, however, has finished surveying the scene in front of them and is marching through the chairs and tables towards a booth selling body jewellery. Siobhan trots after her, and as she passes the table where the women sit she can't help glancing back at them. Three men have arrived at the table and the women's attention is diverted to them. They seem bland in comparison, like a different species, or an ineffective prototype to their exotic looking companions. Like many of the other men in the arena they all have shaven heads, loose jeans and tight t-shirts revealing varying degrees of rotundness in the stomach, and tribal style tattoos on their arms.

Niamh peers into the glass display cabinets and the treasures they hold. She is not actually that interested in belly button rings or tongue studs, since she has no particular desire to have anything more than her ears pierced and then only the twice that she has already. She does, however, need to ground herself. This place is not what she was expecting. She has imagined something glossy, all black and red with lots of glamorously outrageous looking people, and neatly separated shop-like booths, a bit like some of the alternative shopping malls in Madrid. Instead she finds herself in a dirty warehouse building, with rows of tattoo stalls built together out of blue plasterboard like a shanty town in a cold grey tundra. Everyone here, apart from

those women at the table - who on close inspection appeared to be quite old and who Niamh subsequently couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for - looked incredibly ordinary. In fact this could just be the kind of crowd you would find in a regular Dublin pub any night of the week. The only slight difference is in the number of tattooed arms, but if everyone put on their coats they would just be your ordinary, boring, everyday people.

Niamh can't help but be disappointed, and somewhere in the back of her mind she thinks again about moving to London. If only Tom would, but he has lived there before and has no intention of leaving Dublin again. She turns around and looks at Siobhan and can't help feeling a bit disappointed with her as well. She is dressed unexceptionally in grey combats, and a white short sleeved tight t-shirt worn over a long sleeved lilac one. Niamh gets frustrated with her as well sometimes, the way that she remains so conservative despite everything and especially since she, Niamh, has really found herself. Siobhan does have her tongue and eyebrow pierced and two tattoos but they are so rarely visible they are almost not worth having in Niamh's mind. And Siobhan has such a good body too, she is tall and thin and could look really amazing if she only put a bit of effort into it, and would have no trouble getting herself a boyfriend. Maybe even one of Tom's mates, although she has to agree some of them do seem a bit old. Siobhan continues, however, to wear trousers and long sleeves all year round, day and night, and acts all weird around men when they are out. Then Niamh feels guilty, she does love Siobhan, she really is her best and truest friend, and really those irritations are nothing compared to the bond that there is between them. And Siobhan has always been there for her, however bad she felt or ugly she seemed to herself Siobhan never did anything but love and support her. It's not that she doesn't accept her, she just wants to *help* her, to make the best of herself, just to wear something sleeveless and a bit low in the front once in a while wouldn't kill her for gods-sake!

Suitably rallied by her mental critique, Niamh turns to Siobhan, "C'mon lets go and have a look at some of the tattooists at work" she says, "I'm dying to see if any of

them are any good!" As they swing around to walk back across the seating area, a man climbs onto the makeshift stage by the D.J. box, and announces an immanent performance by "the most tattooed man in the world". Niamh and Siobhan look at each other and without speaking agree to stay and watch. They pull up two chairs and sit together just to the left of the woman with the note pad, who rolls up the wad of paper and stuffs it into her bag, takes out a small digital camera and angles herself in the same direction as the two friends towards the stage.

Catherine.

Catherine looks at her watch again, he's even later than her which is unusual. She leans further into the pillar and glances around the room. She feels very self-conscious standing alone in a room full of people who seem to be spending a lot of time just looking at each other. But there is something very particular about the way they look. It's not just people checking each other out (and the state of a lot of them who would even want to!) Nor is it quite the same as the incredulous looks people used to give her a few years a go when she had been into the Goth thing and hung out with her teenage gang on the steps of the Central Bank. No, this is a more measured look, a bit like that way people observe sacred artefacts, or the two-thousand-year-old bog man preserved in the National Museum. A gaze which is at the same time curios and reverent, appreciative but not objectifying. Not that anyone would look at her these days. Her rebellion is long passed and she dresses plainly in whatever is the most comfortable version of the latest fashion. Her once spiked and enviably naturally black hair hangs in waves to her shoulders, and she tucks one side behind her ear in a self-conscious gesture. She feels like she is the only person here on her own, and wishes Callum would hurry up and get here. This is not really her scene at all, and especially not that hideous 'act' they watched the previous night. Crazy White Sean or what ever his name was, 'sick bastard' would have been more suited as far as she is concerned. And while she would normally pride herself on being reasonably open-minded, some of the stuff he was doing really was beyond the limit. Some people had got physically sick. I mean hammering nails through your dick is

one thing, but cutting himself and rubbing his own shit into the bleeding wounds was just too much. Her stomach turns as she thinks about it. Callum had been working hard at maintaining his composure, but she saw him pale and wince a number of times, in fact at one stage he looked positively green. Anyway, afterwards, when they had gone back into to town for a drink in Bruxelles he admitted that it upset him. Actually it upset both of them and they talked it over for a long time before they managed to rid themselves of the visceral residue that clung around them.

Now that she thinks about it, earlier the previous day, and before she had fully taken in who he was, she had heard him talking to a woman with a tape recorder. He had been making some big statement about his performance and the pain of humanity or some such like. What was it he said? She thinks hard and surprises herself with how clearly she can remember what his words[3]:

"One of the driving forces behind my show is to say something. Because I'm not happy with the way the planet is, and I mean I think we could all live a lot nicer, a lot better! For instance it's the same in America as it is in Britain or in Ireland or wherever the hell we are, everybody's getting screwed by the government! There's fucking thousands and thousands who have worked and struggled their entire lives to make to make sure that the people who are in charge now have something to be in charge of! Or old people as well, and AIDS victims, and they've got these miraculous drugs but, 'Oh, we can't give it to you because it's so expensive.'

I think: manufacture all those drugs that are wonder drugs, give all these people their cures and then think of the productivity levels that you would have with functioning people! People don't have to worry, they're not in tears, they're not traumatised, they're living long and healthy lives, they've got a chance at it! Of course they're going to be productive! They're going to make more money, more revenue, more interests, more imagination, more inventions! You know everything's going to flourish, rather than 'NO! CAN'T HAVE ANY! GOTTA SUFFER! EVERBODY'S GOTTA SUFFER! GOTTA MAKE MONEY! Gotta make sure this,

[3] This is an extract from the conversation I recorded with CWS in 2001.

gotta make sure that', and it's like I'm not happy with that stuff, I'm just not happy with it. So I do my shows to shock the shit out of people, to make them wake-up and go, 'Wait a minute! this guy's doing something to make us think about it, and he's fucking doing it hard!' I mean society's driven me to the point where I've got to do *THIS* to get people to listen to me!"

Catherine frowns to herself, unconvinced. As far as she can see he's just attempting to use politics to justify sick, exhibitionist behaviours. And really, how many people here actually give a shit, or even think about any of that kind of thing anyway? It's all just mindless bad-taste as far as she can see.

Catherine swallows, she still feels a bit queasy from thinking about it, and looks at her watch again to distract herself. Only a couple of minutes have passed. She stands up straight, and swings her bag from her shoulder and takes out her cigarettes. She shakes the box, there's only a couple left, Callum really had better get here soon. She had thought about getting a beer, but there was mostly only men (and a few couples) around the bar and she was afraid one of them might try and chat her up if she sat down with a pint. She draws deeply on the cigarette and enjoys the feeling of the thick smoke filling her lungs, and exhales leaning back into the pillar focusing on the taste of the tobacco.

Callum wants to be here today so that he can enter in the competition. He plans to enter in the 'back-piece' category with his tattoo which she thinks of as very sixties psycadellic but which he insists is full of Native American symbolism and spirituality. Callum is normally pretty shy and mostly tends to avoid public attention but a couple of his mates talked him into entering. He had initially protested complaining that it was the tattooist not he who should be entered, which of course was impossible since the work had been done some years previously in the States. Finally, under pressure and with the promise of a few beers and a free lump of hash, from Mick and Pat respectively, he agreed.

Catherine can't imagine how the competition will work, perhaps the entrants, made up of all shapes, sizes and ages of men and women, will parade around on the stage with the relevant parts of their bodies exposed like some macabre beauty pageant. No, that can't be right after all Callum was told to be here this afternoon for the judging, and since the stage seems to be in frequent use through the day it must take place in private. How bizarre, all these bodies with their coloured flesh motifs competing against each other for some unfathomable status.

She's glad she never did anything like that herself, even though she does have to admit some tattoos are quite pretty. Mostly, though, when she thinks of tattoos she can't get the image of those ugly home made efforts out of her mind. And when she thinks of them, she remembers her old school friend Vicky. Vicky and those grey-blue mottos she inked up her arms, angry blotches that seeped under her skin and quickly lost their shape. Vicky had ended up in a mental hospital after her mum caught her one day with freshly cut wounds in her abdomen and chest, seeping like raw, red flags of warning. At the time Catherine had felt shocked and guilty, she had known about Vicky's behaviour for a long time and had never, until then, thought of it as bad or dangerous enough as to indicate insanity. In fact, she had never really known how to react, and so as much as possible she had just ignored it. Catherine's mind flicks from Vicky's cuts on her chest and stomach to Crazy White Sean the night before and she shudders.

She has smoked her cigarette down to the filter. She drops it and grinds it into the floor under the heel of her boot. She takes the last one from the box and lights it.

Now that she thinks about it, it was around the time when Vicky got caught that she stopped hanging out at the Central Bank. And, in an unspoken agreement with her own mother had broken off contact with Vicky, after paying her a single compulsory visit in the hospital. She feels a mixture of guilt and relief. The last time she had seen Vicky she had been shuffling home from some workshop where she spent her days stuffing envelopes and staring at the walls with other mentally ill people. Her skin

was white and flaky and her eyes glazed with medication. It was like Vicky was gone and there was just this weird and ugly shell in her place. Catherine had said hello and hurried away: shocked and uncomfortable with Vicky's rapid transformation from a teenager with wild clothes and heavy make-up to a frumpy, senile old woman.

"Hey, hey!" Catherine jumps, someone is calling her. In an instant she is back in her present surroundings and Callum is beside her grinning broadly. Coming up behind him are Pat and Mick each with pints in hand already. "Its done", Callum says, looking pleased with himself. Catherine forms a question, but he continues before she utters it. "The judges got me on the way in, that's why we're so late. They'll make the decisions by six p.m. and let everyone know then." Catherine sighs inwardly, it's only half three now that means nearly another three hours of this place, she looks at Callum and smiles, maybe a pint would not be such a bad idea after all …..

Sarah

Sarah steps out of the shower and shivers. However long in advance she plugs in the three bar electric heater with its frayed cable stretched to the limit so that it reaches inside the bathroom door, it never fully overcomes the cold and damp. She pulls a towel around her and shivers again, her feet already growing cold and forming damp circles in the centre of the faded rag-rug on which she stands. She braces herself and then dries her back vigorously with the towel, scouring her cold skin. She dries her right arm and her legs from the knees down, and the outside of her thighs in the same rough manner. Then she stops. She pats the towel in between her thighs quickly and unwillingly. Her right arm however, she pats dry very carefully, almost afraid of the tender skin. Even now, after five days, and most of the physical intensity is gone, each time she looks at the coloured ink that will mark her skin for the rest of her life she feels a rush of pride and excitement. Very gently she makes sure it is completely dry. It is almost fully healed now, the waiting for the crisp, coloured scab to fall away, resisting the temptation to pick and pull at it has paid off and she has an almost perfect tattoo. She moves towards the shelf by the sink where she has kept the special

ointment which she has applied meticulously every day in kind of a religious devotion.

She lets her towel drop to the floor and steps on to it in an attempt to warm and dry her feet at the same time. The mist on the mirror above the sink is clearing, and despite herself she looks at her reflection in the damp glass. She cannot hold her own gaze or take in her green eyes, pale skin, and light brown hair for more than a few seconds. Her glance runs self-consciously down her body. Towards the top of he legs where her thighs begin to arch together, the smooth pale surface of her skin changes shape. The curve of flesh is interrupted by the years which she has marked in horizontal cuts, deep into her tissue, again and again. The re-opened and re-cut scars form ridges of keloid in shades of pink and white, a textured surface formed liked hardened streams of melted wax. Between her legs the ridges chaff, an often sore reminder of her route to finding that place of peace within herself.

It has been a long time since she has looked at herself at all, let alone with any detailed scrutiny, and she begins to feel panic rising in her abdomen. She raises her eyes and focuses again on the tattoo embracing her right arm, a powerful bracelet of colour and firm black lines. She dips her fingers into the pot of lotion, still open on the shelf beside the mirror, and gently massages the cool white substance into the newly coloured flesh. The surface is still a little raw in places where the scab has not entirely come away. She tenderly massages each section of the tattoo feeling at once able to care for this part of herself and to will its healing. Something rises in her chest, a panicky sensation that she cannot identify. She tries to focus on the feeling and to understand it, but cannot. Whatever it maybe, she realises, it *is* something to do with this careful act of nurturing which she has committed upon her own skin.

A tear forms in the corner of her eye and forces its way down on to her cheek.

Her fingers are still thickly coated with the lotion, its heavy consistency cloying like webs between her fingers. Tentatively, and with her eyes focused on her hand rather

than the image separated from herself in the mirror, she wipes the inside of her finger between the ridges on her right thigh. Her touch is glancing, the depth of the disgust and shame that the hard and bumpy skin signals to her is almost overpowering, but, she manages not to pull away. Very slowly she brings her fingertips into the glob of lotion on her leg, and, taking a deep breath begins to stroke the ointment into the scars and cuts.

Epilogue:

Not the final words.

It is the final days of writing my PhD. I sit at my computer in my small flat in a housing project in Dublin's south inner-city. The early morning sun is orange now and shines all too briefly through my windows, signalling autumn's immanent return. Like so many other days over the last four years I begin hopeful and yet anxious, unsure if I can communicate and do justice to the depth of the issues and experiences that have been at the heart of my work for so long now. To my left Princess, my feline companion, lies in a pool of sunlight, unmoved by my dilemma. She has also begun her day with her usual routine, jumping onto my lap to investigate my occupation and after some careful sniffing and well placed footsteps across the keyboard she decides, as always, that what I am doing merits no more interest than dozing in one of her favourite spots.

As I look back over the piles of pages, the black symbols printed on crisp, white sheets through which I represent the last four years of my work, I think about what I have learnt and what I have attempted to convey within this project.

I began my thesis by reflecting on the ways in which academic knowledge often fails to reflect our own experiences, and yet I have continually sought it out as a means of understanding and legitimating the knowledge I have gained through my own being in the world. Can I then, in these final moments, recognise myself in what I have written here, in the claims I have made, and the analytical maps and patterns I have drawn up?

Throughout my work I have struggled with a number of tensions: I have felt unable to work autoethnographically, and yet at the same time I argued that *all* research is to some extent autobiographical, and indeed, much of the motivation and experience I brought to this PhD were precisely so. I have struggled to convey the depths of the experiences of the women whose lives are represented here, and at the same time

protect them, and myself, from exposure, judgement or objectification. I have sought out means by which I can openly and honestly represent the ways in which I have been moved and affected by all of these individuals and their stories, and the layers of meaning within them, at the same time as presenting a purposeful knowledge framework. I care deeply about, and am unavoidably enmeshed within the politics, experiences and the knowledge at the heart of this thesis. As such I have tried to work in such as way as to evoke empathy and connection with these experiences, to stimulate reflection, and to impact upon the ways in which we think about and come to know one another. But have I achieved those ends, and what are the final implications of the strategies with which I have attempted to balance these concerns?

What I have produced in order to try and reconcile these questions, my agenda, and dilemmas is certainly a "messy text" (Denzin, 1997; Smith, 2002), which dips in and out of reflexive narrative, ethnographic fiction, sociopoetics, theory and analysis. And while this strategy comforts my ethical scruples regarding issues of representation and truth claims, I continue to worry whether this 'mess' adequately deals with and does justice to the experiences and the people that have been formative to my work. Yet it is not, and never has been my intention to uncover 'the truth' of the meaning or interpretation of these experiences. Rather, I have sought to relocate both the experiences of body marking, and the means by which we come to know, connect with, and understand them within a position of embodiment. From this position we lose the need for fixed answers, rigid categorisations and deterministic analysis and instead open ourselves up to affecting and potentially transformative connections with (ourselves and other) human beings and their experiences. As such, I sought to demonstrate that it is essential to move away from the imperatives to define and categorise human subjectivity and experience within rigid dualistic constructions which have little connection with lived subjectivity, and offer even less in terms of understanding or engaging with it in anything more than objectifying and/or pathologizing terms. As with the experiences of gender and disablement, discursive power needs to be wrestled from diagnostic, authoritarian and medicalised positions and relocated within an understanding that I have

suggested can best be described as embodied. This position, which is drawn together from a number of emergent strands from both within and outside the discipline of sociology, is not only ethically salient and affective in epistemological, empirical and representational terms, it also engenders meaningful and purposeful connections between knowledge and being in the world. It has been crucial to me that my academic work is not solely a theoretical project, but is also purposeful and generative at the experiential level, and the act of critiquing normative knowledge paradigms and replacing them with a position of embodiment has been integral to the harm reduction model of 'self-injury' that I have utilised in the training workshops which I facilitate, as well as forming a central theme of the 'survivors' movement (see, Babiker & Arnold, 1997; Pembroke, 1996; Strong, 2000). As such the position of embodiment - which I have worked through an ethic, method, theory and experience, and in doing so have also reconciled the three formative strands of my work - is both integrated within, and disseminated out from, my analysis.

Embodiment is not, then, merely a convenient metaphor or abstract theoretical conceptualisation within which to frame my research, but is rather, a lived means of knowing, experiencing and researching issues of body marking. It is a "radical empiricism" (Csordas, 1994: 10) that is always transforming and transformative. In this way I have not offered a final conclusive synopsis of my work, but a last textual moment of engagement, from the position of embodiment which has provided the enabling strategy of my work in theoretical, methodological, experiential and ethical terms. I hope that in doing so I have managed to present and evoke some of the complexity and possibilities which are integral to the lives and experiences I have discussed. I hope that my knowledge-making processes have been evident, so that my agenda and my goals are apparent and yet at the same time balanced with sufficient reflective gaps and spaces to facilitate responses to, and developments of, the questions and issues I raise. I hope that those questions, and particularly those regarding how we come to know and define ourselves and our experiences, as well as those of others, remain open and affective, lingering in the senses, connecting with and growing from the lives and experiences that I have wanted to touch you with.

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Appendix.

Research Participant Consent and Researcher Commitment forms:

Research Participant: Consent Form.

Name:

Address:

Date:

I _____ understand that the information that I have discussed today will be used in the PhD work of Kay Inckle. I also understand that other references to this material, in the form of seminars, talks, or essays, and writing for academic or public consumption may also incorporate this material.

I have discussed issues of confidentiality, and am satisfied with the degree of anonymity that will be provided.

Signed:

Date:

Kay Inckle
11, The Old Convent
Basin Lane
Dublin 8

Tel: 086 3288 523

incklek@tcd.ie or kinckle@yahoo.com

Researcher Commitment Form.

To:

Date:

I Kay Inckle give my commitment to maintaining your confidentiality to the degree that you have indicated is most beneficial to you. I also agree to provide you with copies of transcripts of my discussion with you, and, if you wish, to forward copies of material in which direct reference from your transcript is included. I also agree that if you have any concerns in relation to that material you have provided me with that I will make every effort to resolve such issues.

Signed:

Date:

Transcribing Conventions.

Loud.	CAPITALS
Quiet.	softly said words
Emphasis: word, words or part of.	underline underline
Pause.	..
Pause (indicating loner length).	……..
None decipherable words, (indicating number)	(3)
Gestures.	[makes fist]
Emotions.	[angry]
Words cut short.	wor-
Change of direction in thoughts	-
Broken words.	wor-ds
Interruptions.	//
Speaking together.	{together}
Quoting self or other.	"in quotation marks"
Names of people, places, businesses etc. removed ensure confidentiality.	E or S (any single letter except I)
Participants comments / amendments.	** **
Indicating editing has taken place in statements	[….]
Description of edit (for confidentiality)	[words excluded]