



Tattooed feminine bodies: Regulation, conformity, and resistance

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Abstract

Normative constructions of femininity in the UK are constructed around white, middle-class, and thin ideals for women (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016), serving to 'other' different productions of femininity. Tattooed women have historically been associated with working-class bodies. Class-based constructions shape the way that the tattooed body is read, with particular implications for how tattoos are seen as 'tasteful' and 'authentic' (DeMello, 2000). The intersection of tattooed bodies with factors such as class and gender serve as points of tension to unpack in regard to how women negotiate their feminine positions – tacky versus tasteful, common versus other, visible versus invisible.

Using an intersectionally informed qualitative approach, this thesis explores the production of discourses both within the media, and from interviews with tattooed women. In the media analysis, 35 articles were selected following a systematic search. Tattooed feminine bodies are represented in varying ways: as transformative objects, as cautionary tales, and also as a fashion trend or artistic object, accessible and appealing to middle-class women. The discourses (re)produced within the media articles are congruent with previous research, linking tattoos with issues of mental health and wellbeing (Roberts, 2012) and working-class constructions of tattooed women as unattractive (Swami & Furnham, 2007).

I interviewed fourteen tattooed women in total, using purposive sampling to speak to women from a variety of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities and employment positions. Discourse analysis (Parker, 1992) was drawn upon to explore how the women constituted themselves in talk, and what the function of these constructions were. Within the interviews, women simultaneously narrate tattoos as resistant objects that enable them to transgress ideals of the feminine body, and regulate the tattooed body through constructions of 'right' and 'wrong' ways to be tattooed. Women's accounts also

articulated how tattoos are embodied, and also drew on a sense of tattoos as inscribing meaning on the skin. In their accounts, their talk about the tattooed feminine body intersected with other accounts of the feminine, as 'mother', as relational being, as 'professional'. The analysis demonstrates the importance of exploring the multiplicities in women's positionings.

I conclude this thesis by considering the methodological and theoretical implications of the research. As a reflexive researcher, I have acknowledged how I as a tattooed woman, academic, researcher, and feminist have co-constructed the discourses produced and presented within the research. I argue that it is important to draw on reflexive accounts in feminist research, showing how the self has an impact on research (Wilkinson, 1988), allowing for further exploration of these positions. I also argue that this research contributes to how we understand gaze, regulation, and resistance. Tattooed bodies may subvert normative gendered expectations, but they also conform to and reinforce them in others, and are still positioned under the male gaze. The othering of tattooed women is done by reinforcing one's own position as a tattooed woman – regulating the body through the production of factors such as authenticity and taste. The thesis navigates the multiplicity of positionings for tattooed women, providing a point for future research to unpack.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The decision I made to conduct this research was informed by my own experiences as a tattooed woman, and recognising that my own positioning as a tattooed woman is contextually constituted and located in relation to my gender, age, class, and a multitude of other positionings. Whilst I have seen changing attitudes towards tattooed women in recent years (Meads & Nurse, 2013), I am aware that there are pervasive negative constructions of tattooed women that are perpetuated through societal discourses and practices (Swami & Furnham, 2007). My engagement with the tattooed feminine body is personal, political and academic, and in this thesis, I do not only consider how *other* women make sense of tattoos; I consider how I as researcher, academic, and tattooed woman, am intertwined with the work that I produce.

In 2005, I got my first tattoo as a present for my 18th birthday. It was something I had planned for months, and had designed myself, and it felt good being a bit rebellious by having it done. I was told frequently by friends, family and also strangers, that I was not the 'type' of woman who gets tattoos. The notion of a 'type' was produced as something negative, bound in societal expectations around the 'typical' life trajectory: career, heterosexual Western weddings, mothering, and associated ideals of 'good' femininity. Initially, I did not quite make full sense of these constructions, and how they functioned to regulate women's bodies: the tattoos that followed the first one remained on hidden locations of my body, only visible when I chose to make them so. It was not until 2011 when I got my first bigger, visible tattoo on my forearm that I noticed a significant shift in how people spoke to me and what they expected of me. A woman I sat next to on a train to Paris was visibly shocked that I could be working as a lecturer at a University, exclaiming to her husband how shocked she was that a University would allow 'that'. I felt myself located in this expression of surprise as a 'that', an object, an

instance of the 'type' of person who is tattooed. This was not an isolated incident. Since then, I have experienced people touching tattooed parts of my body without consent, have been followed around shopping centres and supermarkets by security staff, and have had numerous assumptions made about my sexuality and sexual practices, as though tattoos inherently suggested some type of social 'deviance', moral deficiency, or criminality (Atkins, 1998). I know that I am not alone in these experiences of how my body is 'read' by others. These kinds of experiences led me to want to understand better how other women make sense of their tattooed body, and of being tattooed.

Initially, I set out on this PhD journey expecting to capture celebratory accounts of the transgressive nature of tattoos, of their ability to enable women to resist the constraints of traditional feminine identities. But as the thesis has unfolded, I reflected on the accounts, realising that the way tattoos are constituted is much more nuanced and complex, depending on context and subjective positionings.

1.1 – Why research tattooed feminine bodies?

It is well documented that western women's sense of self is constructed in relation to 'The Gaze', and expectations for how femininities should be embodied, what is considered as ideal, and what is considered as 'other' (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016). In research, tattooed women are produced as resisting against normative constructions of femininity – being 'alternative' (Holland, 2004), but also serve to reinforce the kinds of femininities that are considered as 'ideal' (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004).

My research takes a feminist perspective (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995), using an intersectional lens (Shields, 2008) to explore how different intersections impact on how the women constitute themselves. Intersectionality puts the multiplicity of positionings at the forefront of the argument, allowing for the exploration of how

each of the intersecting positionings will have an effect on how women constitute their subjectivities, and how their accounts of their experiences are produced. In a field that is often dominated by white, middle class men, the experiences of women should also be given their own focus, especially as they differ so widely from that of men. Intersectionality is sensitive to the multiple ways that women's and men's tattooed bodies are constructed and produced in society, depending on other social positionings like class, race, sexuality, as well as others, and why it is important that we explore these variations in positionings. This research focuses specifically on the intersections of gender, class, and age, as these were produced strongly both within the academic and media literature (chapters 2 and 4), and within the interviews (chapters 5-8). I am aware that there are many more intersections that women experience, including race, (dis)ability, and sexual orientation, and they require further exploration outside of this piece of research.

The overarching question this research aims to address is concerned with exploring constructions of femininities in relation to tattooed women's subjective positionings. From this, I consider how women constitute themselves as tattooed subjects, how social discourses and practices surrounding tattooing and femininity are constructed in contemporary British culture, and what the implications of these constructions are for the way that women position themselves as tattooed feminine subjects.

1.2 – The chapters

In this thesis, I use an intersectionally-informed approach to explore: how tattooed women constitute their subjective positionings; what social discourses are (re)produced in their accounts, and to what effect; and what the implications are for women's positionings as tattooed subjects. A key aspect of the analysis is how women both conform to and resist normative constructions of femininity, and how

they negotiate this through their positionings. These regulative constructions and resistances to regulative constructions are constituted in relation to interweaving discourses of gender, class and embodiment. In particular I consider how women's use of concepts like taste and authenticity function to delineate 'good' femininity.

In chapter 2, a review of the literature on femininities and tattooed bodies is presented, paying specific attention to how tattooed women are positioned and produced within academic discourses. Within 'femininities', literature is presented that shows the positioning of femininity with Western society – as privileged in relation to social class, as constrained by 'choice' in respect to conformity or resistance to trends, and as monitored, as feminine bodies are placed under surveillance. In 'embodiment', I explore how gender is embodied, and explore the intersections of class and age in respect to being tattooed. Finally, in the 'social discourses' section, I consider the depiction of tattoos in media presentations. Previous research does not centre intersectional positions in making sense of women's subjectivities, but rather, discusses them without unpacking the importance of negotiating multiple positionings. I conclude this chapter by giving an overview of the theoretical framework that has informed the research, showing why the present research was needed. I explore the importance of the feminist perspective and the need for an intersectional lens (Shields, 2008) that centres intersectional positionings and unpacks how these are navigated, and detail how influential feminist theorists such as Butler (1990) and Skeggs (1997) informed this qualitative research.

In Chapter 3, I outline the methodological approach to the research. I explain the analytic framework for the research, and provide an account detailing the importance of reflexivity in this research. It is important to note that the importance of reflexivity – if myself in the research – is not limited to this chapter – I am embedded within the

chapters throughout, and provide a more detailed reflexive account in chapter 9. In this chapter, I outline the ethical concerns, and the process for conducting the interviews and subsequent analysis.

In chapter 4, I present an analysis of media constructions and representations of tattooed women in the UK. A systematic search of newspaper articles in the UK revealed 35 tattoo related articles. It is intended to be read in parallel with the academic literature, providing insight into the kinds of discursive constructions around women's tattoos that are in circulation in the UK context. Parker's (1992) discourse analysis was utilized here to explore how tattooed women were produced. This enabled access to the cultural milieu within which women's accounts of tattoos are produced, providing some 'sampling' of the kinds of representations women might draw on or resist when accounting for their own feminine bodies. Several discursive formations are identified in this media analysis: tattoos are described as transformative objects, as moral and cautionary tales, and as a fashion trend. I trace the operation of some of these discursive formations in subsequent chapters analyzing women's accounts of their tattoos.

In chapter 5, I explore how participants position themselves in relation to social norms and 'rules' about tattooed women. I explore some of the tensions that the women negotiate in their accounts, focusing specifically on the intersections of professionalism and femininity, age and femininity, and motherhood and femininity. Each of these positions women and tattoos in particular and problematic ways. I explore the tension between being a tattooed women and discourses of professionalism in the workplace, considering how women navigate the tensions between 'rules' and norms of the workplace, and conformity pressures around femininity and class. I consider how participants position themselves as tattooed women in relation to the intersections of gendered discourses of age. The

intersections of class (professionalism), age, and gender together function to produce regulative ideas about how women should *be* tattooed. These coalesce in the idea of 'right' and 'wrong' tattoo choices, which positions particular ways of performing tattooed femininity as appropriate or inappropriate.

This focus is extended in chapter 6, where intersections of age and class are explored more explicitly. The positioning of tattoos as 'artwork' positions them as desirable consumer objects, and functions to make them more appealing to middle-class people. Rather than being markers of 'commonness', tattoos are repositioned through this idea of 'tattoo art' as valuable consumer objects and potential status symbols. Through the deployment of a discourse of 'good taste', women are able to position themselves as 'not-chavvy', but as tasteful, skilled consumers. More specifically, the historic positioning of tattoos as working-class is both described and resisted through the notion of tattoo as art, and the tattoo is gentrified as a middle-class commodity.

Chapter 7 unpacks how women describe tattoo imagery itself, in ways that enable both conformity and resistance to dominant discourses of embodied femininity. Women's accounts are highly variable, particularly in relation to the way that they position 'feminine' tattoo imagery. This imagery in turn intersects with class based discourses, to produce tattoos as classed *and* gendered objects, that in turn position those who have tattoos in classed ways. The social positioning of tattoos as a working-class (or even 'chavvy') phenomenon is both articulated and resisted in women's accounts. Throughout this chapter, the key argument is that there is a multiplicity to feminine positionings, and it is the way that women navigate and negotiate these is underscored by a sense of conformity to or resistance against normative ideals.

A further important discursive formation relates to the way that women drew on an idea of 'meaningfulness' to justify their tattoos. In Chapter 8, the ways women described the shared social meaning of their tattoos, as symbols of their connection to others, expressing their sense of belonging and of bonding with family and friends is explored. In this sense, women describe their tattoos as meaningful symbols of belonging and community, positioning them as important markers of identity and connection, permanently inscribing their relationships and narratives of relationships onto their skin. The construction of meaning in women's talk about tattoos functions as a way of justifying authenticity and tasteful tattoos as the 'right' way to be a tattooed woman. The women use meaning to negotiate their positioning as authentic and good tattooed women.

In Chapter 9, I provide a reflexive account of the research, detailing how my own history, values and knowledge as a researcher / academic / woman / feminist have developed over the course of the research, drawing on Wilkinson (1988) in making sense of the importance of myself being embedded within the research.

The thesis concludes by arguing that the central thread that is produced across my analysis of all the complex tensions constructed by and through tattooed women, is a sense of how they navigate the regulative pressures around women's tattoos. I argue a reflexive stance and intersectional discursive lens enabled me to unpack the multiplicity of positionings that women (re)produce, where they simultaneously conform to and resist normative constructions of femininity. The regulative discourses they (re)produce and resist are inherently classed, with taste and authenticity providing markers for the embodiment of 'good' femininity. The methodological and theoretical arguments that are drawn together in this chapter provide a point of discussion for future feminist research to unpack in relation to classed feminine positionings.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Over the last decade, there has been a substantial rise in the popularity of tattooing in the UK, and a subsequent increase in tattooed female bodies (Proud, 2015). Despite this, research considering tattooed bodies is mostly focussed on men, exploring prison and gang tattoos (Phelan & Hunt, 1998), as well as motorcycle culture (Halnon & Cohen, 2006). This chapter will explore dominant normative constructions of femininity in literature, how these intersect with positions such as gender, class, and age, and how these intersections function to regulate tattooed women's subjectivities and how they narrate their experiences of being tattooed. I will focus on research that explores femininities and tattooed bodies, the ways that tattoos are embodied, and social discourses produced on tattooed women.

2.1 – Femininities

Dominant discourses of femininity regulate women, establishing expectation about how to dress, act, and behave (Lawler, 2005). Femininity is not a 'one size fits all' concept – there are many ways of embodying femininities. Approaching this from an intersectional perspective (Nash, 2008), I will argue that femininities connect and intertwine with multiple issues, such as class (Skeggs, 1997), conformity and resistance (Walter, 2010), and self-surveillance of the body (Grosz, 1994).

Class

Within UK culture, a class based construction of the ideal woman has been established over time. Women were viewed as submissive to men; domesticated and family orientated (Gorham, 1982); as well as gentle, innocent and virginal, in demeanour and appearance (Mezydlo & Betz, 1980). The construct of 'ideal' femininity in UK culture is based on the dominant representation of the middle class woman – a representation that centres on white privilege (Okolosié, 2014) and

lacks in diversity. Characterised by 'niceness', prettiness, delicacy and natural style, this ideal middle class feminine functions as a norm against which other forms of femininity are othered (Lawler, 2005). In this sense, dominant ideas about femininity are always-already classed; as Skeggs (1997, p.3) notes 'respectability has always been a marker and a burden of class, a standard to which to aspire'. This classed femininity is also imbued with a clear value judgement. Middle class femininity is positioned socially as desirable, whilst 'other' femininities are viewed more negatively. Their positioning outside the normative ideal also means that these Other femininities are often more visible and subject to particular forms of regulation. Practices of tattooing catalyse the operation of observation and regulation of the classed feminine body. Tattooing in itself subverts traditional, middle class notions of what it is to be feminine. Firstly, feminine beauty is viewed as pure and natural – by permanently inking the skin, the body is no longer pure (Kosut, 2000b). As Skeggs (1997) notes, 'the surface of their bodies is the site upon which distinctions are drawn' (page 84), suggesting that a tattoo visibly displays the class of the woman, which permanently resides them within a working-class boundary. This is important for how women position themselves as feminine subjects, by having to keep in mind how they might be perceived by others. Given that tattoos are both classed and visible, to be tattooed within this class context permanently positions the person who bears it as Other – it imbues their class location onto their body. For women this is particularly the case, as the tattooed body so entirely violates classed based norms of femininity. In this way, women's tattoos have been powerfully inscribed as gendered and classed objects, and have historically been associated with working class femininities (DeMello, 2000). Because the tattoo is a permanent body marking, that can be read as a class marker, the capacity of tattooed women to transcend class boundaries might be reduced. Indeed, this is one of the cautions

contained in social messages around tattooing – that it limits women, making social mobility more difficult (Walkerdine, 2003). Bourdieu (2005) argued that certain forms of social capital (i.e. clothing, taste, and material belongings) are symbolic of a particular social class. Whilst cultural capital can provide a sense of identity and positioning within a group, it is also a source of inequality, with access to social capital, and the 'right' kind of social capital limiting options. This functions as a kind of implicit knowledge, as well as a visible marker of class. As a form of social and material practice, tattoos communicate social and economic identities, potentially enabling the person's background, culture and history to be read by the observer. In addition to the classed construction of femininity, the feminine ideal also rests on a presumption of youth. Women's beauty is dependent on their ability to resist ageing. The fascination with youth in Western society is discussed by Wolf (1991), who notes how those who fall outside of the ideal beautiful, youthful female are rendered as invisible members of society. However, tattoos are pieces of artwork that age as we do, and in many senses, they do not necessarily age well. Therefore, the tattoo provides permanent evidence on the skin to show a woman's age; whilst cosmetic surgery can mask the signs of ageing like wrinkles, ageing ink cannot be so easily 'fixed' (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009).

Tattoos are therefore interestingly positioned in relation to ageing. If as Segal and Showalter (2014) suggests, ageing women become increasingly invisible in western culture, then tattoos potentially serve the function of making the ageing femininity *more visible*. From the above, it appears that there is a juxtaposition between being a highly visible, regulated body, whilst at the same time, being an invisible, 'other' member of society. This implies that anyone outside of the ideal essentially becomes an invisible member of society, under the multiple oppressions experienced by those without privilege (Nash, 2008). This makes it difficult to see outside of socially

constructed boundaries with regards to representations of femininities.

However, whilst the tattooed feminine body is positioned as working-class, they are not limited by class. In neoliberal times, tattoos (done 'properly') are also positioned as a consumer product; tattoos are not cheap, and when done 'tastefully', they become reconstituted as 'artwork' to invest in, resisting their previous class based positioning (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005), and making them accessible to and acceptable for the middle class. Recent shifts in the way that tattoos are described has repositioned them as a piece of art to value (Craighead, 2011), which opens up a discursive space in which some forms of tattoos (small, discreet, and delicate tattoos) can be re-constructed as consistent with white, middle-class femininity, as long as they conform to a 'right' way to be tattooed (Sturgis, 2014). Re-writing tattoos as 'artwork' to invest in rather than simply a 'tattoo' both resists the class based positioning as other (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005), and reinscribes it, by making certain kinds of tattoos accessible to and acceptable for middle class women. Drawing on Bourdieu, Almila, (2016) notes that the social practices around fashion enable access to social status, and function as one important basis for social comparison. For example, the small, dainty and more 'tasteful' tattoo preferred by many middle-class women enables the tattoo itself to have a certain amount of mobility, reinscribing it as something desirable – as something 'nice women do'. This also intensifies the possible positioning of larger, more visible and extensive tattoos as distasteful. However, the small and dainty tattoos is one element in the production of taste – within chapter 6 of this thesis, I explore the idea of tattoos as art, which positions the body as a kind of canvas, upon which 'tasteful' art is displayed. What must be acknowledged here are the differences in accounts of tattoos, and the ways in which gender and class intersect in the construction of these differences.

By exploring the intersections of class and gender, I aim to demonstrate how accounts of being a tattooed woman vary, and the implications of this for the subject positions available to women (Nash, 2008). I am interested in making sense of how tattooed women constitute their subjectivities in relation to these intersections; how they construct regulative practices around women's tattoos that entrenched classed accounts of 'good femininities'; and how they function to open up spaces of potential resistance. Tattoos enable a performance of an alternative form of femininity, enabling resistance to the dominant middle class and white construction of femininity. On the other hand, the 'delicate and small' tattoo demonstrates how the tattooed feminine can become reterritorialized by classed, gendered and raced constructions of womanhood. As tattoos become more mainstream and popular for women, and as the idea of the 'tasteful' and 'artistic' tattoo becomes more common, the tattoo becomes an object a woman can 'choose' to have, without necessarily violating dominant ideals of femininity. This 'choice' enables women to both resist and conform to ideal constructions of femininity through their tattoo practices.

Conformity and resistance

Walter (2010) suggests that a sense of choice is key to western women's experiences of femininity – they can choose to conform to or resist stereotypes of womanliness. This neoliberal construct is not a straightforward force for good, however. Whilst choice sounds like a positive construct, it is first always a constrained choice. In addition, as McRobbie (2009) has pointed out, choice itself has become a regulative construct. Women are not 'free to choose'. Rather they are compelled to choose, and tension lies in the ways that these choices are already constrained by socially imposed boundaries. Focus is given to the bodies of young women, sexualised in the male gaze (Grosz, 1994) – 'bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural and class

particularities' (p. 19). Therefore, the choices that women make are already restricted to what is acceptable, and oppressed within culturally restricted boundaries. Feminine styles of clothing and dress, for example, can entrench classed gender boundaries, with more subtle and sophisticated styles being associated with middle-class women (Kuleva, 2015). In reference to tattoos, the way that women adorn their bodies with tattoos enables conformity to or resistance against these boundaries.

Over the life course, a lot of focus is placed upon the female body (Chrisler et al, 2013; Owen & Spencer, 2013; Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013), causing stress and a lower level of body satisfaction. As it is younger women who have the vast majority of emphasis placed upon them, as women age, they become less visible within society (Wolf, 1991). By being less apparent in advertising and media, older women would seemingly have less to worry of the judgement of others, and may be able to find more satisfaction in themselves (Angelini et al, 2012). Tattoos on the body represent a rich and diverse cultural and social history of the wearer, and will differ from person to person. Age is an important factor in the consideration for women with tattoos, as age is criticized at both ends of the spectrum. To be younger and tattooed is to be reckless (Swami, 2012) and evokes connotations of a lack of thought for the future. Older tattooed women don't escape negative stereotypes either (Kang & Jones, 2007), refuting the adage of growing old gracefully, which is expected of ageing Western women (Baraitser, 2014). It would therefore appear that regardless of age, women may still be criticised for their choices to either conform to or resist traditional femininities in being tattooed.

Tattooed bodies are able to traverse both conformity and resistance to trends simultaneously. Though perceptions towards tattoos have shifted over the past decade, tattoos on women specifically can be described as creating cultural 'noise' (Hebdige, 1979) as they fall

outside of expected traditional femininity. Subcultural markers like dress, as well as the presence and form of tattoos, function to mark differences in taste and identity (Entwistle, 2015), but also a sense of belonging and identity. Whilst these differences resist normative positionings on one hand, marking the person out as a member of a particular subculture, as 'other', there are also regulative practices *within* subcultures that shape how these practices of adornment are performed. This has implications for the ways people take up subject positions in relation to mainstream and subcultural regulative norms. Through the agentic tattooed body, oppressive societal norms are resisted, whilst also enabling cultural belonging. This resistance against traditional femininity enables women to gain control over their bodies (Roberts, 2012), whilst at the same time, enables the younger generation of women to enter into the fashionable trend of feminine themed tattoos (Young, 2001). Women who reject dominant notions of femininity by getting tattoos, further reinforce what is considered as alternative femininity, as well as ideal femininity. Their position reinforces and reproduces the established traditional notions of femininity (Atkinson, 2002; Day, 2010).

The placement of a tattoo is important to consider with regards to conformity or resistance to normative discourses of femininity. One of the most cited reasons for tattoo removal is the lack of relation to identity (Armstrong et al, 1996; Armstrong et al., 2008; Burris & Kim, 2007), supported by research exploring bodily narratives (Kosut, 2000a), which focuses on communication and self-identity. At various points, women may want to feel more aligned towards one group, and their identities can develop. This contests the association that tattoos appear on the already anti-social, deviant body (Cardasis, Huth-Bocks, & Silk, 2008; Nowosielski et al, 2012; Way, 2013), and demonstrates the value that tattoos hold to the wearer at any given time. In relation to placement, a sense of identity can be seen and interpreted by others, depending on the location on the

body. The placement of a tattoo provides societal perceptions of class (Blanchard, 1991), sexuality (Pitts, 2003), and mental health (Birmingham, Mason, & Grubin, 1999) amongst other things, showing the difference that placement and visibility can make. In this regard, this will have an impact on how femininities are read by others, as those who have hidden tattoos are less likely to experience negativity (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004), or be subjected to stereotypical constructions of resisting femininity. With research focussing more on the visibility of a tattoo, rather than specifically considering the bodily placement of a tattoo, there is a failure to acknowledge how the body intersects with the performance of femininity, and how tattoos fit within this.

Tattooed women's practices of resistance and conformity are constituted within social, cultural, and historical contexts that produce normative values around 'good' and 'bad' tattoos. In neoliberal culture, women navigate complex classed and gendered constructions of the feminine tattooed body, to enable ways of doing tattooing that are read either as successful or as failed. Fashion trends, ideas about 'art' and consumption, and discourses of ageing shape the way that tattoos are performed by the wearer and are read by the observer. This constructs what is read as acceptable, and what is Other. Whilst the tattooed feminine body in many senses resists ideal middle-class constructions of femininity through its visible subversion of the clean, pure feminine body, it becomes reinscribed in other regulative practices around age, consumption, ideals of 'taste' and associated ideas about right and wrong ways to be tattooed.

Self-surveillance

The feminine body is subject to constant observation and regulation. Through objectification of the body, women learn how they are represented and constructed (Aubrey, 2006). As their sense of self is constituted in relation to this sense of the gaze, women acquire

practices of self-surveillance (Foucault, 1976). In a world full of rules and norms, tattoos have the potential to act as a means of resisting regulation, and as a way of protesting against the consumerist culture of today (Langman, 2008). Fashion, dress and style, for example, are read as representations of identity, communicating values and morals, with luxury consumer goods giving the indication of a 'better' person, with those fashionably dressed bodies conforming to societal ideals of appropriateness (Harris, 2016). Women are held accountable for their bodies in terms of what is deemed as acceptable in appearance and behaviour and hegemonic notions of femininity cannot be projected onto women's bodies that have been adorned with tattoos (Thomas, 2012). Therefore, these women in some senses remove themselves from the objectifying gaze, enabling them to construct their own reflexive and embodied constructions of femininity, and perform their femininities. Women's bodies are under constant surveillance, from both the self and others, and are often treated as a site of control and containment (Grosz, 1994). Through becoming tattooed however, women are able to challenge the oppressions imposed upon the body –

'simultaneously occupying competing spaces of object, subject and process; practices of the commodification of the body and embodied subversion become complex sites for the re/negotiation of femininities and constructed feminine beauty standards' (Craighead, 2011, p. 45)

In this regard, tattoos enable the performance of multiple femininities, constructing the female body in a way that is personal and meaningful to that individual, and opening an agentic space in which they can do so.

The difference in perception of public and private tattoos is also made clear in research on tattoo removal. Such work suggests that people are more likely to regret tattoos places on more visible body parts, such as the arms and shoulders, (Aslam & Owen, 2013). For this

reason, first time tattoo receivers are often advised to have the tattoo placed on body parts that are less visible (Graves, 2000), to avoid embarrassment, regret, or reprimands from employers. This suggests that there is a tension between the visible versus the hidden when considering how the body is read by others.

Through consideration for the various factors that can impact on the body, the ways in which femininities are monitored is clear. Surveillance from the self and from others makes women take account of their bodies, how they are represented and how they represent themselves, and also highlights an integral gap in the research that does not take into account the importance of differences in tattoos, be it visible, private, small or large. Permanence must be recognised as a key facet for the wearer, in the ink they have, as well as how this interweaves with their own self-concept.

Overall, it is clear through the exploration of this research where femininity is positioned within Western society – as privileged, constrained and monitored. Though it is situated as such, we must acknowledge emerging alternative femininities, through recognition for how diverse femininities can be, dependent on a vast web of factors within each individual's experiences. The relevance of why it is important to gain an understanding of the experiences of women with tattoos must be acknowledged. There are complexities in conforming to and resisting normative constructions of femininities. The vast majority of research that is available on tattoos concerns mostly men (Cronin, 2001; Goldstein, 2007; Guéguen, 2012), or at least, does not fully understand the implications that gender has with regards to body adornment (Horne et al, 2007; Manuel & Sheehan, 2007), let alone other factors such as sexuality and race.

2.2 – Embodiment

By exploring the research on tattoos as an embodied practice, I will show how intersectionality informs how gender is represented, and

how it is often excluded from tattoo research. Femininities as an embodied practice are socially and culturally constrained. In considering the performance of fashion, there is a complex construction of 'other' versus 'common' in relation to the tattooed body, which is underpinned by classed discourses of taste. I also explore how tattoos effect the embodiment of gender, how fashions play a part, and also, what the function of narratives are as displayed on the tattooed body.

Tattoos as an embodied practice

Ideal femininity is a heteronormative construction, which positions women to behave, act and be in particular ways. The body represents a site for which value, conformity, and status (class) are produced (Munt, 2000). Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir, Butler points out that it is not biologically determined - 'one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one' (Butler, 1990, p. 11). Societal norms are based on heterosexual men and women, and the ways that heterosexual norms inform our thoughts, actions and behaviours. Femininity is not something we are born with, nor is it something we passively acquire through socialisation. Rather it is performed – we position ourselves as feminine in relation to dominant constructions of gender, and perform femininity in social and embodied practices. In other words, we *do* gender. Femininity is constituted in relation to its binary opposite, masculinity, and these are established through language and constructed through social practices. Society deems what is considered a feminine or masculine trait, which shifts depending on time, context and culture. Young, (2005) comments on how our sense of being gendered is constituted through social and embodied practices like feminine comportment. In this sense, the body performs gender, but is constrained within boundaries that our culture co/constructs as feminine. Young (2001) also described how the practices of body modification challenge oppressive hegemonic boundaries, especially with regards to beauty, gender and sexuality.

In this respect, those who are considered as 'other' are able to re/construct their own narrative bodies, taking agency for them and forming their own self identities. Tattoos provide the wearer with the ability to challenge representations of women and femininities (Longhurst, 1995), resisting regulative constructions.

In considering the complexities of women's experiences, Grosz (1994) states that we must regard the body to make sense of both their psychological and social reality. She focuses on the surface of our bodies as a link between the inner goings on of the body, and the external representation of the body, with the skin being an outlet to this. Rather than seeing a tattoo as a representation of the self, through marking the skin in this way, intersections with gender and class occur, adding to the complex layers of experiences. The surface of the skin can hold a vast amount of non-verbal information, and provide a detailed picture of a person. As well as signifying identities, it can also provide a visual representation for non-verbal communication (Patterson & Schroeder, 2010). Firstly, tattoos represent the body's vulnerability. By getting tattooed, people are able to express who they are, display what they have overcome, and state how they see themselves within their social worlds (Anderson, 2014). Secondly, tattoos portray the passage through life. In this sense, tattoos serve as a physical marker of the entrance into adulthood (Kang & Jones, 2007). On a different level, tattoos can also signify links with spirituality (Mun, Janigo, & Johnson, 2012), displaying our moral character. Finally, the skin enables storytelling, gives meaning and providing permanence in a world that changes rapidly.

Patterson and Schroeder (2010) emphasise the communicative potential of the body, and emphasise how the storytelling narrative plays into a discursive imperative for tattoos to be *authentic* to the wearer. This enables the construction of an authentic (and by extension *inauthentic*) tattooed self, with associations of 'goodness',

personal integrity and morality (Schwarz, 2016). By self-positioning as 'authentically tattooed', as well as the tattoo being produced as art, an individual might avert the more negative associations of tattooing.

The context in which tattoos are displayed also plays a part in how they are embodied. Within social spaces where tattooed bodies are considered 'normal', such as tattoo studios and tattoo conventions, they more likely to be on display (Fenske, 2007), especially if they are felt to hold good communicative value, with respect to its meaning, design, and the artist. Building upon this, Modesti (2008) notes how tattoo studios are a dedicated space for agency; being tattooed is an exercise in control, over both pain and body, and includes the performances of being tattooed, and taking part in the act of tattooing. What this research highlights is the importance of space and context for those with tattoos, and being able to effectively understand surrounding spaces as to the extent that tattoos can be a visible embodied practice. Outside of these spaces, tattooed bodies are viewed differently, and therefore means the feminine tattooed body as an embodied practice is expressed differently.

Tattoos enable an understanding of the body, and provide a sense of control over the body in resistance to the hegemonic oppressive nature that society imposes. The ways in which gender is embodied will differ in accordance to numerous intersectional factors, as well as the space and context within which the tattooed body is located. However, tattoos do not always provide the wearer with a means for expressing their identities; tattoos are also a consumer product, and in essence, can be seen as a fashion accessory.

Fashion

Fashion trends play a key role in the popularity of tattoos and body modifications, just as they do with clothing and hairstyles. Entwistle (2015) suggested that fashionable appearance was used as a means of marking out class distinctions – 'good taste' being positioned as

more socially desirable. In 'Distinction', Bourdieu (1984) suggested that defining 'good taste' was the preserve of those with social capital, who were able to establish their particular aesthetic as hegemonic. In relation to tattoos, as we will see later in the thesis, the middle class feminine ethic of 'distinction' suggests that smaller, dainty and alluring tattoos are the hallmark of 'good taste'. These are positioned as more desirable consumer objects. Larger and more visible tattoos become positioned as other through these material-discursive practices. This sense of 'good taste' in tattoos and the attendant classed associations are further entrenched by the contemporary positioning of tattoos as 'artwork', rather than simply as a tattoo. As constructions and representations of what it means to be feminine changes, so does the acceptability of tattoos on women (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005), and the design of the tattoos that they have. A review conducted of existing tattoo literature (Lane, 2014) highlighted the need for a focus on the social processes within which tattoos are produced. For example, in the context of fashion, tattoos are used as a commodity within the beauty industry (Goulding et al, 2004) as a way of enhancing looks and sexual allure. The commodification of the body through the consumption of tattoos suggests the wearer to be something of a 'skilful consumer' (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016), someone who is able to make the 'right' choices about their bodies and how they display them. McRobbie (2004) notes how female consumer culture has 'come to occupy a key site in regard to normative female identity' (p. 105), whereby feminine social spaces are defined by status and body image. In this regard, for women to perform 'good' femininity, they should consume fashionable trends, making them relevant, and *visible*. To conform to fashionable trends as part of our consumer oriented society is to further emphasise the class-based difference in the construction of 'good' femininity. However, the way that tattoos are positioned in Western culture serves to consolidate middle-class,

white femininity as the only femininity worth noting (Schippers, 2007), rather than taking account of race, sexuality and class. Tattooed bodies with more extensive coverage, or on women of colour, are not given the same consideration as those with small, feminine artwork, and are constituted as 'other'. At the same time, not all women want to conform to trends in embodying femininities, and express themselves in their own ways.

Though there is a plethora of research stating how conformity to fashion trends leads to social acceptance (Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, & Welch, 1992; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Park & Yang, 2010), there is little research that considers the impact of fashion trends on tattoos. Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson (2005) explored meanings of the fashion tattoo, finding that tattoos are 'comparable to other consumption practices where people seek to beautify their bodies according to current fashion norms' (p. 172). Alongside this, the increase in effective laser surgery has reduced the stigma of getting inked (Sweetman, 1999), meaning people can more readily remove ink that they regret. An example of trends and subsequent regret comes from the so called 'tramp stamp' – a tattoo on the lower back of a woman's body – once popular, and now seen as an emblem of promiscuity (Guéguen, 2012). Rather than this being considered a fashion, the placement of this tattoo on the body has dictated a wider negative perception of the body it is inked upon (Langman, 2008; Nowosielski et al., 2012; Swami & Furnham, 2007). The lack of research that focuses on tattoo placement leaves negative associations to be constructed for the body, once fashion trends have passed.

However, what happens when that tattoo is no longer felt to portray part of that person's identity? As tattoos are seen as a method of communication, what is displayed publicly and what is withheld as private tells us a lot about these women as a society (Doss & Hubbard, 2009), though this can change according to the spaces they

are displayed within. Recent research on women has highlighted how they can become lost behind culturally idealised images of themselves (Rasmusson, 2011), namely sexualised and submissive. This produces a complex tension in the position of the tattooed feminine body. On the one hand, it is constituted as a positive 'other', resistant to normative and idealised constructions of the feminine body. On the other hand, it is positioned as 'common', cheapened by its adornment; the tattooed body is conflated with problematic constructions of working class femininity, and is read as promiscuous, unattractive, overconsuming alcohol and other substances (Swami & Furnham, 2007) as well as less caring and less trustworthy (Zestcott et al, 2017). The tattooed feminine body is 'tasteless', different from the aesthetic values of middle class femininities (Szeman, Blacker, & Sully, 2017). The way that tattoos intersect with gender and class will produce different visibilities of identity, dependent on which category may be overarching at any given time (Staunaes, 2003). With consideration for fashion and consumer culture in tattooed women, we can see how the embodiment of gender, and of class, is embedded within societal trends. Class is embodied, and therefore read, through the stylised self (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016), which is shaped by consumption. Tattoos have been increasing in popularity for some time, and even within this time, trends in tattoo design and placement have come and gone. At the same time, tattoos are more than just a fashion accessory, embodying strength, and resisting hegemonic oppressions. To consider tattoos with respect to fashion is not dismissing them as sole consumerist products, but recognizes their diverse nature.

Narratives

As well as facilitating self-expression, tattoos are communicative in their own right. Tattoos can offer a method of communication for those who cannot easily put their emotions into words (Kosut, 2000a), rendering the body as articulate. Tattoos are a snapshot of

a person's life at a particular time (Fisher, 2002), creating visual memories that detail a particular person, time or event. Fisher (2002) also notes how tattoos have been described as a totem, symbolizing something of importance to the individual, and even 'patching up' metaphorical holes that person may feel with regards to their self-concept. Through tattoos, the embodied practice of gender can be narrated. In communicating the self, however, the body is open to interpretation by others.

One of the most current trends in tattoo literature focuses on mutilation and self-harm (Vine, 2014). Here again, representations are in tension: on the one hand, tattoos are seen as a form of self-expression and healing, enabling the embodiment of wellbeing; on the other hand they are seen as a form of self-harm, as the embodiment of poor mental health. Implications are made that troubled childhoods lead to attainment of tattoos (Karacaoglan, 2012), and that by continuing in getting tattooed, the person is committing an act of harm against the body. These claims are made more explicit in respect of women's bodies. Studies (Hewitt, 1997; Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 1992) have concluded that tattooed women must be maladjusted, providing the motivation to mutilate the body as such. Though in contrast to this, Claes, Vandereycken, and Vertommen (2005) discuss how tattoos can reflect self-care, providing protection for the wearer through expression. Cited from a feminist perspective to body modification, Jeffreys' (2000) paper discussed the practice of tattooing on women as akin to self-harm, insinuating a link between body art and poor mental health, only seeing tattoos as a result of overarching male dominance. In her view, it is societal oppressions that cause this attack on the body, and whilst considering how tattoos enable reclamation of the body, she doesn't expand on this as a positive notion. Though the article has been contested (Riley, 2002; Van Lenning, 2002), what has been key to take away from it is the pervasive link that body modifications

do have with acts of self-harm, despite this not always being the case.

One way that tattoo placement has been explored is through the reclamation of the feminine body following a mastectomy. The symbolic role that tattoos can take when covering the scars has been documented (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Moorhead, 2015), constituting the body as 'brave', and helping in the repair of damaged femininities. Breast cancer survivors express how their breasts are a visual reminder of sexual expression, gender, and their identities (Manderson & Stirling, 2007), but rather than embodying memories of surgery and illness through scars, tattoos enable reclamation of femininities and more positive embodiment. During 2013, a movement named P.INK ('personal ink') emerged, encapsulating support for women with breast cancer, but more specifically, celebrated women who adorned their mastectomy scars with tattoos. The movement was focussed on raising money for women who had survived breast cancer, and helped them to reclaim their bodies back from the illness by decorating their chests with large, bright, and feminine tattoos (Mapes, 2013). The positioning of tattoos as giving back a sense of 'lost femininity' is problematic in itself, suggesting that women are not 'complete' without this femininity being made explicit on the skin. This positioning is explored in more detail in chapter 4, through the exploration of tattoos as transformative being a dominant discourse in the media. This being said, cancer and other such illnesses are not the only reason why women may get a tattoo in terms of providing a narrative of their lives. It is often the case that women will get a tattoo to signify an important event, a milestone (Kang & Jones, 2007), or other such memories which they wish to hold on to and display. When it comes to traumatic situations such as cancer, tattoos can be used to reclaim the body back from the ravages of illness, and individuals are able to embody their identities through the marking, and embodying the meaning of the

tattoo (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). At the same time however, it must be recognised that this perpetuates the notion that 'good' tattoos are authentic, and can be found on the authentic body.

In addition to the embodiment of self-identity, tattoos also aid in the identification of group membership and affiliation (Kang & Jones, 2007). Though often cast as 'other' and as 'outsider' to social norms, being tattooed also provides belonging to the group of 'tattooed', as opposed to 'non-tattooed'. When taking age into account, adolescence and the need for social acceptance has been mocked in relation to tattooing (Litt, 1994) – 'group affiliation may also change with the passage of time. Not so, the identifying tattoo!' (p. 198). This refers back to Western ideals of age appropriate behaviour and the issue with permanence, through assuming that young individuals are incapable of making responsible choices. However, these tattoo choices could lead to more than simply getting a tattoo. Within the tattoo community, collectors are seen as more authentic individuals (Irwin, 2003), as their skin is able to tell people of their lengthy journey with tattooing. They see themselves as 'being tattooed', rather than having a tattoo (Vail, 1999), collecting ink as the narratives for their experiences. DeMello (2000) draws upon the notion of community in her consideration of tattoo culture, viewing them as resisting the middle-class appropriation of tattoos as status symbols, and suggesting that they are more about a sense of identity and belonging. Whilst this sense of belonging to a community enables resistance to middle-class norms, it also produces a sense of hierarchy and new regulative norms (MacCormack, 2006), by "othering" those who are not 'authentically' tattooed. In chapter 5 I show how multiple intersecting identities function to normalise some tattoo practices, whilst othering those that do not conform to regulated ideals of tattoos.

Consequently, whilst tattoos enable an effective form of visual, non-verbal communication that allows women to express who they are,

they can also be misunderstood, leading to tattoos and the wearer being perceived more negatively than intended. However, the consideration for narrative opens up a tattoo community, providing a sense of belonging for tattooed women. Narratives are an important consideration for the lived experiences of tattooed women, as everyone will have a different story to tell, which will have a different effect on who they are, and how this intersects with the embodiment of gender.

Overall, this shows the need for understanding the societal and cultural constraints on the embodiment of femininities, as well as the effect of the intersectional layers to this regulation. With a tattooed feminine body, taking account of trends helps to reiterate the permanence of tattoos, and how these snapshots of time ultimately have an effect on the wearer, how they represent themselves, and how others form representations of them. The commodified body and the construction of the authentic tattooed self are set in opposition to phenomena like trends, tackiness, and bad taste in tattoos. These discursive formations interweave with constructs of class, as I will argue in chapter 7.

2.3 – Social Discourses

In order to fully understand representations of tattooed women, attention must be given to the social discourses that construct, reconstruct and co-construct them. Here, I give consideration to the tattooed feminine body, encompassing issues of professionalism, mental health, and media portrayals, with regards to the function these damaging discourses have in relation to tattooed bodies.

Professionalism

The construction of professionalism is bound by class-based regulations, and serves to highlight the tensions between the public and the private body. Whilst there are numerous definitions that try to encapsulate what being 'professional' stands for, there is consensus that the professional has a position of privilege, a high

level of education and training, and is successful (Evetts, 2003). There is a distinct lack of research that considers tattooed people in professional workplaces, due to the pervasive stigma for the kinds of people who get tattoos (Mcleod & Walinga, 2014). There is a consensus amongst research that does consider tattoos and employment more generally, which suggests that tattooed individuals are more likely to be rated as less hireable (Timming, Nickson, Re, & Perrett, 2017). Of interest within this research is how the employability improves when the tattooed individual is not customer facing – they are not as *visible*. Due to the customer facing nature of some jobs, negativity towards tattoos is high within the service sector (Timming, 2015), with the misconceptions being driven by what managers feel their customers want. The main issue that underlies negative perceptions of tattoos is more related to the location that the tattoos can be found on the body; the more visible the tattoos are, the higher the likelihood of prejudice (Timming, 2015). It is not just a case of how visible the tattoos of a woman are, but also, how visible she is as an employee. Recent research into class positionings in service work found that there are some employers who expect their employees to adapt their behaviour and style to suit the company and their tastes, in order for them to exceed the expectations of their consumers (Dion & Borraz, 2017). In this instance, the employees are regulated in a way that specifically intersects with class. As we present ourselves and are judged through the notion 'we are what we wear' (Karl, Hall, & Peluchette, 2013), visible tattoos give the impression of an 'untidy, unsavoury and repugnant' person (Kelly, 2014). What this suggests is that tattoos do not fit into professional discourses in relation to employment. Often, they are associated with being unemployed, or being on benefits (Heywood et al., 2012; Skeggs, 1997).

Now that figures show almost one fifth of all people in the UK have a tattoo (Fisher, 2014), anyone who has a customer-facing job is likely

to come into contact with tattooed individuals. Because of the high popularity of tattoos, it seems logical to assume that the issue that employers have is not with the tattoos themselves, but with the tattoos that are on display. The bias that is held towards those with visible tattoos (Bekhor, Bekhor, & Gandrabur, 1995) appears to stem from outdated discourses as to what is regarded as professional. This is supported by the fact that a number of big companies have rather ambiguous policies when it comes to tattoos, such as John Lewis, HMV and Starbucks (Kelly, 2014), causing issues with employees and feeding into negative discourses relating to good service and customer expectations. This has even extended to the point of airbrushing out the tattoos of a blogger for a high-end supermarket (Anderson, 2013), as they felt that this would not be something that the majority of their customers would like to see, or have their supermarket be associated with. Tattoos are often cited as less desirable in the employment sector (Doss & Hubbard, 2009), adding to the already damaging discourses and regulating norms within employment. Though Skeggs (1997) doesn't explicitly discuss tattoos with regards to the working-class body, it can be inferred that tattoos add another layer that contributes to the working class construction (Thomas & Ahmed, 2008), and the display of tattoos renders the body visible, and therefore visibly seen as working-class.

Recent news articles have highlighted some of these negative perceptions (Conway, 2013), giving more thought for what employers think their customers want, or more specifically, what they don't want to see. A controversial news article (Newton, 2014) stated how a young teacher's tattooed body negatively impacted her profession, creating national debate due to the perceived negative exposure to the children in her class. With reference to such employment that contains a larger social element, there are seen to be professional standards that should be met (Williams, Thomas, & Christensen, 2014), and tattoos are not considered professional.

Despite the fact that a tattoo has no impact on the level of intelligence of an individual, within professional discourse it is assumed that a 'right-minded' person would not dare to cover their professional bodies with such markings (Thomson, 1996).

With regards to issues surrounding professionalism, through a lack of clarity in rules and policy, and with reinforcement from societal stereotypes, those with visible tattoos are classed as unprofessional. The perception of professionalism is intertwined with the construction of the classed body, and how what is visible or not visible adds yet another layer to this. The tensions between what is publicly visible and what is hidden does not stop at the level of the tattoo, but also impacts the person as an employee. Emphasis is placed on the professional, career-oriented individual, taking unnecessary concern for the ways in which a tattooed body may have a bad effect on that.

Mental health

Whilst tattoos may be largely excluded from professional discourse, they are most certainly prevalent within mental health discourses. In Western cultures, tattooing practices can largely be found in what has been described as 'mutilation discourse' – describing the ways in which 'nonmainstream' body modifications are pathologized (Pitts, 1999). Through the use of authoritative discourse taken by mental health practitioners, tattooed bodies are reconstructed as abnormal (Sullivan, 2009). The importance of individual experience is lost through these practitioners not seeing how their own position as normal is reaffirmed through their relations with those who are tattooed, positioning them as 'other'. Perceiving the tattoo as a self-inflicted wound leads to a failure in recognising the complexities of narratives, identities, and the embodiment of femininities for these women (Craighead, 2011). As Pitts (2003) points out; 'because the body is a site of investment, control, and cultural production, anomalous bodies can be understood as threatening to the social order' (pg.41). With tattooed female bodies being positioned as an

anomaly, the discourses that they are formed within can be problematic.

This problematic discourse tends to centre on pathologizing women with tattoos (Birmingham, Mason, & Grubin, 1999; Romans et al, 1998; Swami & Furnham, 2007; Thompson, 2015), relating the process of tattooing to self-harm and poor mental health. Recent media articles (Styles, 2014; Watson, 2014) intend on providing shock value in their content, attempting to make assumptions about the individual's poor state of mind and how that related to being tattooed. Whilst the media attempt to gain attention for negative portrayals of tattoos as body modification, other modifications, such as cosmetic surgery, are reacted upon less negatively. Reactions to media stories on cosmetic surgery are met much more openly than tattoos, suggesting that tattoos are not seen as aiding in self-esteem like surgery. Pitts (1999) has extensively explored perceptions of body modifications, and how the media frames such modifications as mutilation of the body, something which is outside of normative constructions of feminine appearance. The pathologization of such modifications only serves to harm the practice, and supports the negative stereotype as to the types of people perceived to adorn their bodies as such. As Pitts (2003) states, for those women who choose to tattoo or modify their bodies, despite the marginalised position that discourses place them in, they are questioning the hegemonic culture's control over their appearance, and are subsequently reconstructing discourses on the subject.

When considering the discourses of mental health and women with tattoos, there appears a tension between tattoos being the symbol of liberation against hegemonic norms of society, versus pathology. Body modification can be a form of resistance against normative constructions of what women's wellbeing should look like. It suggests that there must be an issue that may have led to the decision to become tattooed – norms that are written into social discourses about

how women should 'be' leads to a need to justify choices on body modifications.

Media

As celebrity culture makes an impact in influencing fashions, the ways that tattoos are produced within these social spaces is important (Irwin, 2003; Kosut, 2006a; Woodstock, 2014). Pop stars such as Tulisa Contostavlos and Cheryl Cole both have numerous visible tattoos, and both went from being portrayed as public sweethearts to being in positions of scrutiny, thanks to their working-class background being associated to their tattoos (Gould, 2011). While the link back to their working-class roots helps them to identify with the public, it also serves to play into discourses about the types of things working class women do, including getting tattooed. Through Cheryl and Tulisa displaying their tattoos, and being open about their working-class backgrounds, it allows other women to feel comfortable about their own backgrounds, meaning that something often regarded as negative, becomes something to be proud of through celebrity endorsement. However, at the same time, they perpetuate the same constructions produced about working-class women, which serves as a reminder of how middle class women should not be (Foster, 2015).

Similar to the celebrity culture above, a social movement that aims to celebrate alternative femininities has been challenging dominant discourses of femininity, enabling wider representation of female identities in the media spotlight. The 'Suicide Girl' – referring to the removal of the self from 'mainstream society', and linking to the term 'social suicide' (SuicideGirls, 2014) - models her 'alternative' body, which the website cites as its key feature. Within the context of what would be considered alternative femininities, negotiation occurs between resisting dominant notions of femininity (Holland, 2004) whilst at the same time being entangled within culturally defined issues of self, such as age. Youth for example, is favourable

regardless of alternative or traditional femininities (Wolf, 1991). Whilst some applaud the site for showcasing alternative representations of femininity (Magnet, 2007), diversifying from the oppressive, cosmetically enhanced women who dominate the porn industry, SuicideGirls builds upon the 'beautifully imperfect', and has previously been reviewed as a feminist website (Magnet, 2007). Whilst on one hand, the site exudes empowerment of women, on the other, it still subjects these women's bodies to the male gaze (Gill, 2008; Grosz, 1994), honing in on their sexual attractiveness, in a newer niche in the consumerist corner of porn. Whilst it may be enabling these women to celebrate their uniqueness, this is not the reasoning behind the website – it is a consumer based, pay per view service. Social media enables many young women to submit their own photos, without monetary cost, to SuicideGirls, under the gaze of all who have access. In this sense, these women are opening themselves up in other ways, perhaps less favourable.

The media has a big influence over the ways that we construct and reconstruct what we consider to be norms, and it is no different when it comes to tattooed women. Though they may not be represented in the mainstream media as an example of what we consider as beautiful, avenues have opened up in terms of a niche for alternative femininities to blossom, despite the tension between it being liberating, and also a new consumerist product. Within these depictions of alternative femininities, they still play into mainstream ideals of how to pose and how to act in order to play up to sexual gaze, therefore reinforcing discourses of sexual attraction in mainstream and alternative women.

Overall, through considering the ways that social discourses produce constructions of tattooed feminine bodies, it highlights the tensions in visibility of these bodies. There are classed undertones that intersect with gender, wellbeing, age, and professionalism amongst other things, and these classed elements support the regulative

nature of the workplace, of women's wellbeing, and also of how women's bodies are produced within the media. Whilst body modifications may be positioned as a form of resistance against normative constructions of femininity, as I argue in chapter 7, these resistant acts nonetheless incorporate elements of conformity to other regulative norms. This exposes how challenging it can be for the feminine body to avert the male gaze, or to avoid the pressures of neoliberal discourses of 'choice' and consumption. The discourses are fraught with tensions between conforming to and resisting normative femininities.

2.4 Theoretical perspectives

Following from considering the related literature, here, I present the theoretical perspectives that have informed my research approach. Each of the areas presented do not work as separate entities in exploring discourses of tattooed women, but rather, they work together in considering the discourses that are produced.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism refers to the ways that our realities are constituted through language, which produces how we understand it (Burr, 2015). Gergen (1985) discusses key principles in understanding social constructionism which are centred around production, construction, and negotiation. The world as we understand, and our sense of place in it, is produced through exchanges amongst people, and these exchanges are historically situated, producing and reproducing our understandings of the world (Burr, 1995). People's accounts and the meanings they give to events are socially, politically and spatially located, such that accounts of experiences are constituted differently from different positions, and consequently vary. The understandings that we have about different experiences are not permanent, or fixed – they will change depending on social processes such as communication, conflict, and negotiation (Burr, 1995). Finally, negotiated understandings are important in

how they intersect with other experiences that people have. Shotter & Gergen (1994) provides an important and well-rounded definition of social constructionism, highlighting the role that power has in the production of meaning, reflexivity in method, and the voice it gives to the construction of identities. In addition, one of Gergen's (1994) five basic assumptions for social constructionism is that 'terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are social artefacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people' (page 49). In this sense, my interviews with tattooed woman are considered as discursively constituted and contextually located. Women's positions vary, and this shapes the accounts they give. Their understandings of what it means to be a tattooed woman are constituted at the intersection of their social contexts, (dis)abilities, class backgrounds, ethnicity, and occupation. Working intersectionally, I have attempted to make explicit the operation of dominant discourses women draw on to make sense of their (and others') tattooed feminine body, to make clear the operation of oppression and spaces for resistance within this discursive web (Gavey, 1989).

Butler's account of gender as performative is also a central theoretical resource in this thesis. She suggests that 'gender is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (p. 45). This quote is important in relation to the thesis because it highlights how gender is not something that is a fixed state, but rather, it is something that is built up through practice and performing certain actions and behaviours, which change over time, as these actions and behaviours that are associated with gender develop. The stylised representation of gender can be disrupted performatively – this can be seen through the tattoo. The feminine body is 'disrupted' by the perceived masculine tattoo – though, through new performances of femininity

(with dainty, small, and delicate tattoos) the tattoo becomes part of the feminine performance. More extensive tattoo coverage can be offset through the performance of hyper-femininity in dress and style (Gerrard & Ball, 2013; Goulding & Saren, 2009). Butler discusses how gender is performative, with consideration for the embodied practice of gender, and constructions of culturally defined femininity. The performance of gender is embodied as well as socially constituted. As Butler suggests 'always already a cultural sign, the body sets limits to the imaginary meanings that it occasions, but is never free of an imaginary construction' (Butler, 1990, p. 96). Women are placed in the position of *becoming* a woman, and discourses surrounding the ideal woman and femininity constantly look at what is beyond the place in which they currently sit. With regards to my research, it is important to consider how gender is constituted and embodied through the women's own experiences.

Subjectivities

As Henriques et al (1984) discuss, the subject positions we hold in discourse is important, and must inevitably be a negotiated position that has been produced through interaction. Importantly for this research, Davies & Harre (1990) suggest rather than a stable and permanent identity, our sense of self is shaped by the subject positions we take up in relation to socially and culturally available discourses. Discourses can regulate our sense of self and our sense of capacity through socially agreed notions of 'right' and 'wrong' ways for being. If a person takes up a subject position like tattooed woman, our sense of who we are is constituted at the interface of a range of intersecting discourses and social practices – of gender, embodiment, class, etc. Each of these positionings has regulative elements – opening up some possibilities for action, whilst foreclosing on others (Foucault, 1976). This is interesting in relation to the perceived permanence of tattoos on the body, though the meaning and the tattoo itself may change and evolve over time – the tattoo presents

a visual representation of this potential temporary position, whilst simultaneously representing a sense of permanence.

Hollway (1984) argues that that the social construction of gender has resulted in shifting gendered subject positions in UK culture. She suggests that gender relationships are inherently relations of power, and that 'power difference...is both the cause and effect of the system of gender difference and provides the motor for its continuous re-production' (p. 228). By this, Hollway shows how there are wider societal structures that feed into constructions of gender, and also, how gender feeds back into societal structure. She suggests in particular that dominant understandings of masculinity and of femininity are shaped in relation to heterosexual gender relations. In this sense women's bodies are subject to the regulative gaze of practices of femininity and heteronormativity. As such, how they present, use and relate to their bodies is shaped both by representations of how to be feminine, and dominant ideas about how to be masculine. Whilst the history of tattooing has been predominantly masculine, the emergence of tattooed women has always resulted in contestation around what it means to be feminine / female and tattooed. This lays bare some of the power relations inherent in the relationships between men and women, as well as in our culturally constituted understandings of masculinity, femininity, embodiment, class, and ethnicity as examples. As I will argue through this thesis, on the one hand, being a tattooed woman enables a space in which women can resist hegemonic notion for how they should be perceived and behave (Pitts, 1999), through the construction of a position as an alternative mode of femininity. However, at the same time, this disruptive construct is reinscribed in other normative constructions around what it means to be tattooed, causing issue as social norms surrounding tattoo practices are changing.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality has been posited as one of the most important contemporary contributions to feminist theory (McCall, 2005) and has impacted the ways that gender is discussed. Intersectionality arose from black feminists' frustration with white middle class feminists' generalisation of their struggle to all women (Crenshaw, 1991). It initially emerged as an attempt to theorise the experiences of black women, by arguing that there was no universal experience of womanhood, and no universal feminism (Carastathis, 2014). Instead, women's experiences are constituted at the interface of multiple social positionings. I draw on Shields' (2008) understanding of intersectionality, which encompasses 'social identities which serve as organising features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalise one another' (pg. 302). I acknowledge how intersections produce both advantages and disadvantages, and also how identities such as gender and class reflect particular positions of power.

The central theme of intersectionality – multiple, co-constituting positions as opposed to unitary or layered positions which privilege one position as foundational to the rest – ensures that the positions are given equal weight in understanding representations and experience (Carastathis, 2014). Rather than treating gender, for example, as the foundational block for which all other understandings of the tattooed body are produced, an intersectional perspective ensures that other issues such as class and race and age are considered in respect to how these positions are co-constituted, rather than being seen as 'add-on's to one position in particular. To not consider the plurality of such positions is to diminish the aims of intersectional research. In this research, I focus predominantly on the intersections of class, gender, age, and sexuality in women's accounts of being tattooed.

The material-discursive

Accounts of the tattooed feminine body clearly cannot operate in a purely linguistic realm. For this reason, I draw on material-discursive accounts of the operation of language, place and social practices in discourse. Hook (2001) suggested that discourse analytic work often failed to take into account other aspects of social life – for example, the body – by prioritising the text. He argues that language does ‘play a role in generation, enabling and limiting empowered/disempowered subject-positions’ (pg. 12), but that language alone is not sufficient to understand power relations, a point also emphasised by Parker (1992).

The intersections of the material, spatial and discursive have been a frequent concern of feminist scholars. For example Ussher (2008) argued that it is essential that we explore the embodied as well as the discursive, and that ‘the materiality of the body is recognised, but always mediated by culture, language, and subjectivity’ (p. 1781). Her interest is in how the material body is made meaningful in our talk and in our social practices. In common with other feminists, she argues that the body has been a suspicious absence in critical psychological research, though the recent move towards a consideration for the ‘extra-discursive’ ensures that the body and embodiment are focused on within research. As Ussher (2008) states, a material-discursive approach has already been used to cover a range of critical psychological topics, and would work well in the understanding of the tattooed female body in that ‘the body is not positioned as a passive object upon which meaning is inscribed in these accounts. Rather, the body is constitutive in the making of experience and subjectivity, and in the process of contesting and transforming discursively constructed beliefs’ (p. 1783). This supports the point that tattooed women are not passive in their decisions to be tattooed – they are active in the process, and help to constitute meaning and personal narratives that are constructed in dialogue. The links to Butler (1990) can be drawn from this work,

supporting the notion that gender is something that is discursively constituted, but not something we 'have' or 'are'. This connects to culture in the sense that there are issues when gender is not 'performed' correctly within a culture that values particular – in this case Westernised, white, and middle class – constructions of femininity. Bringing women's bodies into attention is important, and shows how the embodiment of gender and being tattooed is mediated in relation to culture, subjectivities, and how the body is discussed.

2.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the research that has been presented stresses the importance of taking an intersectional approach with respect to the plurality of tattooed women's positionings. Uncovered within the literature is a complex navigation of the tensions women face through multi-layered positions: working-class 'tacky' tattoos versus middle-class art, 'other' versus 'common', wellbeing versus poor mental health, and the visible versus the invisible. The overarching link that binds all of these positionings together is regulation – tattooed women navigate between conforming to and resisting against normative constructions of femininities, and this impact is different depending on the multiple positionings and subjectivities. Rather than considering gender and tattoos as separate topics, they need to be measured in conjunction with each other, with careful consideration being given to how other positionings and subjectivities impact their understanding as tattooed feminine bodies.

Research questions

The central question upon which the analysis is built for this research is concerned with exploring constructions of femininities in relation to tattooed women's subjective positionings. The literature that I have reviewed does not centre intersections within the understandings of tattooed women, and therefore, will be addressed here. From the central question, three sub questions are derived:

- How do women constitute themselves as tattooed subjects?

- How are social discourses and practices surrounding tattooing and femininity constructed in contemporary British culture?
- What are the implications of this construction for the way that women position themselves as tattooed feminine subjects?

Chapter 3 – Method

In the previous chapter I discussed literature on femininities, embodiment, and social discourses that constitute tattooed female bodies. Here, I outline the feminist and intersectionally-informed Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Nash, 2008; Parker, 2003) I used, to consider how the tattooed woman is constituted in linguistically and socially produced relations of power. I use the intersectionally-informed Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to explore the women's subjective positionings, and the discourses that are produced from these. I conducted interviews with fourteen tattooed women over the period of a year, exploring their accounts of their tattooed bodies. Here, I outline the approach taken for the research, how it was conducted, and the analytic framework that underpinned the analysis.

3.1 Research approach

To answer my research questions, I am using a feminist-informed qualitative methodology which enables me to reflect on my insider/outsider position as a researcher (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008), constructions of otherness (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004), and the sharing of voices (Parr, 2015), as well as allowing me to challenge current knowledge claims held by those in privileged positions, which includes my own positioning. The use of qualitative research is predicated on a number of arguments, with the main focus studying what happens in the 'real' world as opposed to experimental conditions, the need for people to produce their own understandings about their experiences, and the notion that quantification results in meaning and concepts being lost (Hammersley, 2013).

I acknowledge that there is some debate around the use of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis in feminist work (Ramazanoglu, 1993). In the context of the power of the speaker, Foucault et al (1991) focus more on the production of the discourse, and lose the account of the speaker. Within my research, I acknowledge my own

positioning as a tattooed female academic researcher. In addition, it is important to note that I had proper relationships with all of the participants; these are further explored later in this chapter, and more fully in chapter 9 of this thesis. Whilst a Foucauldian analysis can identify how subjectivities are constituted in discourse (Ramazanoglu, 1993), I argue that an intersectional discursive account is valuable in exploring how tattooed women position themselves as subjects, because it enables an explicit consideration of the implications of multiple and intersecting positionalities.

3.2 Participants and recruitment

I used purposive sampling for my research (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008), specifically identifying tattooed women as the main focus for this approach. From that position, I intended to find women from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, employment statuses and so on, in order to explore the various subjective positionings. Participants were mostly recruited via word of mouth – I knew most of the women personally, and they knew that this research area was of interest to me. For some of the women, we had previously had personal conversations relating to tattoos, and once they knew about this project, they were keen to take part and discuss an area of interest to them in a way that would contribute to research knowledge. I acknowledge that it would not have been feasible for me to expect to find participants who covered all possibilities of positionings, though I did aim for a diverse group of women to interview (Forrester, 2010). I felt this sampling method to be beneficial, as I would be able to talk with the group of people specific to this research. Participants were invited to take part in the research, and provided with an information sheet outlining details of the research, and also contact details for myself in the event that they had any further questions. Each interview lasted anywhere between half an hour to an hour, depending on the routes that the questions took for each participant. The interview questions were predominantly focused around the

themes of femininity, exploration and discussion of their own tattoos, and wider perceptions of tattooed women. The interviews with each participant produced different discourses based on the women's own social contexts and experiences.

Fourteen women agreed to take part in the current research, providing insight into their experiences as tattooed women. Some of the women who took part in the research had been recently tattooed, and some of the women had been tattooed for as long as thirty years. There was also a variety of styles, sizes, placements and total tattoos according to each participant. It could be argued that the diversity of these factors is integral to the understanding of being a tattooed woman, as it illustrates the many possibilities in experiences, and produces a diverse account of the ways that tattoos are attained and represented in today's society.

As the women were of different ages, this will provide insight into how age intersects with gender in the construction of the tattooed feminine. The table below provides more information about the women who participated in the research:

Table 1 – Interview Participants

Name	Age	Tattoos	Biography
Maud	48	One tattoo – small flower on foot	Mother of two from West Midlands area, working in retail. Tattoo was described as 'more painful than childbirth'
Artoria	23	Multiple – mostly larger pieces of work	Full time student from Northamptonshire, Working in retail. Tattoos 'help to express life and are symbols of strength'
Ruth	47	Multiple – smaller	Family oriented woman from Northamptonshire area.

		(names, a rose)	Currently working on a rural barn in France to retire to.
Betty	31	3 – on arm	Family oriented mother of a 12 year old, lives in Birmingham Works in the beauty industry.
Nora	21	Multiple – medium/large pieces	Recent university graduate living in Northamptonshire, wants to work with children. She doesn't 'like the stereotype associated with tattoos'
Violet	19	Multiple, medium size	Undergraduate student living in Northampton. Recently came out as gay, and went travelling to 'take some time out and reflect'
Irene	22	1, small	Mum-to-be from Northamptonshire, seven months pregnant at the time of interview. Open about own experiences of the body and eating
Annie	33	2, large arm piece and smaller hand piece	Mother of three from Daventry, currently a full-time student. Got tattoos 'at an older age. I haven't experienced any negativity'
Amelia	21	1 – small foot tattoo	Recent education graduate from Northamptonshire, studying a postgraduate degree at Cambridge. Tattoo 'doesn't fit in' with her identity

Jean	24	1 small tattoo - arm	Recent graduate from Milton Keynes area, and a mother of one. Her family have a very traditional cultural heritage; 'having my daughter and getting tattoos is against this'
Lydia	40	Multiple – small to large (whole back)	Mother of one from Milton Keynes area, studying for postgraduate degree. She has previously worked in television, and is very outgoing
Mae	30	Multiple, heavy coverage	Retail worker from Northamptonshire, involved in tattoo culture. Her partner is also heavily tattooed.
Belle	45	4, large	Counsellor from London. Tattoos hold symbolism and meaning, hidden from view.
Gabrielle	21	2, small, hidden	Customer service assistant in food retail store. Recent home owner.

3.3 Interviews and schedule

Before the interviews I developed a flexible interview schedule, taking into account past research, and my theoretical framework, as well as my own experiences as a tattooed woman. I wanted questions that would enable me to explore the complex representations and constructions of women with tattoos. I explored issues relating to femininity and definitions of femininity, aspects of identity, how tattoos come into play with regards to identity, and how factors like employment might shape women's perceptions of tattoos, and their accounts of being tattooed. All of the questions were open ended,

inviting the participants to expand upon their answers and allow for explanations of things that they felt to be important. Before conducting the interviews, I made it clear that I had no ideas about 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and invited them to and were invited to be as open and honest as they felt comfortable.

For this research, I have used initial semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducted with all of the participants. Previous research highlighted the importance of question structure, through providing a more open topic question, followed by more specific questions which were attuned to each participant (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). For example, the women were asked 'How would you define femininity?' From here, as each woman replied differently, following questions ranged from 'Do you feel feminine? How would you describe being feminine?'

I used qualitative interviews to explore how the tattooed feminine self is constructed through language (Mason, 2002). This research explores the construction of the tattooed self as produced within discourse. Mason (2002) also points out that the role of the researcher must not be underestimated in the research process on the whole – my own reflexive account is explored in more detail in a later chapter.

Mason (2002) argues that, despite the variations in qualitative interviewing, all semi-structured interviews have the following features in common: an exchange of dialogue; a topic-centred approach with issues to cover; and that meaning is co-produced within an interaction. Within the interviews, the Women construct their accounts of tattooing in the interaction, drawing on memories, but constituting their current narrative in dialogue. I chose semi-structured interviews for this research as I wanted to collect data about women's tattooed bodies, from their own perspective. I had the interview schedule with me for all of the interviews to ensure that I asked the central questions, though each of the women expanded

on different points and took the conversation in different directions, which helps provide a wealth of data for analysis. Moreover, within the interviews I was able to also consider gestures and body language employed by the women, and how this helped to enrich the conversations – this involved the body within the research process, which was important given the overall focus on tattooed bodies. For example, when the women were talking about the tattoos they have, they would often show me them, touching them whilst they talk about them, and in a couple of interviews, the women stood up and turned around, removing clothing to show me tattoos that were more hidden.

Just as important as the justification for using interviews to generate data, is my own positionality in relation to the research (Oakley, 1981). Whilst my positionality in respect to gender, race, class and disability may be clear, I also had to consider my own body, and the exposure of my tattoos in the interview process. For consistency, I felt that my more visible tattoos, the ones on my arms, should be on display for all of the interviews. To me, this seemed important, as having all of my tattoos hidden may have an effect on the responses exchanged within the interviews. I'm aware that having my tattoos exposed will also have an effect, though given the topic area, and my relationships with the participants, I felt this this would help them be more comfortable with how they responded. In some of the interviews, my own tattoos were directly referred to or pointed at, especially when the dialogue revolved around shared experiences, such as needing to cover up tattoos on our arms whilst at work. Whilst this approach has been criticised in respect to a potential exploitation of relationships and the information that might be shared during the interview process (Banister et al., 2011; Kvale, 2007) this is somewhat of a contested issue, with Oakley (1981) commenting how interviews involve a process of give and take, whereby information is also shared by the researcher, forming part of the co-production of

knowledge in the context of the interview. Oakley (1981) furthers this point by arguing that it is impossible for researchers to remove themselves emotionally from the interview process, and that researcher engagement is welcomed.

As I knew each of the participants in some respect, they felt like normal conversations, and flowed well rather than being strained. In this respect, the experience of the interview expands between myself and the participant – there's a mutual understanding of our bodies, a social understanding described as 'mutual incorporation' (Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009). We sense each other's expressions, and become aware through each other's actions of situations we may have mutually experienced, such as being called out on 'what we will look like on our wedding day', for example. I feel that some of the women felt that they could be more open about their opinions because they knew me, and they knew that I wasn't there to judge them. The majority of the interviews took place in the interview rooms at the University of Northampton, in private rooms. Some of the others, especially if they lived further away, met me at local cafes where we could find a more secluded area to talk.

Using qualitative interviewing enabled me to gain an understanding of the women, accounts that are full of depth are needed in order to be analysed, with a consideration for what is produced and constituted within conversation (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). For the interviews to be carried out, it was vital that the participants and I were able to agree on a place, time and date that would be suitable, with enough privacy and quiet to conduct the interviews. I used bookable interview suites at The University of Northampton for the interviews, and if that was unfeasible, local cafes that had a quieter seating area enabling ordinary conversation without shouting.

3.4 Media analysis

As well as conducting interviews, I decided to conduct a media analysis, which would address one of the research sub-questions,

how are tattoos and femininity constructed in British culture. This media analysis aimed to present a societal context for how tattoos were being discussed, to contrast against the ways the women discussed tattoos within their interviews. The articles were analysed in the same way as the interviews, which is outlined in the section below, 'developing the analytic framework'.

Articles

For this qualitative study, I conducted a systematic search using Lexis Library, through the University of Northampton library website. I used specific search terms to obtain the best possible sample for the analysis. The specific terms used were 'tattoo' or 'wom*n' within the headline of the article, or 'tattoo wom*n' having major mentions within the article itself. There were articles that contained 'tattoo' in the headline, but did not contain any mentions within the article itself – I wanted to ensure that the focus of the articles were centred on tattooed women, rather than just being in the headline in order to grab reader attention. The original search for 'tattoo' provided hundreds of media articles, with too much data to analyse for this chapter. It made sense to adjust the search terms, to ensure that there was a balance between having a sufficient amount of relevant data, but not too much that it detracted from the intended focus. I adjusted the search date for articles published between 2014 and 2017, to ensure that the content was current, given the fast-developing pace of tattooing and opinions of the practice. I also adjusted the search terms to only include articles that were over 500 words in length, so that there was a good amount of text to analyse. A total of 35 articles were sourced, all from UK based newspapers (see Appendix D for more details on the media articles). Each of these newspapers has their own readership profile, as outlined by Gani (2014), suggesting that the articles would be written differently to accommodate for the tastes of their readers. For example, Gani notes how The Guardian and The Telegraph are considered as 'serious'

newspapers, containing content that is more serious in tone, and more associated with a middle-class readership. The Sun and The Mirror are considered as 'tabloids', seen as less serious and more likely to contain sensationalised content, associated with a more working class readership (Hilton, Patterson, & Teyhan, 2012). The average Guardian reader is a younger male enthused by politics, with niche interests centred on women's issues, and the arts. The average The Daily Mirror reader is suggested as elderly male, with general interests centred on sport, also enjoying reading multiple newspapers and magazines. The Daily Telegraph reader is suggested as middle class, middle aged male, self-described as 'arrogant', with niche interests in sport, and a liking for editorial and comment pieces. Finally, the average The Sun reader is a young male, with interests in sport, people and celebrities. The typical readership that Gani has outlined above has an impact on the way tattoos are discussed within the media, and this can be seen in more detail in chapter 4.

3.5 Recording and transcription

I audio recorded the interviews with the use of a dictaphone, and transcribed them following general research conventions. In all of the transcripts, any identifying features, such as names and workplaces, were removed, and replaced with 'XXX'. However, as the participants were describing their tattoos, and in some depth, it became apparent that some participants may be identified through these descriptions – something that could not be avoided, given the context of the interview. All participants were made aware of this, and were able to not answer particular questions, or withdraw from the research completely, if they so wished.

I transcribed the audio using a simple format, using general punctuation where appropriate. Pauses, laughter, or any other significant emphases within the audio were designated within brackets, for example, (pause).

As well as transcribing what was being said, I also made notes within the transcriptions, where appropriate, when the women used their bodies to enhance the discussion. As perhaps expected when discussing tattoos, the women showed off parts of their bodies, undressed and contorting in specific ways in order to show me their tattoos. They also did things such as caress the skin as they talked, or looked down at the tattoo, and even reached over to touch my arm tattoos – due to the importance of the material-discursive in this research (Hook, 2001), I felt it important to note when such occurrences happened, as they impacted what was being produced in that moment.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Through consideration of The British Psychological Society's code of human ethics (2010), I could ensure that the correct procedures were being followed for the protection of my participants, myself and the research. After the participants had been presented with the information sheet on the research, and agreed to take part, the nature of the research was explained to them, so that they were aware of what was expected of them, and how their answers would play a part. They were made aware of the topics of the questions, such as femininity and perceptions of tattoos, they were advised to answer as honestly and openly as they felt comfortable with, and that they didn't need to answer any questions that they didn't feel comfortable with. In addition to this, they were made aware of their right to withdraw up to two months after the interview had taken place. At no point were the participants deceived about the nature of the research, as deception was not a factor in the collection of the data for this research. Full ethical information for this project can be found in Appendix A.

Before the research took place, a proposal was formulated, outlining possible ethical issues that may arise through the research. This shows that consideration had been made for both the potential harms

to the participants, whilst being weighed up against the potential positive outcomes obtained from the data. Though the risk of harm to the participants was considered low for this research, appropriate contact details were provided in case they experienced any distress in taking part.

One of the most significant factors which could play a part with regards to the current research is that of familiarity, due to the manner in which most participants were known to me. This could have influenced the participants with regards to the answers they provided, in at least two ways. Firstly, the participants could have felt as though they did not wish to disclose all personal information to someone that they knew, and therefore did not provide full answers to their questions.

3.7 Developing the analytic framework

With regards to how the interviews will be analysed, the focus looks at the production and reproduction of discourses, and how the personal narratives of the women are negotiated and constructed.

In using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, I can focus on how the discourses that are produced constitute and reproduce power, resulting in forms of inequality (Gee, 2014). Parker (1992, pg.5) defines discourse as 'a system of statements which construct an object'. In relation to my research, the objects will be things such as tattoos, the self, the body, and femininities. Also, the tattooed women themselves are constructed as both object and subject, depending on how they produce their tattoos, themselves as agentic, and how they construct their tattooed bodies within dialogue. The ways that the women talk about these different elements within the interviews, and how the media articles frame tattooed women, will produce certain understandings of these, and will be based on their own subjectivities.

Power for Foucault is not so much about possession or having something over another – rather, it is about knowledge as being

power, and people having the power to define others (Burr, 1995). Specifically Foucault considers the body as a site of power, linking this to the notion of 'normality', and what acts, activities and behaviours are considered to be 'normal', against those that are othered (Burr, 1995). Here, the links between Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and a focus for how tattooed feminine bodies are produced are made clear, in that some practices of modification may be produced as 'normal' within the discourses, and some may not. In addition, how tattooed bodies are discussed within the interview will be regulated by what is considered acceptable and not acceptable. The regulative potential of the media articles depends on the readership of the newspaper it comes from, but within all of the articles, it was clear that a sense of what is considered the 'right' and 'wrong' way of being tattooed was produced.

Initial analysis started early on, during the interview stage. Through the dialogue between myself and the participants, there were moments where I would require clarification or expansion on certain points as to explore what was being said and from what position they might be coming from, mentally noting what I felt to be of importance. In addition to the talk, there were also occasions throughout the interviews where the women would physically show me parts of their body – more specifically, their tattoos – and whilst this is not captured within the recordings of the interviews, it enriched the conversation, as the women were able to give some context to the tattoos they were talking about. Whilst the interviews were being transcribed, I began to take notes on things that I felt stood out. This included things such as recollections from the interviews and the way in which it unfolded, how I as the interviewer played a part in the way that the questions were answered, and finally, initial observations and thoughts with regards to the transcript.

I followed Parker's (1994, cited in Banister et al., 2011) step-by-step guide for carrying out discourse analysis, the first part of which

provides a process for analysing text (see Appendix B for examples of initial analysis), and the last part, a deeper analysis into discourse. Parker himself does not agree with step-by-step approaches to discourse analysis, as he sees 'sensitivity to language' and the associated interpretation. However, given the variety of approaches to discourse research, the 'steps' help with following a methodological process. The first steps involve 'free associating' to the text, so I made notes on things that came to mind as I was reading through the interview transcripts. Following from this, steps include identifying different 'ways' of speaking, and what these different voices serve to produce within the text. Deeper analysis conducted on the transcripts focus on how the discourses that are produced operate to naturalise certain things in their given contexts – for example, the construction of certain stereotypes of femininities being taken for granted as 'normal'. I followed the same approach with the media articles, reading and re-reading them to identify 'who' was saying what within the articles, and what this was producing about tattooed feminine bodies. A mind map with early analysis can be found in Appendix C.

3.8 Reflexivity

As knowledge is always positional, it is important that I explore how my positioning as a woman, and academic, a tattooed and working-class woman, all function to shape the knowledge I produce. The first thing to consider is the role of myself as the researcher as an insider or outsider to my research. Being a tattooed woman, I am an insider to my research, meaning that I am a part of the community within which my research is based (Yakushko et al, 2011), but at the same time, I am also an objectifying researcher. I will have influence in the research from the ways that the questions are designed, how the interviews flow, and the ways that the data is analysed.

One benefit of being an insider and a member of my research community is that of acceptance (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) –

throughout the process of planning how to conduct the interviews, it was decided that my most visible tattoos, those on my arms, would be on display or at least partial display to the participants. It made no sense to cover them up for the participants, as they were all aware of the fact that I have large visible tattoos. It may have affected the responses provided by the participants with regards to the depth that they went into, but it also could have influenced whether they felt comfortable responding truthfully about their feelings towards their tattoos. As participants may have been affected either way, I decided to ensure that my tattoos were visible to all of the participants, so they at least all had the same consistent experience with the way that I presented myself.

In addition to acceptance, being an insider also allowed me to benefit from access to those within the community at ease, as well as talk to those who were happy to discuss such an issue. However, because of the differences in opinions on tattooed women (particularly those with multiple large ones), my self-presentation may have had an effect on the ways that the interview questions were asked, or responded to, due to my own personal embodied experiences (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In this respect, I do not feel it to be an issue, as my personal experiences provided an open, flowing and comfortable conversation to take place between myself and my participants.

One of the key facets of being an insider to the research is the position of power and privilege that I am granted in relation to the research (Yakushko et al, 2011). It is often hard to cite one's own power relations with regards to their research, but here I must acknowledge my position as a researcher, and not attempt to empower others through my own personal experiences, but rather, let their own voices be heard. The concept of 'giving voice' is problematic, as discussed within feminist research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996), and the women that I have interviewed will not be

speaking in one, homogenous voice, and therefore, I must acknowledge the contradictions and tensions within the accounts I am presented with. As discussed by Burman, 'we have to recognize the complexity of the stories that "they" as well as "we" tell' (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996, p.23), and therefore must unpack these complexities within the research. At the same time, I am also a working-class woman, and in this regard, there are certain privileges and powers that I will not be granted. As Brown (1994, cited in Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996) writes, the Other should be represented, but at the same time we as researchers should acknowledge the position of privilege that we are in in being able to describe such Others.

As a reflexive researcher, I have also considered some of the preconceptions and feelings that I might have about tattooed women, and that some information provided might be overlooked (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). My own ideas about tattoos have shifted through the course of this research, which has meant that I have moved from seeing tattoos, rather naively, as celebratory and liberatory objects, to more of a complex and nuanced view of tattooed bodies, exploring the multiple tensions felt by these subject positions. Wilkinson's (1988) concepts of both personal and functional reflexivity are discussed, not as two separate concepts, but how the two intersect in understanding reflexivity. This means that I needed to consider how my identities – as woman, tattooed, academic, working class, and young - will inform the research. This includes acknowledgement of how my values, life circumstances, societal role, and ideologies play a part in constructing my knowledge, and forming the research. In practice, this was (and still is) a fraught and complex process to navigate. Whilst I have been afforded privileges in some respects (being able to conduct research in an area I'm passionate about, and supported by the academy in this), I have also experienced negative perceptions of my research and questioning of my capability as an

academic, because of my age, my tattoos, and my gender. To me, this is not a process that finishes once the research is complete, but is an ongoing project of reflection, important for feminist research.

As the nature of the research is to consider tattooed women through an intersectional lens, there will inevitably be elements of the research whereby I will simultaneously be both insider and outsider (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015), with respect to factors such as sexuality, age, class and race. As a woman, and a tattooed woman, I shared some experiences with my participants, though there are elements whereby they may feel less comfortable discussing topics where they may see me as an outsider to their particular experiences. One of the women, with African heritage, talked out her upbringing, and what was 'typical' for her growing up. As this is not something I myself would have experienced, she elaborated on some of the key factors in this, such as religious beliefs informing the perception towards those with tattoos.

As a tattooed woman myself, I feel strongly about the ways that women with tattoos are viewed – I am frequently told I will regret my tattoos when I am older, people despair at the sight of them and ask what I will do with them on my wedding day, and I have been told numerous times that I will never hold a good job. In talking to women about their tattoos, I was aware of how my own experiences came into play – in shaping my approach to the research, in the interviews, and in the analysis. For example, when discussing employment and the workplace in relation to tattoos, I was highly aware of the differences between my tattooed body in an academic space, as opposed to a visibly tattooed body within a customer service environment. The way that workplaces were discussed in this context were with contempt, a clear understanding of a difference between different professions, especially when talking to previous work colleagues with whom we had previously had the shared experience of having to cover our tattoos. This meant that I became

aware of this new difference, not a shared experience, in the positions held between myself and my participants. For this reason, it was important to acknowledge my subjective position on these issues, and also to be aware of how that position shifted and changed over the course of the interviews. This helped me in turn to understand that the women I spoke to were also not producing final, permanent statements of their experiences. Rather their accounts were contextually produced – coproduced in their interactions with me – and located at a specific point in time and place. In using an intersectional, feminist discourse analysis, my intention was to recognise the locatedness of both their accounts of their tattoos, and the importance of my interaction with them in producing those accounts. This enabled me to consider how my positioning as a woman, and particularly as a tattooed woman, enabled particular kinds of accounts, whilst potentially foreclosing on others.

In addition to my being a tattooed woman, it is also important to consider the role of relationships in the production of the interviews. I had a previous relationship of some kind with the majority of the participants. Though traditional research seeks to avoid 'bias' through a stringent separation of the researcher and the participant (Atkinson et al, 2001), qualitative researchers contest this notion (Garton & Copland, 2010; Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2013), suggesting that the researchers' own emotional investment enables richer and more complex data. In a critique of reflexivity by Gill (1995, cited in Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995), she challenges relativist notions of reflexivity, highlighting how the acknowledgement of personal value is important in feminist research. As noted, Gill (1995, cited in (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995) stresses that discourse analysts must critically reflect on their own authority as researcher and challenge their assumptions, rather than reinforce them. I must acknowledge that whilst the interviews are to be neutral and not value-laden, the content of the interview itself will most certainly be locally contained

(Rapley, 2001), connected to the contextual experiences of work, personal anecdotes and social norms between myself and the participants.

As a reflexive researcher, I acknowledge the part that my tattoos play through non-verbal communication – during all of the interviews, my tattoos were on display, or were known to the participants. I will explore how my tattoos may have formed a part of the answers from the participants, and where the perceptions of my own body art fit in.

3.9 Conclusion

The present research is about women's bodies, and looks to explore the discourses produced by these women's own subjective positions. It is feminist in focus, engaging with intersections including but not limited to gender and class, with an overriding focus on the regulation of tattooed feminine bodies. This research acknowledges how the participants are active in the research process, and how I as the researcher am co-constituted within the participant's discussions. It also acknowledges the various subjectivities in positioning, and the way that what we understand is produced within language. Part of experience and how we make sense of it is constituted in the conversations had about such experiences, and how we position ourselves within such conversations is integral. Given the intersectional focus, it is clear that the experiences that the women discuss and how they produce these in language is going to differ between the women participants.

The research methods that have been used here are linked to the overall framework for the thesis, by using semi-structured interviews and analysing social discourses from within the media to address the research questions. My own position as the researcher is important to the overall process, as I will have my own inputs into the interviews, the analysis, and the discussions presented within this thesis. Within the next five chapters, I will unpack the tensions that

the women navigate between their multiple positionings, exploring what the function of the produced discourses is for these women.

Chapter 4 – Regulation of tattooed women with the media

In this chapter, I present an analysis of media discourses focused on tattooed women. This provides an important insight into the kinds of social discourses in circulation that might come into play in women's accounts of their own tattoos. The discourse analysis produced within this media analysis considers the transformative construction of tattoos, the cautionary tales produced to warn people away from regretful choices, and finally, the positioning of tattoos as a trend, serving to both conform to and resist normative constructions of femininity.

Newspaper articles often make reference to the 'normal' people who are now adorning their bodies – normal being white, middle class, 'respectable' people (Hughes, 2014; Sturgis, 2014). The narrative of such newspaper articles often seems to rely on a discourse that positions tattooing as the proper domain of 'the other', associated with deviant, problematised and generally male bodies. Newspaper articles often reflect a certain moral panic about the rise of tattoos among so called 'normal' people whilst at the same time, normalising tattooing. Articles in popular media are particularly preoccupied with gender and tattooed bodies (Blimes, 2008; Meads & Nurse, 2013). There is a repetitive trope about the apparent incomprehensibility of tattooed feminine bodies, with repeated articles questioning why women get tattooed (Ashworth, 2013; Telegraph, 2012). Women who reject dominant notions of femininity by getting tattoos, further reinforce what is considered as alternative femininity, as well as ideal femininity (Atkinson, 2002; Day, 2010). This resistance against traditional femininity enables women to gain control over their bodies (Roberts, 2012), whilst at the same time, enables the younger generation of women to enter into the fashionable trend of feminine themed tattoos (Young, 2001). By unpacking the dominant discourses that are presented, it allows us to understand how

tattooed women are co/re/produced and co/re/constructed in the media.

4.1 The tattoo as 'transformative'

When reading through the articles, I noted that tattoos were often presented as *transformational*. In particular they were discussed in relation to mental health and wellbeing, as potentially changing the bearer of the tattoo, or their experience, in some crucial way. On the one hand, this echoed a theme in tattoo research, that suggests that people with tattoos often have mental health issues (Tiggemann & Hopkins, 2011). This positions the link between mental health and tattoos as negative and pathological.

In contrast, the articles I analysed for the media based study suggested that the tattoos provided an outlet for the women to express their mental health, in a positive way. Tattooing is seen as potentially cathartic, and as transformative of 'past wounds':

"talking about mental illness is becoming more acceptable, people might be feeling more comfortable talking about their scars and may way to make something beautiful out of them"
(Dunn, 2017)

The woman cited in this article positions the scars as something that are not beautiful, something that previously made her feel uncomfortable. However, as a more therapeutic discourse has been mainstreamed around mental health difficulties, she suggests that she was able to see the scars as something that could be owned and transformed: they could be made beautiful through the addition of the tattoo. The tattoo then becomes a part of the transformative and therapeutic process, that enables the therapeutic subject to discuss their mental health in a way that is more socially acceptable, rather than just referring to the scar. Rather than being a form of self-harm, as they have previously been positioned, this account rehabilitates the tattoo as a form of *self-care*.

Lewis & Mehrabkhani (2016), report that self-injurious scars are seen as part of the self-narrative, but this is negotiated with unacceptance of the scars, with shame and poor body image being common. The tattoo over the scar becomes a part of the self-narrative, and also, a part of the acceptance process. In this extract, the tattoo is produced as the thing that re-beautifies the body, which simultaneously conforms to the notion that women's bodies should be beautiful (Adams, 2009a; Angela McRobbie, 2004) but resists normative constructions of beauty through the tattoo itself. Self-harm is framed as unacceptable, but through 'working hard' on the self, you can be transformed through the tattoo. By talking about mental health issues, the individual produces their subjective position on the matter, and the tattoo is used as a therapeutic device for re-constructing their understanding of the self and wellbeing (Rose, 1998). Furthermore, by achieving good wellbeing, as opposed to mental health issues, the women indicate a level of success in her role as a 'good woman' (Miller & Rose, 1997).

Later in the same article, tattoos were referred to as 'artwork' on the body, positioning the body as a 'canvas' (I explore this idea in more detail in chapter 6), which linked to how the women saw their bodies and their self-harm practices:

"one of the reasons I got the tattoo was to stop myself from doing it, now I don't want to ruin the art work" (Dunn, 2017)

in this extract, the tattoo is physically a part of the process to prevent the woman from self-harming. Her body is constructed as almost acceptable to 'ruin' without the tattoo, but with the tattoo, it is now something to admire. The body is transformed into a valued object, through both the processes of therapeutisation and commodification (Miller & Rose, 1997). The tattoo is positioned as a catalyst that transforms how she sees her body, which subsequently has an impact on the choices she makes about what to do with her body. Whilst the

self-harm scars mark her as 'damaged', the tattoo transforms her to that of a rescued position, as a healed therapeutic subject (Rose, 1998). This does not suggest that there will be a change in her mental health, but does suggest a change that can physically be seen – it makes the outward elements of her mental health visible, but in a more acceptable way.

There are different ways that the body is communicative and tattoos function as a means of making the body more readable (MacCormack, 2006). Several of the articles focused on how tattoos provided women with freedom from abuse and human trafficking. However, the narrative of redemption that can be found here is not about liberation from mental health difficulties, as with the extract above, but rather, it is about liberation from involvement in sex trafficking and abuse. Serious and distressing incidences are outlined, though they are framed in a way that suggests that it is the tattoo that has allowed the women freedom from these issues:

'The tattoo meant that Erica belonged to them. They would feed her, clothe her and supply her with whatever drugs she needed to get by, but she was their property and any money she made was theirs as well. Even after she managed to get free, the words on the back of her neck pulled her once again to those same streets...Erica says the words now tattooed on her neck, "Free yourself", have helped her reclaim her identity'

(Kelly, 2014)

Here, tattoos are constructed as an emblem of ownership – firstly, Erica's body is 'owned' by the gang through the tattoo they put on her, and then the ownership returns back to her, as she got a new tattoo to reclaim her body from them. The transformation that is produced within the extract is from that of a victim position, an object of the traffickers, to an agentic position. Her tattoo does not set out that 'god has set you free', or 'rescuers set me free', but rather, it is

'free yourself'. This positions her as a 'good victim', who has been rehabilitated through *choice*. She is a good, liberal subject, choosing a better life for herself (McRobbie, 2004). The tattoo as an object is constructed in both a negative and a positive way, though dependent on the 'owner' of such object. This extract produces a tension between the tattoo being an object, a commodity that is bought and worn on the body (the tattoo provides the gang with 'ownership' of her body) versus an embodying of the tattoo, and the body being produced as agentic. Where the tattoo is positioned as a commodity, it is not seen as a good thing, but when she talks about the tattoo allowing her to reclaim her identity, it is produced as communicating her agency over her body. The tattoo is an emblem of resistance for her against being owned.

Some the articles highlight a tension in how women negotiate the 'right' way for their bodies to communicate. Some articles focused on the capacity of tattoos to help women mark an illness, or celebrate their recovery from it. For example, in one article, a woman's experience of vitiligo is described:

'Tiffany, 24, had the words "It's called vitiligo" tattooed across her forearm after ditching the thick foundation she'd been wearing for years and deciding she had nothing to hide. Tiffany spent 17 years covering up her body and wearing thick make-up to avoid cruel comments about the condition, which causes pale patches to develop on the skin due to a lack of melanin' (Wheatstone, 2015)

Quite a statement is made here that constitutes the tattoo as enabling her to show her body, after a long period of hiding it – it is produced as a gesture of defiance, as well as ownership of her skin condition. Her skin condition has not changed, but the visible tattoo that communicates the condition is constructed as providing her with the ability to show her skin. The message behind the tattoo itself is not mysterious – there is a clear statement directly relating to her

skin condition, which means that there is less opportunity for others to misinterpret what the tattoo is about. Tattoos that have a personal connection or hold meaning for the wearer are positioned as more acceptable (Kang & Jones, 2007), therefore, the tattoo in the extract is constituted as 'good'. She resists others reading of her skin through the wording of the tattoo – by clearly articulating what the skin condition is, she resists the positioning of damaged, or weird, and so on.

Similar to the previous extracts, how the personal narratives are told within the articles produces the tattoo as transformative – she covered up and hid for so long, but it was the tattoo that enabled her to show her skin. This echoes of the messages portrayed to women with media advertising – the kind that gives women the 'choice' to wear lingerie and wear particular make up brands for themselves (R. Gill, 2008). It also is similar in focus to the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty – beauty products sold to women, appropriating ideals of femininity, ultimately at the detriment of the female consumer (McCleary, 2014). This reaffirms the personal narrative element to attaining a tattoo (MacCormack, 2006), producing this 'authentic' tattoo as the 'right' reason to get a tattoo. Tattoos that communicate a clear message are constructed as the right way to be tattooed in the articles, and must hold some meaning to the wearer.

Many of the newspaper articles centred on positive reasons to be tattooed, and one of the most popular themes that emerged considered reclamation of the body following from abuse or illness. Because of the serious nature of the content, an 'expert' presence came up in some of the discussions, which served to frame tattoos in a particular way:

'Of course, body art tattoos are just one facet of helping someone recover from illness. Medical tattoos are another, cosmetic rather than artistic, form of tattoo, which camouflage

the scars rather than tattooing colourful art over them'
(Cashmore, 2017)

Here, a distinction is made between 'body art' tattoos and 'medical' tattoos- the medical tattoo is a cover over, intended to 'hide' or disguise what is underneath it, rather than draw attention to it. In contrast, the 'artistic' tattoo draws attention not just to itself, but to the body of the wearer – it is intended to be looked at. Whilst the difference between medical and artistic tattoos is not polarised, the skin is still open to be 'read' differently by others – the medical tattoos marks survival, and/or acceptance of the wound, and what it means. It stands for beautification, and sometimes a celebration of survival. This framing of 'other' tattoos as being 'artistic' and 'colourful' produces a sense of more attention being drawn to the body – art is there to be admired. In both of these cases, the tattoo is constituted as serving a purpose – cosmetic or artistic, it *does* something for the body it is on.

This idea of a particular purpose for the tattoo is continued later in the same article, when discussing a nipple tattoo (considered as medical) and what this did for the wearer:

'After she had a nipple tattooed on, they both began crying. "They've had so much taken away from them - they've often lost an income. I've had clients who've lost their marriages, I've had people lose their homes because they couldn't afford their repayments, and then they're losing vitally important things off their bodies. This gives them that back."' (Cashmore, 2017)

The tattoo is produced as having more meaning beyond that of the body, and by linking it to other areas of the wearer's life, such as their relationships and finances, it constructs a sense of wider importance in getting the tattoo. It is not *just* a nipple tattoo – it is a way for the wearer to reclaim a sense of control where they cannot control other things around them. It does not really 'give them back' their body, but it does render the body as agentic, allowing them to

embody a sense of womanhood that they had lost. The framing of the nipple tattoo as giving something back to them also links to feminine ideals of the body – that by not having a nipple, she is not a ‘complete’ woman, but the tattoo gives her that back. In this way, the tattoo is conforming to ideal constructions of the female body. This is not positioned in the same way as getting an ‘artistic’ tattoo – the ‘medical’ tattoo is seen as giving her something back that she had lost, rather than adding something new to the body. A distinction is drawn between what is produced by the medical tattoo ‘giving something back’, and more extensive decorative coverage post-mastectomy, in the embodiment of femininity. The emotion that is mentioned in the extract constitutes the tattoo and the process of getting the tattoo as important, as the wearer now has something back in the midst of losing a lot more. What she has gained through the tattoo is something that she can embody, it is on her, whereas the other things that she has lost are external to her body. The embodiment of the tattoo in the face of illness or abuse is positioned as something good for the wearer, and is produced as a way to reconstitute how the body is read:

“Most of the time the commonality is that they want a tattoo that represent reclaiming their lives back; empowerment and reminding them that they we are no longer victims but we are survivors.” (Gander, 2017)

Here, the tattoo is produced as enabling the position of ‘survivor’, which is seen as better than the position of ‘victim’. To be a victim is to be passive and to let things happen, but to be a survivor is to be agentic in that positioning, and within this extract, it is the tattoo that is produced as the catalyst to the position of survivor.

At the start of this extract, the woman who is quoted makes the suggestion that the reclamation of the body is common, and something she has seen before as a tattoo artist. This produces two

understandings of tattoos – firstly, that there is some kind of meaning behind a tattoo, which is therefore produced as the ‘right’ way to be tattooed (for example, it is framed here that a ‘victim’ would not be tattooed – it would be the ‘survivor’). Secondly, this produces tattoos as something that have a meaning, that someone would see a tattoo on another person and assume that there is an important and/or personal story to be told. Imagery is not mentioned within this extract, and how imagery is important in the reading of the tattooed body (Kosut, 2000b) – it is the tattoo itself that provides the reclamation.

Where imagery has been mentioned within the articles, it is feminine and positioned as more desirable, providing the women within the articles with a renewed sense of femininity:

'She chose a floral tattoo, and was delighted with the result, she "couldn't wait to get home and look at it. It made me feel like a new woman."' (Cashmore, 2017)

Floral tattoos are commonly linked with feminine imagery and embodiment in tattoos (Kang & Jones, 2007), and here, it is explicitly linked with being a woman. The tension that is produced between getting a tattoo, often not positioned as feminine, and then having feminine imagery in a tattoo, shows the conformity and resistance that is negotiated. With the regulation of women’s bodies, they should make the ‘right’ choice for them – as the articles that constitute the tattoo as transformative position tattoos as the ‘right’ choice for their personal narratives (Gill, 2008; McRobbie, 2009), the feminine imagery discussed within these further supports the meaningful, feminine tattoo as the ‘right’ way for women to ‘do’ a tattoo.

Surprisingly, there is little talk of female sexuality and attractiveness discussed explicitly within the articles, though in one particular

extract, sexiness and feminine imagery in tattoos are considered from the perspective of a newly tattooed woman:

"I saw the piece. It was huge. And, very dark. Big and dark. So big. And there was dots. I never said I wanted or was okay with dots. But the beauty of the flowers calmed me: the placement of the wing cupping my ribs; the indentation of the lower orchid in my waistline. It looked so pretty. The chain streamlined my hips. It looked sexy and dainty. I liked it." (Kirkova, 2014)

The contrasting description of her new tattoo produces a sense of how to do a tattoo right as a woman. At the start of this extract, the tattoo is 'big and dark' – big positions the tattoo as excessive (Stirn et al, 2011), and dark does not relate to what would be considered 'good' feminine imagery for a tattoo (Kang & Jones, 2007). As she then discusses the tattoo in relation to the shape of her body, it produces the tattoo as enhancing femininity – pretty, sexy, and dainty – all considered 'good' things for tattoos on women (Dann, Callaghan, & Fellin, 2016).

Overall, the production of tattoos as a transformative entity makes personal narratives important – it suggests that it is okay for you to get a tattoo if you have a good story or something meaningful to base it on. This also suggests that you as a person must go through a 'then' versus 'now' process, and it is the attaining of the tattoo that is the culmination of that process. Whilst getting tattoos in this way are seen as 'right', there is still a sense of regulation in respect to the kind of tattoo and the imagery that is associated with it – it must be feminine.

4.2 Morality and cautionary tattoo tales

Whilst these 'positive' accounts represented tattoos as transformative and enhancing, in contrast, there were also many articles that presented a kind of cautionary tale, a morality and responsibility that constructed a regulation of the body, and more about how 'not' to do

tattoos. These articles made use of 'experts' who gave their professional opinions about tattoos and their potential harm, and also fed into discussion topics for how people should and shouldn't get tattooed – specifically in the case of employment:

'the editor of tattoo magazine Skin Deep described them as an increasingly bourgeoisie form of body art. The title was still "mostly bought by people who drive forklift trucks," he admitted. "But the most interesting letters we get are from surgeons who say, 'I've been living for five years with this huge tattoo on my back and no one knows, I'd like to show it to you'. "I was at a wedding last month at which the vicar had a tattoo. As for the full-arm tattoos, we get pictures coming in on headed paper from Barclays and HSBC." (Saul, 2017)

There is a construction made here that suggests there is a 'type' of person who is expected to get a tattoo, and a type who are not expected to be tattooed. The career professionals who are tattooed are not the norm, as the idea of the professional in respect to work does not include tattooed bodies (Karl et al., 2013). This also produces a sense that tattoos are expected of the working class, and therefore not something that is newsworthy or stands out, but for the professionals, they are resisting an expectation imposed on their bodies that sees them in respect to their career first. It does suggest if you are a professional, it is 'acceptable' for you to be tattooed, to show a rebellious side – though as in the extract, for them to be covered up is better. This is supported in a few other articles, even when employment had not been the main focus of the piece:

'The student wants to be a teacher for disabled children - and she's aware being covered in tattoos won't help her get a job. She said: "My mum said I should calm down with the tattoos now - although I don't think my teaching ability is affected by

how many tattoos I have. "But I would never get something that I couldn't cover up under clothes." (Robinson, 2016)

'Previously I had to cover my arms up in work with long sleeves. Now, though, I'm going through the menopause, having had cancer, and I can't bear to be too warm, so my employer is fine with me wearing short sleeves - even though my tattoos can be seen' (Ireland, 2016)

A few interesting expectations are threaded through these extracts, though they both link in the construction of the body being regulated through the need to cover up the tattoos. In the first of the two extracts, the journalist positions tattoos and intelligence/employability as antithetical. Despite the level of perceived intelligence, a clear message is produced, with attention being paid to the body, and those who wish to be employable should think about these factors when deciding upon a tattoo. Given the importance of employability in our society, the body is regulated heavily from this perspective, with those who cannot get a job because of their tattoos serving as a morality tale for those who are thinking about getting a tattoo. However, the second extract that is presented adds another element to this regulation and how the employable body is understood. The woman in the extract provides detail of significant bodily changes, which have taken precedent over the visibility of her tattoos at work. Rather than focusing on the meaning of the tattoo itself, the extract focuses on the bodily issues that she has experienced as a woman, leading to her tattoos being on display. Her personal narrative is not produced as readable through her tattoos, but is linked to her age – and as research suggests, age plays a part in the perceived level of responsibility a person has (Dukes & Stein, 2014).

I noted that regret and responsibility was common within the cautionary tales that were presented in the articles, and these tales

were imbued with alcohol consumption, age, and general constructions of recklessness:

'She is the woman with Britain's most embarrassing tattoo. Holly Ashton awoke after a drunken party to discover a man's WILLY on her shoulder...' "I had tattoo parties with my mates. We'd have some drinks and tattoo each other - it was stupid." It was during one of those parties that things got out of hand. "I let my mates draw whatever they wanted," sighs Holly. "I have the word 'Dyke' on my ankle, and then one drew the penis on my shoulder... "I had to keep it covered up in the summer; if I went swimming I tried to cover it with plasters because I didn't want children seeing it.'" (Laws, 2015)

Here, the cautionary tale now centres around her wanting to cover her body, both in summer, when bodies are generally more on display, and also around children, suggesting that the tattoo imagery is not 'safe' for young eyes. The regulation is evident through her want to cover her body – 'I had to' – despite the fact that she has a choice here, the alternative option of having the tattoo imagery on display is produced as the 'wrong' thing to do. She positions her tattoo as something immature and shameful, something which cannot be shared in 'polite society'. This shame is supported by the article opening with the claim that she has 'Britain's most embarrassing tattoo'. She puts distance between her adult self and her younger self, which positions the tattoos as a youthful mistake, something you will outgrow and regret. The tattoos are further compounded as a bad decision through the inclusion of them being done by friends, rather than professional tattoo artists, and also by the fact that they were drinking. This extract reiterates a point made in tattoo research – that tattooed women (especially the 'regretful' tattooed woman) are positioned as heavy drinkers, as well as promiscuous and unattractive (Swami & Furnham, 2007). The

imagery itself is important here – her body and tattoo choices would be constituted differently if she had chosen more feminine, soft, and dainty imagery, rather than more explicit and sexually suggestive imagery. The difference between what would be considered appropriate and inappropriate tattoos is linked to appropriate and inappropriate womanhood. The regret within the extract is produced as regret for spoiled feminine identity on her skin (Dann et al., 2016). Regardless of the imagery, there is a running theme within the articles that tattoos should be done by professional artists – something the skilful consumer would do (Gill, 2008)- as those who will do their own will come to regret their decision:

'Tracey Chatterley, 46, a drama school principal with a son and a daughter aged 13 and ten, would desperately love her tattoo lasered off if only she could afford the £1,500 she's been quoted. She says she utterly regrets the £40 design that has encircled her left bicep for 20 years. I dread the summer,' she says. I am that woman who wears cardigans in the height of a heat wave.' Tracey, from Bedfordshire, succumbed in her mid-20s because it was the cool thing my girlfriends were doing'...Then, in her early-30s Tracey realised she'd made a huge mistake. I'd just had my children and the decades stretched out in front of me. The prospect of being a gran with a tattoo wasn't cool, it was ridiculous'' (Goldwin, 2017)

Here, there are multiple positionings expressed that play a part in the regret of the tattoo. The first thing that is mentioned along with her name and age, is her role as a mother. The tattoo is produced as a youthful mistake, something that motherhood has enabled her to realise, constructing a sense of maturity and responsibility. In this extract, motherhood is positioned as transformative – a move from the self to selfless (Gorman & Fritzsche, 2002), a key element to 'good' motherhood. The regulation here does not just encompass the

body of a woman, but also the body of *mother* in respect to good choices.

The passing trends, such as the tattoo of barbed wire wrapped around the arm of the 1990s (Lynch, 2014) visibly show the age of the wearer, through the knowledge of the time that the trend was in fashion. In relation to her own tattoo narrative, the tattoo is positioned as a disavowal – it is an admission of wrongdoing ('made a huge mistake'). In this sense, her tattoo is not done in the right way, which constructs the fashion tattoo as the 'wrong' way to do a tattoo.

As well as the tattoo being discussed as something she did in her youth, the choice of wording to describe getting it – she 'succumbed', suggests that it was an act of conformity to trends of the time. The comment also makes reference to the stereotype that people make decisions on younger life that they will then regret (Madfis & Arford, 2013) and they have not given responsible consideration for their future (Dickson, Dukes, Smith, & Strapko, 2014). It also implies that women should 'be' a certain way as they age, and having a tattooed body does not fit with the ideal notion of what women should look like as they age. The warning to readers can be seen here – avoid making permanent markings on the body based on trends. In effect, this positions *taste* rather than fashion as what defines good style (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016), and draws on normative middle-class ideals for what is considered as good taste (Lawler, 2005).

Another female role is brought up in the last part of the extract, the role as grandmother, which re-constitutes her body again in playing this role, and what it means to be a grandmother. As produced in the extract, it is not okay to be a tattooed grandmother – it violates dominant ideals of 'The Grandmother' as little old women, caring, doting, selfless in providing care for the family (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). In this sense, the various positionings mentioned here, such as age, gender, and class, serve

to regulate the female body in relation to the multiple roles that women have – with those relating to the family and care being more important than the body of a woman in its own right.

A further element in the media construction of Tattoo Cautionary Tales is the embedding of health warnings, provided by 'experts' who appear throughout the articles. I found that wherever a serious or sensitive topic was discussed, there would usually be a section towards the end of the article that presents the reader with a warning, as outlined by 'experts' in the field, providing expert information so that the reader can make an informed 'decision'. As seen in the extract below, the information presented is often biased, and presents tattoos and tattooed bodies in a particular way:

'Dr Mckay said you should never go for the cheapest option when looking at permanent medical procedures like tattooing. Customers can end up with permanent scarring on their face or even serious, life threatening illnesses from dodgy operators.' (Ingram, 2016)

The article itself discusses the 'dangers' of cosmetic tattooing, specifically permanent make up, and provides examples of women who have been left scarred from the procedures. Imbued within the extract is the construction of professionalism, and the importance of quality when undertaking such a procedure – there are strong classed overtones in the need to seek a 'professional' over a 'dodgy operator'. This idea is supported by other articles where 'do it yourself' tattoos are positioned as 'wrong', given the lack of expertise to carry them out. Within this construction of professionalism is also money, suggesting that the more money that is paid, the better the procedure will be. This is given as a cautionary tale as less money could lead to facial (visible) scarring, and illness.

Perhaps most evident within the extract is the positioning of the tattoo as a consumer product – the mentioning of money, and the

term 'customer' used to describe people that get them. This changes the way that the tattoo is viewed, positioning it as an item for consumption, an object on the body, which then serves to commodify the body it is on. The inclusion of money suggests a level of quality, which from this position, means the that body will be read in a particular way, also suggesting a level of quality. In this way, the body is regulated through the consumer practices that it takes part in. The moral panic about women's beauty and cosmetic surgery is perpetuated here (Pitts-Taylor, 2008), and links to the sexualised focus of moral panics on the bodies of women (Gill, 2007) – to risk scarring is to risk not being appealing or attractive.

Some of the warnings presented about tattoos did not actively mention the body itself, but do infer something about the kind of person who may get a tattoo:

'very little is known about the effects of modern day tattoo ink on the human body. The lack of research and data is worrisome because some of the key ingredients are known to make people sick or die...Tattoos can camouflage moles, making it difficult to monitor tattooed patients for skin cancer. And tattoo ink ingredients like cadmium have been found in lymph nodes, which help filter waste from the body.' (Moodie, 2016)

Here, a serious health warning is presented that suggests a tattoo can kill you. However, this assertion is made in relation to a *lack* of knowing about the effects, rather than research that does support this being an effect of tattoos. There are specific links made to serious illness, and this is also linked in the extract to the extent that the tattoo covers the skin – the more skin that is covered, the greater the potential that moles be 'camouflaged', hinting at cancerous potential. Rather than providing narratives from tattooed people, as with the other extracts, this one focuses on tattoos from the side of research and science. This produces the body as an object of study,

constituting tattooed bodies as 'at risk' from potential health risks. As seen in research focusing on neoliberal attitudes towards health and risk, being unable to modify your lifestyle as to eliminate risky behaviours is effectively seen as a failure to look after the self (Petersen, 1996). In this sense, the articles serve as a morality tale for people looking to get tattooed, and should instead regulate their 'risky' behaviours to avoid been seen as failing to look after the self. Discourses of risk in health promotion regulate the body (Lupton, 1993), and constructs the tattoo as 'too risky' for the self, and for society.

In summary of the cautionary tales of being tattooed, the underlying assumption in the extracts presented is that tattoos as associated with regret and (a lack of) responsibility, which young people will not be aware of until this age, or until their societal 'roles' change. Articles that discuss tattoos alongside 'expert' views give the reader the opportunity to be informed, to be skilful consumers in their tattoo choices, though it is clear which choice is right and which is wrong.

4.3 Tattoos as a trend

The final discourse produced within the articles constituted tattoos as a trend, a fleeting fashion, and a sign of the times. This is pitted against ideas about the 'traditional' tattoos of older generations, and the kinds of people who made and bore them. The trend based construction of tattoos was heavily classed within the articles, with specific mention to how middle-class women are taking on the tattoo trend:

While once you'd have to venture down a back alley to a dingy studio, where a tattoo 'artist' - in the loosest sense of the word - would ink on an angry looking rose or anchor to the sound of blasting rock music, today's tattoo parlours are smarter than most spas. More surprisingly, tattoos are increasingly transcending traditional class boundaries: 28 per cent of

professionals have gone under the needle, against 27 per cent of those who define themselves as working class.’ (Sturgis, 2014)

Two polar views are constructed within this extract, with tattoos once being seen as ‘dingy’ and unappealing, the preserve of labourers and sailors, people of a ‘particular class’, against their repositioning as a luxury product, better suited to a ‘spa’. In this way, the tattoo is gentrified - appropriated and recreated for the use of the middle classes.

The demographics of tattooing reflects this process of gentrification – almost a third of “professionals” are now tattooed, only marginally more than those who identify as working-class. As discussed by Kern (2012), bodies become a site upon which gentrification is fought for – identity is literally inscribed upon the body through the tattoo, and the middle-class are changing the landscape for which tattoos are understood by attaining them. The explicit reference to tattoos as ‘art’ and tattooists as ‘artists’ further supports the gentrification of the practice (Halnon & Cohen, 2006; Thompson, 2015). As the tattoo has been increasingly commodified, the middle-class tattoo has been produced as acceptable. This reconstitutes the tattoo itself as something that a middle-class person might do, and therefore be seen as ‘good’ (if done correctly), rather than just be associated with working class individuals, and not be something that is desirable. I would go as far as to suggest that commodification has made the middle-class tattoo something of a status symbol – an acceptable form of rebellion, when done ‘right’. However, there is a certain way in which these tattoos are acceptable amongst the middle class:

‘My corporate girlfriends working in the City in high-flying jobs for big banks are tattooed, albeit on their feet or hipbones, with their signs of “rebellion” well-covered by crisp white shirts and Chanel pumps.’ (Della-Ragione, 2015)

Whilst the tattoo itself may be more normalised within this societal

group, it is the way that the tattoo is presented that makes it acceptable or not. Specifically within this extract, the author states locations on the body that are produced as acceptable – ‘feet or hipbones’ – parts of the female body that are considered appropriate for tattoo coverage. The way that tattoos are represented in this context are tasteful, small and delicate (Adams, 2009a). In this context, tattoos are acceptable on the bodies of women if they are dainty and discreet (Adams, 2009a) - feminine, girly, and attractive. These feminine, attractive tattoos are decorative objects, described alongside ‘crisp white shirts and Chanel pumps’, as markers of social class. This both opens up the consumption of tattoos to the middle class, and delimits the ‘right’ way to do it: small, girly tattoos that are decorative and feminine, and do not challenge dominant ideals of middle class femininity. Size and placement are just as important, with small and discreet tattoos being the ‘right’ way to perform tattooed femininity.

Fuelling the class-based constructions of tattoos and producing a sense of what is acceptable and what is not, is the inclusion of celebrity tattoos and the trends they follow within the articles. More specifically, particular celebrities are mentioned – the ‘right’ kind of celebrity - which produces a particular understanding of the tattoo:

‘Take actress Judi Dench who has “carpe diem” inked on her right wrist, a present from her daughter for her 81st birthday. Then there’s TV presenter David Dimbleby, who had a scorpion tattooed on his shoulder at 75. Samantha Cameron has a dolphin on her right foot (which she always covered up for visits to the Queen). And, of course, fuelling the trend is a dizzying array of celebrities, who seem to compete over who can cram the most artwork onto their expensively toned flesh.’ (Goldwin, 2017)

The mention of Samantha Cameron, the wife of the former UK prime minister, functions to underscore the anodyne acceptability of such a tattoo – even the prime minister’s wife (often represented as stylish and tasteful in the pages of *The Daily Mail*) has one. Samantha Cameron provides an example that distinguishes between the tasteful, middle class tattoo, and the excess of the ‘array of celebrities’ who get ‘too many’ tattoos. With tattooed bodies, excess is positioned as too tacky, too much, and not feminine (Francombe-Webb & Silk, 2016). The normalcy with which Samantha Cameron is positioned within this extract positions the tattoo in a particular way for the conservative readership of *The Daily Mail*. For many, it may be the case that Samantha Cameron does not represent a ‘normal’ example of a tattooed woman, but does however produce and reproduce notions of the ‘right’ way to do middle class femininity. The fact that she does not represent a ‘normal’ tattooed woman emphasises the significance of the cultural shift the article is articulating. The fact that this attractive, public school educated woman, who epitomises the establishment, has a tattoo.

It is clear that the celebrities picked for this article are producing a specific point about being tattooed – if these middle-class, well-respected people are doing it, then it is acceptable for other middle-class people to do so also. Framing the tattoo as consumption is seen within this extract, similar to the previous, referring to tattoos as ‘artwork’, as well as mentioning how one of the tattoos was bought as a present. By commodifying the tattoo, it is produced as something worth spending money on (Halnon & Cohen, 2006), and displaying it in the right way, as you would do with artwork being hung in the home. As noted by DeMello (2000), for middle-class individuals to appropriate tattooing for themselves is to further perpetuate social differences between classes.

The final point in relation to tattoos as a trend shows the shift in constructions of tattooed bodies, as evident when parents or grandparents are mentioned in the articles. Tattoos are viewed differently to how previous generations have made sense of them, which serves to show how some of the regulatory elements of tattoo constructions have persevered with time:

Maggie usually covers up, keeping each and every one of her tats hidden so her mom and dad, Linda and Randy, don't associate her with the hoodlums they've always assumed get inked. "My parents think people who get tattoos are people with motorcycles, [who] probably dabble in drugs, and just are probably kind of lowlifes." (Stern, 2015)

The woman in the article, Maggie, has grown up with a particular understanding of what tattooed people are like, as produced by her parents. Whilst the article discusses how she has resisted against this outdated view of tattooed bodies by being so heavily tattooed herself, she self-regulates when around her parents, therefore re-producing the construction that tattooed people are not good, as she covers herself up when in their company. This produces a sense that whilst tattoos may be 'acceptable' in some societal contexts, there is a recognition that there has been a time where they are not okay, and this understanding is re-produced by her not showing her parents a different construction of tattooed people. This is not to say that when parents are aware of tattoos, that it makes them any better or more acceptable – parent comments were dotted through a number of the articles – specifically of the 'regret /warning' kind:

'It certainly is a statement. I don't look like a "tattooed" person...At Sunday lunch with my parents my mother gasped..."why do you always have to look like a Christmas tree?" she lamented. "When are you going to realise that less is more?" My father assumed it was henna and would wash off

until I informed him otherwise. He told my mum: "Leave her alone. She is an adult now." But my mother didn't let up, calling to offer to pay for laser treatment the next morning. She just couldn't comprehend how I could actually like my tattoo.' (Della-Ragione, 2015)

Excess is produced as an issue within this extract, producing a sense that tattoos can be 'too much', and that in this instance, the daughter's tattoos were excessive. Excess here is produced as a 'wrong' way to do tattoos, and produces a very middle-class distain for being 'too decorative', to the point that her mother offered to pay for the tattoo removal.

Overall, the positioning of tattoos as a trend produces them as an object to be bought, which commodifies the body in a particular way. The 'skilful consumer' spends money on quality work, serving to produce a particular understanding of that body. The influence of the celebrity within this sphere cannot be denied, though the choice of the celebrities discussed within the article perpetuates a particular notion of femininity – mostly white and middle-class – which reconstitutes the tattoo as an object of desire for middle-class women. The difference in generational constructions of tattoos highlights the shift we are experiencing in tattoo acceptance, though this shift is still regulated by what is considered as 'right' and 'wrong' on the female body.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the ways that women's bodies are policed does not change with the addition of tattoos. Just as there are 'right' and 'wrong' ways to 'do' femininity, there are 'right' and 'wrong' ways in constructing the tattooed feminine body. Whilst middle class notions of dainty, small, and discreet tattoos are revered in respect to tattoos, working class constructions are produced for those women whose tattoos are too big, loud, or overt that they fall under public

judgement and scrutiny. The intersection of class is an important factor throughout the articles – it regulates what is considered as tasteful, and therefore ‘good’, and produces tattoos as an overt marker of class. Regardless of the readership, all of the articles selected produced constructions of tattooed feminine bodies in a similar manner, regulating the body and how it should be ‘properly’ presented. Overall, the discourses that are produced within the media are exactly the kinds of things that you would expect to find about women’s tattooed bodies – there is nothing new presented. They utilise the ‘expert’ in making sense of tattoos on women, they recount the horror stories that are intended to turn ‘good’ people away from such ‘risky’ behaviours, age is constructed as a marker of responsibility, and they all perpetuate a normative view of femininity, and of feminine tattoos. The discourses that are produced here are in direct contrast to those produced within the interviews, which explore the nuances and complexities of being a tattooed woman.

Chapter 5: Regulation and Social Norms

In the previous chapter, the analysis focused on media constructions of tattooed women, encompassing discourses of normalcy and authenticity. The next four chapters focus on the analysis of the interviews conducted with women who have tattoos, exploring four overarching discursive formations: regulation and norms, femininities, bodies, and meaning. In each of these chapters I consider what is produced from the data, exploring the ways that tattooed women are represented and constructed.

In this analysis chapter, I explore the women's talk about regulative practices and social norms, with a specific focus on how the women draw on regulative discourses around gender, class, sexuality, and age to construct 'right' and 'wrong' ways of being tattooed. This includes regulative ideas about age and gender (what's 'appropriate' for the ageing woman), intersections of gender and 'mothering', and its implications for the positioning of tattooed mothers, and finally, how professionalism is negotiated as a potentially regulative construct for women who have tattoos.

5.1 – 'Right' and 'wrong' ways of being tattooed

In this section, I explore how both overt and implicit 'rules' about tattoos and femininity are constituted in women's accounts, and how participants narrated their stories in relation to these regulative discourses. In particular, these are constituted around normative assumptions of the 'right' and 'wrong' way to be tattooed, and how making the 'right' choice is suggestive of the position of 'good citizen' (McRobbie, 2004). The following extract provides an example of how not to 'do' tattoos:

I think like with the bloggers and stuff on Instagram, people watch others too much, then it's like well you've got that so I want that. I've stopped reading magazines because the amount of shit that's in them, you have to live like this and you have to eat this and you have to do this, you know, and I'm thinking,

why (laughs) I don't get it, I'll give you an example, like Cara Delevingne had something to do with bacon tattoos right, I don't know if it's just fake ones, random, but I guarantee you right, that they'll be at least one person following her on Instagram who has a bacon tattoo, do you know what I mean, it doesn't mean anything to them, they'll just do it because of who she is, it's insane [Betty]

In this extract Betty positions herself as a 'skilful consumer' (McRobbie, 2009), a person who is 'in the know' in respect to making the 'right' choices about her tattoos. It is notable that her focus here is not on her own tattoo choices, but rather on the poor tattoo choices of other people. This enables her to construct a sense of distance between herself as skilled consumer of tattoos, and 'them' those who make poor choices. She suggests that these 'other' tattooed women imitate 'celebrities' or 'well-known' people, position this negatively, reinforcing the notion that these people are not making authentic tattoo choices. Through constructing a me versus the other notion within the extract, she is giving herself space to resist criticism, so that she is not associated with the same poor choices they make. At the same time, she also positions herself as 'knowing', and above/better than those who would choose to get a tattoo after following a celebrity, therefore, her tattoos are better – she appreciates the artwork, and has taste with respect to her choices (DeMello, 2000). She gives an 'extreme' example of someone with a bacon tattoo, representing something silly and seemingly not an authentic or meaningful choice. The bacon tattoo is an example of a 'tacky' tattoo (Dann et al., 2016), and as discussed by Allen & Mendick (2013), female 'improper celebrities' – those associated with social media and other similar media outlets – are considered to have low cultural value, with the construction of 'tackiness' being normative within this social space. Betty looks to remove herself from this association as she positions herself as independent and not

someone who follows trends ('people watch others too much...I've stopped reading magazines'). She is producing a notion that conformity to trends is tacky, and she does not like to follow trends – it is not so much rebellion, but more an anti-conformity, which is positioned as a 'good' choice and one that is true to herself. This construction of the 'authentic' bearer of tattoos is good, because it rejects conformity to fashion trends in favour of 'choosing' imagery that is personal to the wearer.

In this extract, Betty details a chronological self-development; a before and after story is given in respect to her journey as a skilful consumer. She states that she 'stopped reading magazines because the amount of shit that's in them', which highlights that there was a time when she did read them, and there has been a change in the view towards conformity and trends ('you have to live like this and you have to eat this and you have to do this, you know, and I'm thinking, why'). This positioning of herself as 'enlightened' suggests that she is a better person, more knowing, and capable of better decisions. She has challenged what she considered as feminine and the associated behaviours, and described herself as having moved beyond a preoccupation with feminised ideals. – In this sense, she has become 'skilful' in seeing these societal constructions of femininity and creating her own understanding of femininity (McRobbie, 2009). In respect to the language that is being produced here, she draws attention to her actively thinking about these constructions – she is not passively agreeing with and conforming to them. This is related back to tattoos, and shows how she makes sense of tattoos through her commenting that the tattoos of those who copy celebrity trends will not 'mean anything to them'. Here, she produces a sense that tattoos are done 'right' if they hold meaning to the wearer, and also, that a tattoo without meaning does not produce an authentic sense of self – it comes to represent trends in society, rather than the person (Riley & Cahill, 2005). The notion of

authenticity here functions to legitimate the importance of meaning in tattoos, and produces a construction of 'tackiness' in those who do not get their tattoos for the 'right' reasons. Through the extract, she positions herself as more aware, as not likely to follow tattoo trends, and ultimately, of being more authentic.

Continuing with a similar focus on the kinds of tattoo choices being related to authenticity, Gabrielle talks about her views towards joke-related tattoos:

A lady had every single name of her cats that she had, every cat that she had on her back it was covered, it was covered (pause) what's bad is when people have like shhh or moustaches written like on their finger (laughs) I do think that's a bit weird ent it (laughs) it's just a funny thing isn't it they're just messing about its like a joke [Gabrielle]

Rather than this being about the tattoos in themselves being the issue, this shows the jokey-style tattoos, that aren't considered as 'serious' or 'normal' tattoos. Whilst the first woman that Gabrielle refers to seems to have tattoos that are of meaning to her, the sheer number of tattoos, constructed as excessive, and the subject matter, the repetition of cats, sees this woman produced as different – the tattoos are too different to be taken seriously. The repetition of the fact that this woman was 'covered' emphasises the issue that is held with women who have extensive body coverage. This shows that even within the community of those who are tattooed – often constructed as the 'other' – that certain types of tattoos are considered as too much (Thompson, 2015).

Like Betty, Gabrielle positions herself as *different* from other women with tattoos, by talking about the jokey tattoos that other people have, she reinforces the construction that she is 'knowing' in her own tattoo choices. What is different here is that the cat tattoos that are referred to seem to hold meaning to the wearer, and whilst meaning is usually seen as the 'right' way to do a tattoo, in this instance, it is

the lack of seriousness that plays a role in the perception of the tattooed person.

She also gives examples of other tattoos that she considers as 'bad' – tattoos that have been seen to be 'trending' in recent times (Scott, 2016). This directly relates to the discourse of 'tattoos as trend' within the media, which focused on tattoos that were inauthentic or too excessive to be bad choices. The classed overtones appear more explicitly within the media than they do within the extracts presented here. In respect to these examples, she produces a sense that joke related tattoos are not a good choice. These examples are also positioned as tattoos that are almost for the benefit of other people – they are there to make other people laugh, and it is their reaction that is sought after, rather than the tattoo being obtained for the wearer themselves. Similar to previous accounts, for a tattoo to be done right, it has to represent an authentic sense of self – following fashionable trends is not positioned as authentic. Through the tattoo being constructed as a joke, a representation is produced of the wearer (Kosut, 2000a), which is not seen as 'right'.

As a position is being created that meaningful tattoos are authentic and 'right' for the wearer, it seems plausible to assume that tattoos provide an external representation of someone's personality. This is discussed by Jean in her interview:

I think tattoos in general do show peoples personality cus its like what represents me, erm so yeah, so even people that do choose like a random thing it has to mean something to that person or you wouldn't get it, unless it's something ridiculous like Harry Styles had all the names of the girls he slept with when he was on holiday or some guy that got the Nandos
[Jean]

The tattoo is initially constituted as something personally meaningful, that 'shows the personality'. The tattoo is a form of self-expression, and this is what it communicates to others. For a tattoo to be seen

as expressing the self, it needs to be more profound than a girl's name, or a company logo – for Jean, the tattoos she mentions here do not convey a sense of self. At the start of this extract, Jean makes a statement regarding the link between personality and tattoos, because this is the experience she produces. From her perspective, this is the 'right' way for a tattoo to be done, and she had done it the 'right' way because her tattoos are meaningful to her and representative of the things that are important to her. Even in the consideration of people who might get 'a random thing' tattooed, she still sees this in the sense that it must have meaning to the wearer – she cannot see that it would have no significance, because a tattoo must have meaning. Within her interview, she discusses how her tattoo might be considered as different (Harry Potter related) and that also she would get a jar of Nutella tattooed because she loves Nutella. In this sense, this example may be considered as random to other people, but still contains meaning for her, showing how she makes sense of tattoo choices that are informed by her own. This shows the nuance in her response, and the position that is produced from this – how she reads others 'random' tattoos is 'wrong' and not meaningful, but a seemingly random object (the Nutella) is not random to her, therefore she does not position herself as wrong or inauthentic.

In this section, I have explored how practices of tattooing, whilst in some ways seen as 'subversive' have become subject to practices of normalisation and regulation. The women within this section all position themselves as knowing, and others as wrong. What they constitute as the 'right' way to be tattooed is produced through how they have experienced being tattooed themselves. The social norms in relation to tattoos serves to function a policing of tattooing, and the right way to do it.

5.2 – Generational norms produced about tattoos

For most participants, the meaning of their tattoos was located in the present (intimate relationships, children), and some of them drew on the differences they were aware of in relation to previous generations, and how these perceptions of tattoos from different eras produce certain constructions of tattooed women today. Some of them discussed these constructions in relation to their own tattoos, whilst others produce a 'then versus now' understanding of tattooed female bodies. Here, one of the youngest of the women who were interviewed discussed the relationship between her tattoos and her family:

I've got five, I've booked my next one as well which I'm so excited about, erm but yeah no I, my mum is very, old school, she's very like, no piercings, no tattoos, what are you doing with your life, and I'm like right I'm going to leave the country (laughs) [Violet]

Violet states the number of tattoos that she currently has, along with excitement for the tattoos that she will be getting soon. This is spoken in contrast with how she then relates this to her mum's feelings towards her tattoos – starting with 'yeah no' and the tone of voice changed, audibly within the interview, as she discussed her mum's views on tattoos. She states that her mum is very 'old school', implying a conservative view on body modifications more associated with decades that adhered to ideal and traditional views of femininity and adornments (Riley & Cahill, 2005). The link is also made between body modifications and a sense of uncertainty in life direction ('no tattoos, what are you doing with your life'), relating to the view that tattoos are associated with a lack of responsibility, ambition, and planning (Dickson et al, 2014).

Violet suggests that her mother's views on tattoos, life choices and lifestyle was a factor in her decision to go travelling. She describes leaving the country as enabling her to make decisions for herself and not be constrained by the views of her family, and it is when she is

abroad that she gets her first tattoo. This sense of rebellion against her mum's generation's views about tattoos is supported by her statement within the extract that she has five tattoos – she positions herself as breaking with the restrictions imposed by her mother's views, and frames getting tattoos as a form of liberation.

This sense of rebellion and non-conformity to 'traditional' ideas about women is also discussed by other women in the interviews:

Erm, but I had it done yeah it was when I was seventeen so it was there for twenty years , erm, and, yeah so that was that I had that done, parents hit the roof the usual, sort of stuff
[Belle]

In Belle's interview, her parents' attitude to her tattoo is only very briefly mentioned. The brief mentioning produces a sense that her parent's reaction was something to be expected, given the negative attitudes towards tattoos at the time. However, the expectation of their reaction did not stop Belle from getting the tattoo in the first place – despite the negative association, she got one herself.

The previous two extracts produce a change in generational constructions of tattoos from the previous generation, to the present – though they might not be completely accepted, the level of acceptability has changed to the extent that they could get the tattoos that they wanted without too much fear of reprisal, and they are able to express themselves in this way. What is produced within these extracts is the idea of parental expectation, a want for their daughters to be 'good' daughters (Hamid, Johansson, & Rubenson, 2011; Jackson & Lyons, 2013), and draw on normative constructions about what good girls do, and what they do not.

Taking a different perspective to the acceptability of tattoos across generations, Nora, another of the younger interviewees, discusses her feelings towards an older generation of women who have tattoos:

I hate seeing erm, middle aged women with like a cupid on their shoulder and it's all blurred and, yeah and I don't really

like that, but I do like the bigger, sleeves not the little ones they got when they were you know, fifteen or whatever, it's almost expected of younger people than it is of older people of that generation not, like my grandparents and my parents don't like tattoos, whereas I love tattoos, so you'd think, that that age to have them would be a far bolder statement [Nora]

There are quite a few issues at work within the extract, centred around age. As she points out, issues surrounding tattoos are mostly focused on the younger generation, with disapproval coming from family members. Here though, she discusses her own opinions towards older generations who have tattoos, and more specifically, certain kinds of tattoos. She draws a distinction between those women who get the smaller, daintier tattoos in a way that they are not being alternative or different enough. For her, the older generation of women who have larger, bolder tattoos are the ones to be admired, because they would have faced criticism for their choices during times when tattoos were not seen in the same kinds of ways that they are today. Nora produces a sense of rebellion, a non-conformity in the tattoos that she likes, as she discusses bigger, bolder tattoos as the ones that she favours. It is a non-conformity to societal views on tattoos, but also, non-conformity to expectations of a previous generation, and their perceptions of tattoos.

There is an underlying theme of rebellion within the extract, as the bigger and bolder tattoos will inevitably be the ones that are visible and more open to judgement by others. She states that she admires this rebellious act, the non-conformity, pointing out that it would have been more of a rebellious thing for the older generation to do when they were younger, than it would be for the younger generation of this age.

This generational account of tattooing is extended by Artoria, who talks about this in a way that exposes the intersectional construction

of women's tattoo practices: Linking the discussions of generational differences in perceptions of tattoos specifically to gender, Artoria notes her own experiences with older generations of her family and what they thought of her tattoos:

P: She's seen my dads, its my mum's mum, she's seen my dads, but

R: Does your mum have any tattoos?

P: No, she's seen my dads and he's like a guy but because I'm like, the first granddaughter, to have tattoos, and she saw the tiny one on my ankle and she was like [stern voice] is that a tattoo, and I was like yes [Artoria]

The most interesting point that stands out from this extract is the way that Artoria normalises her grandmother's response to her dad's tattoos rather than her own. The fact that 'he's like a guy' implies that this makes it acceptable, and it is a normal thing for a man to have. Despite the fact that Artoria has multiple tattoos, she draws upon the 'tiny one on my ankle' as the one that her grandmother does not approve of, emphasising the level of her distaste towards tattoos by mentioning this one rather than her other larger pieces of work. This extract does not just show the change in perceptions towards tattoos over generations, but rather, shows the difference in perceptions towards tattoos from an entirely gendered lens, serving to normalise tattoos for men, but not for women.

In summary, the generational difference towards tattoos on women has shown varying levels of acceptability that relate directly to issues of age and of gender. Whilst it may be seen as more acceptable for younger women today to be tattooed that it was for younger women of previous generations to be tattooed, these levels of acceptability are still fraught with issues. Though, it is not just about the level of acceptability of a tattoo – the women produce a sense of resistance against normative temporal constructions of the 'good' feminine woman. The distain from the parents is almost expected, but

underlying this is what the parents expect from their 'good' daughters. Placement with the family and the importance given to certain gender specific roles plays a part in how they are viewed, as well as parental conservative attitudes. What the family dynamics did show is that the women who discussed generational issues did so with an underlying theme of rebellion, with an admiration for those who were visibly tattooed in times that may not have been as accepting as now.

5.3 - The regulation of tattooed mothers

The analysis presented here explores how motherhood becomes subject to scrutiny through the tattoos the women have, showing the importance of the meaning of the tattoo. Being a mother is embodied in part through the tattoo – the role is embedded in the skin. Exploring how women talk about gender, motherhood and class makes apparent the intersections of these in the production of ideas of femininity and tattooed femininity. Consider the following extract:

No, no, erm, it's only got my name and my sons name and a rose, that was that was it (pause) erm but yes I would like it covering over but I would like the names back [Ruth]

Many women have tattoos that include their children's names. This is an 'acceptable' form of tattooing for women (and a valorised one for men). The extract shows the importance of the content of the tattoo, especially in relation to her child. Her son is reproduced as an object on her skin, with the physical name being more important than the imagery surrounding it. There is a simplicity in the way that she describes the tattoo – 'only' – suggesting that it only includes what is important. The rose, whilst signifying a feminine choice, is something she 'would like covering over' - but would still like to keep the name. This shows that the surrounding imagery is not what carries the meaning; the imagery surrounding the tattoo can evolve and develop with the body as time passes (Kosut, 2000a), but the permanence of her child's name represents the permanence of her

role as mother. The tattoo is positioned as a physical marker of motherhood, with the name representing a sense of ownership, and pride in its display. Her son will always be a part of her through the tattoo – he is hers. They are tied together as mother and son, and this is also represented through the tattoo. Name tattoos on women have also been discussed in relation to the exchange of value of the female body for men (MacCormack, 2006), usually as partners, signifying male ownership over their body rather than agency on the part of the woman. For a woman to tattoo her body with the name of her child produces a different understanding of ownership, over their body and their embodiment of the role of mother. The embedding of her son's name in the tattoo explicitly links his name to her body, what she has physically produced, and how that is represented on her skin.

However, name tattoos have not always been socially constructed as desirable, especially in relation to names of partners (Kang & Jones, 2007) with this specific idea falling out of fashion. This sentiment is echoed by Irene, who discusses the way she embodies motherhood through her tattoo, in the 'right' way:

I definitely will have his name [son] on me, but I just don't know how I'd have it, like I just think like just having a name written down, I just don't find it classy, I'd put it into a tattoo like them [points to tattoo with grandparent's initials in], like you wouldn't know, but that's how I like my tattoos like based around it, like I'd have his initials, and then some flowers...I wouldn't ever want just a name [Irene]

Here, the definitive statement that the participant makes in relation to having her son's name tattooed on her denotes a wanting to embed motherhood onto the skin, but in the 'right' way. The marking of women's bodies with the names of men is a tradition held within gangs, with women being marked as the 'property of' their husbands (Thompson, 2015). Regardless of who the name belongs to, it is read

by others as: this body is owned. Despite the fact that there is a tradition for men to also tattoo their bodies with the names of women within hearts or roses (Steward, 2008), this is positioned as heartfelt – like young son's inscribing 'mom' on their bodies (DeMello, 2014) – not an emblem of ownership. This is also seen cross-culturally, with women described as 'marking' their skin with the names of their partners (Ellis, 2008). The name is too obvious – readable, suggesting ownership, and had a history as a working-class emblem of commitment (DeMello, 2014). For the tattoo to be done 'right', she wants it designed as though 'you wouldn't know', so the tattoo becomes private for her, with her skin not so easy to 'read' by others (Fenske, 2007). In this sense, motherhood is a role that is personal to her, and not outwardly obvious through her body. With less focus on just the name, there is less of a production of ownership, and more a construction of 'good' femininity through a meaningful tattoo design.

Further by suggesting that would never want 'just a name', and emphasising the need for a design around it, she underscores the artistic merit of the tattoo. It is not just a mark of ownership, it is a work of art. The re-writing of tattoos as 'artwork' to invest in rather than simply a 'tattoo' both resists the class based positioning as other (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005), and reinscribes it, by making certain kinds of tattoos accessible to and acceptable for middle class women. As I have already discussed, women often justify their tattoos in relation to their 'meaning' (Doss & Hubbard, 2009; Madfis & Arford, 2013; Thompson, 2015). In the extract below, one participant discusses the meaning of her tattoo, as both symbolic of her self-identity, and the links to motherhood:

but this one, on my arm, I only got recently, it's a phoenix, I was kind of wanting something representative of my children so kind of meaningful but not their names or something (laughs) so obvious, so I was kind of looking at three little

humming birds, but then I kind of had a bit of a life change, and erm, I was doing some reading, on coping with relationship break ups (laughs), and now I can't remember exactly but she mentioned this kind of phase, and named it the phoenix, so it kind of came from that really, so, it's meaningful to me, coming up, stronger, and I have three flowers in it one for each child
[Annie]

Of interest here is the transformative process that is described within the tattoo – the phoenix is symbolic of change, evolution, and growth, and embeds this positive growth onto her skin and part of her identity (Dukes & Stein, 2014). This in turn is intertwined with images of motherhood and femininity – flowers that represent her children. The image is one of power, but also of femininity. The strong but feminine image of the phoenix contains the small, delicate flowers, producing this image of her as a strong mother caring for (and containing) her small children. The three flowers are 'just right' in representing her three children – any more or less than this number would impact on the meaning of her tattoo. The tattoo directly links to her role as a mother, positioned in a visible location on the arm for all to see – this reads: I am a strong mother.

The imagery of the phoenix and the flowers is meaningful to her, but it is not overt – not too "obvious". It can't be read by a stranger. It is a communication, written on the skin, but only knowable through intimacy. She laughs off the notion of child's names as being too 'obvious', suggesting that this is a 'wrong' way to show motherhood through a tattoo. Names on the body are depicted as a tattoo faux pas (Telegraph, 2012). As previously discussed names on the skin function to signify ownership, and in this extract, the idea of names on the skin is depicted as laughable, inappropriate. In contrast, she suggests the imagery she has chosen to represent her positioning as mother, and to 'write' her children onto her skin is symbolic, signifying relationship, not ownership.

Both tattooing and the embodiment of motherhood were described in the interviews in ways that were highly regulated – there were clearly right and wrong ways of doing both. As I have already described, many participants saw the meaning of tattoos as important in justifying the body marking. Maud describes a similar tattoo:

I would have another tattoo if it means something, the butterflies, like four butterflies for my family, the four of us, but that was it [Maud]

Here, she positions herself as authentic in respect to her tattoo choices (Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler, 2007), as her tattoos need to 'mean something'. The symbolic meaning behind the tattoo is constructed as a 'good choice', as the tattoo holds personal importance for her. Having the tattoos as both a woman and as a mother, the tattoo being representative of the family shows the 'authentic' self as being the maternal self. There is a prioritisation of motherhood as a 'good' identity for women (McDermott & Graham, 2005). The design itself, a butterfly, is a feminine representation of the family, relating not just to the tattooed body as a mother, but also constructed as 'good femininity' (Roberts, 2012). The stance of 'that was it' as finality for tattoos on her body is explicit in stating an end to her tattoo journey. This reinforces a construction of 'good' femininity, and motherhood, as this is not excessive tattoo consumption.

The extracts analysed here produce a complex construction of the tattooed female body, as interwoven with the role of mother. There is a strong construction of motherhood being tattooed in the 'right' way, with working class constructions of the tattooed mother being constituted as excessive, obvious, and making 'wrong' choices. The ways that meaning and design are produced as symbols of motherhood are important in constructing a representation of a 'good' mother.

The adjustment to motherhood has been noted as influential in the development of women's identities (Laney et al, 2015; Mulherin & Johnstone, 2015), showing how the sense of self can become lost, and reconstituted over time once becoming a mother. In places in this research, some of the women discussed their perceptions of other tattooed mothers, addressing tattoos and mothering as interrelated topics. By discussing their constructions of other tattooed mothers, they reinforced their position as a tattooed mother as the 'right' way to be. Consider the extract below:

Yes I have changed my opinion that's what I was trying to explain, me, alright then this sounds really wrong, a woman from a rough area covered in tattoos loads of kids by different dads those are the type of people you expect it (pause) but now you see more girls coming in that have obviously come from a well, erm, well bought up family, and they've got tattoos, so, you've got two different (end) [Maud]

This extract very clearly draws on an association between tattoos and class. Maud narrates a social shift that moves tattooing from the domain of 'chav mums' to 'nice middle-class women', suggesting that it is this process of gentrification that makes them more socially acceptable to others, and it seems to her. The start point embeds tattooed mothers in the working class, and positioned as bad, making 'poor choices' (Dickson et al, 2014), suggesting a spoiled femininity (Dann et al, 2016) and ultimately a bad mother. The imagery produced from the 'rough area' suggests poverty, crime, and not an ideal upbringing for children. This is followed up by the loaded sentence 'covered in tattoos loads of kids by different dads', which addresses two separate points, linked together by a stereotypical trope of working class tattooed mothers. First, the heavy coverage of tattoos relates to a less than feminine body, suggesting an unappealing woman (Swami, 2011). Second, the multiple children reference relates to this woman as a mother, also less appealing in

her supposed sexual availability (Swami & Furnham, 2007). The key that links these two points together as relating to the body of a tattooed woman and mother is that of excess. The notion of excess is associated with 'chav' culture, and 'excessive' tattoo coverage is described as a typically working class practice (Hollingworth & Williams, 2009). In this sense, like the old 'tramp stamp' the significant coverage is positioned as a kind of spoiled femininity. In contrast, Maud suggests that more recently, tattoos are being worn by 'nice' women from 'well brought up families'. This has effectively rehabilitated the tattoo, making it an acceptable form of body adornment for women of all classes. This produces middle class femininity as the arbiter of acceptable standards for women – if nice middle-class mothers do it, it must be okay.

As she discusses this production of the 'other' tattooed woman, she implicitly positions herself as doing it in the 'right' way – she has two children, rather than 'loads', they have the same dad who is her married partner, rather than 'different dads', and she has one small tattoo on her foot, not 'covered in tattoos'. She avoids the 'excesses' she associates with 'chav' femininity. She achieves this through a juxta positioning of 'nice' and 'chav' femininity, and through an identification of herself with the more 'appropriate' performance of embodied femininity. This underscores how the intersections of class and motherhood function to regulate the performance of embodied femininity.

Another participant also links the number and visibility of tattoos to the number of children, and the suggestion of sexual availability of the woman. The ways that both of these cases are presented are singular, not considered as the norm for mothering, and therefore 'othered' as representing something 'bad':

there's a lady round the corner from me who's got tattoos on her face and her neck, and she's got like quite a lot of kids but she's also got quite a lot of tattoos [Irene]

The language used within this extract is loaded with associations of excess – ‘quite a lot of kids’ and ‘quite a lot of tattoos’, placing them together in a productive way, to effectively conflate them. Like Maud, Irene draws on the construct of ‘excess’ to indicate bad taste, commonness, the reference to the excessive tattoos suggests that they are too much, too ‘tacky’ to represent ‘good’ femininity, and the excess of children denotes a lack of good mothering due to the number who are within her care. The face and the neck areas are specifically mentioned here, described as extreme in tattoo placement. This is an area often considered as taboo for tattoo work, (MacCormack, 2006), and has negative constructions relating to the potential employability (or lack thereof) of the individual (Timming, 2015).

Through their overt and implicit criticism of these women, through their positioning them as ‘other’, and as committing tattoo faux pas, the women distance themselves from these ‘other women’, the bad women, the bad mothers. In contrast, their tattoos are described as meaningful, subtle – they are evidence of both doing ‘tattoos right’ and motherhood right. By discussing tropes of tattooed mothers in relation to excess, they reinforce ‘good’ constructions of mothers as having dainty, small and feminine tattoos (Dann et al, 2016), and caring for a small number of children with a married partner, or as little partners as possible. The notion of excess is heavily classed, with Skeggs (2004) commenting how ‘contained excess’ is acceptable, where limits are imposed, being more tasteful, and thus the domain of the middle class. By being restrained in the number of children that the women have, and in the number of tattoos that they have, they show how they are good, by not going ‘too far’.

In summary, the extracts analysed here produce a complex construction of the tattooed female body, as interwoven with the role of mother. There is a strong construction of motherhood being tattooed in the ‘right’ way, with working class constructions of the

tattooed mother being constituted as excessive, obvious, and making 'wrong' choices. The ways that meaning and design are produced as symbols of motherhood are important in constructing a representation of a 'good' mother. The women here construct themselves as 'authentic', good women, and in doing this, they 'other' some women, also mothers and tattooed, showing the complexities of their positionings. The position of tattooed mother is a regulated and nuanced position, not a universal celebration of being tattooed, as I had thought when I started the research.

5.4 – The construction of professionalism

An area of current cultural controversy is the issue of tattoos in the workplace (Ellis, 2015; Timming, 2015). Whilst most accounts (popular and academic) position tattoos as incompatible with professionalism, because of the association with undesirable behaviour (Mishra & Mishra, 2015), other research suggests that tattoos signify a certain level of creativity and might therefore be regarded as desirable for particular job roles (for example, marketing and design – Singer, 2016). For many of the interviewees, the workplace was a site of contention for them as tattooed women. For example, Betty discusses her issues in relation to the policies that dictate the visibility of her tattoos whilst at work:

R: I suppose as [beauty brand] is a big company, do you think tattoos fits in with them?

P: Not good (laughs) my uniform, is, this blue top [shows me a navy blue, elbow length top]

R: Oh right okay

P: And it sits just below my elbow, so I have to wear a top underneath. My tattoos are on show and it's not something they like to have on show, so I have to wear a long sleeve top underneath

R: So do they say you have to wear that?

P: Well it's not my choice, erm, it's something that like when I go for training they say you need to have something on underneath to cover your tattoos, erm, but saying that, they might be starting to change a little bit. I've purposely gone to conferences or meetings and worn my top without anything underneath, just to get a reaction, because I refuse to hide them [Betty]

The first thing that stands out about this extract is the position of 'employee' as opposed to the recurring theme of 'family' that is threaded throughout her account. In this sense, she is hiding a part of her, and becomes de-personalised through her role as employee. There is a production of a 'personal versus professional' identity within this account, where it is clear that the tattoos, as being personal, are not considered as appropriate for the performance of the professional. In customer service-focused work, tattoos are perceived negatively (Resenhoeft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008) with negative judgements being made relating to the stereotypical 'type' of person who would be visibly tattooed. Further, employers often cite that they would not employ someone with visible tattoos (Timming, 2015), as they feel that it would deter customers from their business.

Whilst Betty does not explicitly discuss a policy towards tattoos that her employer has, it is clear from the extract that there is a 'right' way for Betty to present herself at work, as she says it's 'not my choice' to cover up her tattoos. However, through this statement, there is a choice being produced, whereby it is implied that it is not acceptable for her to not cover her tattoos – to not cover them is to not present herself professionally. Her 'choice' here is regulated by constructions of professionalism in the workplace.

There is however, a production of rebellion within the extract, when she states how she purposely does not cover them in some contexts 'just to get a reaction, because I refuse to hide them'. She produces

certain contexts whereby she can keep them uncovered ('conferences or meetings'), and as discussed just after this in the interview, she still keeps them covered when she is facing customers. The tattoos are produced as a part of her identity as she does not want to hide them, as this would suggest that for work, she must 'hide' a part of herself.

Artoria suggests that workplace policies on tattoos are gendered, and regulate women more strongly than they do men:

in the workplace, men can get away with tattoos, well a lot more, my boyfriend has got like both his arms and his hand done, he's never not been in a job, and I just feel, I don't know whether it's the same, my friend, she's covered everywhere and she can only get a job, she's applied for jobs in care and that and they've turned her away, but they never say why, so now she does factory work, but, there are a lot of men who are tattooed there, so it does seem, I think that, I don't know, I can imagine it being harder for women to get a job, because I think men, for tattoos, it's always gonna be more, normal, than for women that have tattoos [Artoria]

Artoria references the normative value that tattoos are more acceptable for men, something that is confirmed by other research in this area (Swami & Furnham, 2007). She suggests that being tattooed contributes to women being seen as 'unemployable', in particular fields. Care work, which is itself a femininised profession is particularly identified as a sphere in which a female friend could not get work (Resenhoeft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008). In contrast, it was not seen as an impediment to the less overtly gendered arena of factory work. The normalised view of men having tattoos has an impact on the tattooed body in the workplace, with perceptions of tattooed bodies seeming to be an indicator on how the person may act or behave (Heywood et al., 2012). Although this is challenged elsewhere in the interview, nonetheless she appears to position this

gendered construction of tattoos as inevitable, here. Although she identifies other sites of contention in which the tattooed feminine body is acceptable, she nonetheless appears quite resigned to the social value that tattoos and professionalism are incompatible. This produces a construction of what a customer facing employee should look like – and this is without visible tattoos.

It has to be noted that not all employees are as black and white in their reference to tattoos being an issue in the workplace – usually, tattoos fall under guidelines around appearance (Timming, 2015). The inference is made within the extract that it is the fault of the tattoos that prevents her friend from getting work, despite the fact that she cannot be sure of this ('they've turned her away, but they never say why'). The issue surrounding often vague policies makes it difficult to ascertain the reasoning for not getting a job.

Tattoos being considered under the guideline of appearance does not always necessarily help in regard to being treated equally, as discussed by Belle, some aspects of appearance are viewed differently to others when it comes to the workplace:

It's a funny thing isn't it when I worked in business and I worked with you know, boards of companies, erm, definitely I mean I had bright red hair they could tolerate that but tattoos less so, erm, and most you know I worked in a marketing agency and you know everyone's kind of out there, but, they could just about cope with a nose stud but tattoos, mmm, you know there's an expectation that that things will be toned down
[Belle]

Within this extract, there is a difference in the types of workplace and their views towards tattoos. Here, Belle discusses marketing as an example for where people are 'out there', suggesting it would be more acceptable to have a 'different' appearance. There is a suggestion that this could be considered as a more creative

employment role, therefore being a little different in appearance may be expected (Mishra & Mishra, 2015).

She makes explicit reference to the colour of her hair as being 'different' – bright red, a colour that would not be considered as natural. She also talks about piercings – a nose stud – and positions this as just about acceptable, possibly due to the high level of visibility with it being on the face (Doss & Hubbard, 2009). This would suggest that in respect to appearance and 'looking different', the changes in appearance must be those that can be *changed* – that they are not permanent, like tattoos are. The permanence of a tattoo is constructed as an issue for the workplace.

Within the interviews, the majority of the women articulated dissatisfaction with workplaces and their negative attitudes towards tattoos – they did not want to be viewed negatively, but they wanted to be able to show a part of themselves, a part of their identity, with their tattoos. However, issues surrounding first appearance were also discussed, and the understanding that in these contexts, appearance is important:

P: I did hide it when I went for an interview

R: Oh okay

P: When I went to, that's the truth that is, when I went to XXX for the interview, I was like [crosses her leg so the tattooed foot is not on show]

R: Oh really

P: Oh yeah, I didn't want them to judge like old girl, tattoo, what's going on there

R: Old girl with a tattoo, like is that something bad?

P: Yeah

R: Even though you were dressed smart for the interview?

P: Yeah I know, and I had my Mulberry handbag and everything, (pause) you just feel as though people are going to

judge you, especially at my age, I think it's more acceptable when it's younger [Maud]

There are intertwining issues at play within this extract, the main ones being class, gender, and age. Firstly, she makes reference to her age throughout in relation to her tattoo, noting that she perhaps would not have been as conscious about it if she were of a younger age – refer to chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion on ageing bodies. In respect to her focussing on her age in relation to the workplace, she is articulating the understanding that younger people today are more likely to be tattooed (Mishra & Mishra, 2015), therefore it is perhaps more acceptable to see a younger person being interviewed for a job and being likely to have tattoos. She does however then link this to a stereotypical trope of mid-life crisis ('old girl, tattoo, what's going on there'), making clear that this is the kind of negative construction that she wants to avoid being made about her. The reference to 'old girl' is also interesting, given the lack of equivalent term for a middle aged male who has tattoos, and the lack of acceptability of this for women rather than men (Musambira, Raymond, & Hastings, 2016). Her views on tattoos are different from many of the women who were interviewed, as this is her only tattoo, and perhaps does not want to be judged on something that is so small and only visible depending on the footwear that she has.

Interestingly, she draws on a class-based construction within this extract, noting how she 'had my Mulberry bag and everything', suggesting that she had made an effort and thought through her appearance as so to look middle-class and sophisticated (Lawler, 2005), a construction that would often not include a visible tattoo (Fisher, 2014). This class-based construction also serves to construct what the 'ideal worker' would be like – middle-class and well presented. It suggests that tattoos are not acceptable within an interview context, though judgements are to be expected in relation to overall appearance and attire (Ruetzler et al, 2012). A

performance of professionalism is constructed, and tattoos do not fit in this.

In sum, the almost normalised notion of different kinds of jobs having different rules regarding tattoos in respect to appearance suggests that the issue isn't with the tattoos, but rather, the issue lies with what is defined as professional, and that this definition is contextual. In addition, there are productions formed around the ideal worker and how they would look and behave, which runs from an initial interview through to being employed. In considering tattoos in the workplace, there is a distinction made between the body as tattooed, and the body as an employee – if the tattoo is not visible, this does not pose a 'threat' to the tattooed body in getting employed, or to the employer in respect to customer perceptions (Timming et al., 2017). In a similar way to how motherhood is a central positioning to women who have children, 'the employee' as a position becomes a marker of respectability – of class – through the construction of the professional. Tattoos can serve as a form of resistance against the regulative productions of the employee. Many factors intersect in relation to the workplace, but the addition of tattoos to already existent issues such as gender and age shows another way in which discourse are formed around tattooed women.

5.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, there are a multitude of rules and social norms that govern the ways that tattooed women are both represented and constructed. There are clear ways in which the women construct 'right' and 'wrong' choices in relation to tattoos, which are shown to be the result of their own experiences with tattoos and how they construct their ideal selves. However, the positions that are produced paint a nuanced and complex picture, and show how the women navigate these different positionings. Whilst the women self-regulate themselves as 'good', at the same time they produce a construction of what is considered as not good. Throughout the whole of this

section, whilst class is not explicitly discussed, there is a classed thread that runs through all of their accounts, which serves as a regulatory point for being tattooed women. The generational differences in the perceptions of tattoos shows some of the gender specific expectation of femininity, and how these expectations may still inform how tattoos are perceived today. There is a strong construction of motherhood being tattooed in the 'right' way, which is regulated by a number of other factors, including age and class. Finally, the workplace has been shown to hold often rigid views towards tattoos that are constructed as issues of appearance, and serve to highlight the issue of what can be defined as 'professional', and how this is context dependent. In contrast to the discourses produced within the media articles, the women here discuss professionalism and generation norms in a different way. In respect to the generational difference, it might be expected that the media focuses on the tattoos as being a cautionary tale as told by the parents, with links to excessive bodies and 'low life' individuals. On the contrary within the interviews, there was much more nuance in how they produced the generational difference in tattoos, that intersected with understandings of age and gender more explicitly. Professionalism in the media articles was painted as a central identity, something that all people should be focused on as a marker of respectability. Whilst professionalism is still produced as respectable by the women, they show the tension between being an employee versus being a family member, a mother, a woman, and an older woman. The discourses produced within the interviews bring to the forefront the multiplicity of positionings that feed into the construction of the 'right' and 'wrong' tattooed female body.

Chapter 6: Analysis of tattooed female bodies

The previous chapter explored discourses that centred on regulation and social norms, specifically focussing on the notion of 'right' and 'wrong' ways of being tattooed, the generational difference in how tattoos are accepted and understood, the regulation of mothers who are tattooed, and finally, how professionalism is negotiated whilst being tattooed. It highlighted some of the gender and class specific issues that arise from being a tattooed woman, including the multiple roles that women negotiate, and how tattoos intersect with these.

Following from a focus on social norms, in this chapter, the discourse of tattooed female bodies will be explored. Within the interviews, tattooed women's bodies were discussed in a number of different ways, and will be explored in turn. Firstly, there is a focus on the ageing body, and how tattooed bodies are constructed differently in relation to the age of the body they are on. Second, the ways that tattoos represent an emotional marker on the body are explored, and how these points of emotional stability are embodied. In addition, the visibility of tattoos on the body is considered, which highlights how the tattooed female body is constructed in certain ways depending on how visible tattoos are. Finally, tattoos being constructed as art on the body is considered, exploring how this construction changes the way that the body is understood. Overall, this chapter will show how understanding how the body is represented is key in the constructions formed of tattooed women.

6.1 - Ageing Bodies

One of the issues that emerged in relation to the complexities of tattoo imagery and placement in relation to body was that of age. In the majority of the interviews, age was referred to both implicitly and explicitly when considering tattoo choices on their own body, and the bodies of others. The majority of the women who discussed age were over the age of forty, though some of the younger interviewees also discussed issues relating to age. The issue of age was not constrained

to a particular age – both younger and older bodies were referred to in respect to tattoos. This first extract draws upon an integral aspect of ageing, making reference to the inevitable change in bodies as we age:

But yeah, I don't regret having any of them done, like when people say that like when you get older and your skins gonna sag and well it's gonna go anyway isn't it (laughs) [Ruth]

At the start, Ruth states how 'I don't regret' any of the tattoos she has, as though regret is an expected part of attaining tattoos at a younger age (Ruth discusses her tattoos previously in the interview, and how she got most of them when she was quite young). Research tends to focus on the younger body in tattoo choices (Ferreira, 2011), and how this is often perceived to be a negative, with younger people seemingly not being responsible (Dickson et al., 2014) or giving consideration for their futures (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004). The choices that she made in respect to her tattoos are then justified from a position of the ageing body. She acknowledges that as you age 'your skins gonna sag', and that the comments that other people have made in respect to this indicate that the ageing process is something undesirable, and seen as a negative. A youthful body is regarded in a more positive light in Western society, with the majority of media focussing on youth and youthfulness as important (Carter, 2016; Han & Rudd, 2015). This is also indicative of one of the issues with tattoos on the body, in that they visibly show the ageing process on the body – the ink changes colour and can distort as the skin moves and changes. She finishes her point in a joking tone, commenting on how 'it's gonna go anyway isn't it', in reference to the ageing process. Here, ageing is produced as inevitable, expected, and normal. The only thing that makes the ageing process different for her body is the inclusion of tattoos that show the process in a more visible manner. Within this extract, she also positions ageing as an issue that other people have, as they are the ones she refers to in respect to the

comments about ageing and skin sagging. She seems to remove herself from seeing ageing as a negative, and is not preoccupied with the negative associations of having skin that will change with age. Negative associations with tattoos and older bodies were also mentioned by other interviewees in respect to tattoo choices, producing accounts of tattoos done in the 'right' way:

I've got some older women who come in the shop and they're older than me or my age, and like covered in like (pause) tramp stamps or whatever you call them or something, I don't know, like in blocks or like a dolphin, and I think like, why would you have that' [Maud]

To reiterate the scope of the current research, all of the women who were interviewed are tattooed themselves. In the above extract, Maud explicitly makes judgements about the tattoos of other women that she sees, and uses this example perhaps as an extreme case of difference, of how *not* to do a tattoo. She herself only has one tattoo – a small lily on her foot – a stark contrast to the large, bold, and visible tattoos that she mentions on the other women. In this sense, she is producing a notion of right and wrong in tattoo choices, but more so in relation to age. By discussing age as a factor ('older than me or my age') she is implicitly making a point that they should 'know better', or that they are perhaps too old to do tattoos in that way. In Western society, an ideal is formed centred on age that suggests that women should grow old gracefully (Jankowski et al, 2014). With age indicating what kinds of behaviours are appropriate, large, visible, and bold tattoos are not positioned as age-appropriate. Maud also makes reference to another key issue in women's tattooed bodies by making reference to the 'tramp stamp', a derogatory and working class-based term for a tattoo on the lower part of a woman's back. Whilst the comment made is an example ('tramp stamps or something'), the use of the word 'covered' in line with the tramp

stamp suggests a body that is tasteless, tacky, and excessive (Irwin, 2003).

The tattoos being intertwined with age is pointed out when Maud provides more specific details about the tattoos of the women she's referring to, through the acknowledgement of passing trends in tattoos ('like in blocks or a dolphin'). The passing trends, such as the dolphins and the barbed wire of the 1990s (Lynch, 2014) visibly show the age of the wearer, through the knowledge of the time that the trend was in fashion. In relation to her own tattoo narrative, she mentions these tattoos as though there were pointless or meaningless ('why would you have that'), which is in opposition to her own, given the meaningful nature of hers to a significant life event. In this sense, her tattoo is done in the right way, but theirs are not. The tattoo must be appropriate for the body, and the age of the body is key to this decision.

Ageing has also been referred to in a jokey way by the women in the interviews – they acknowledge the inevitability of ageing, but at the same time, want to point out that there may be more important things for them to be thinking about during older age than their tattooed bodies:

oooh aren't you going to regret that when you're older, and it's like I'm really going to regret something that I had in my youth I enjoyed that gave me happiness I'm really gonna be thinking about that in my seventies with my zimmerframe when I can't barely be controlling my bladder functions do you really think I'm gonna regret tattoos (laughs) [Lydia]

The jokey comment here highlights the significance that others give to tattoos in respect to the ageing body, but this is brushed off by Lydia. She is aware that her tattoos may look different as she ages, but is also aware that there are other things – as she hints to health – that may be more important for her to focus on than her tattooed skin. The tattoos are of importance to her – as she points out, they

give her happiness and carry a strong meaning in relation to her identity. However, the tattoos are only one part of her, rather than being all of who she is. Because the tattoos are significant to her, she cannot see that this would be an issue for her in the future, especially in relation to other factors that affect the body as we age (Tiggemann & McCourt, 2013). Instead of giving too much focus for how her body may look as she ages, and see her tattoos as something to regret, she positions them as fond memories that she will be able to look back on. In this sense, she has not let the notion of regret and ageing put her off from tattooing her body – she is agentic in her decision. The comment that she refers to that is clearly meant as a warning by others ('you going to regret that when you're older') also makes reference to the stereotype that people make decisions on younger life that they will then regret (Madfis & Arford, 2013) and they haven't given responsible consideration for their future (Dickson et al., 2014). It also implies that women should 'be' a certain way as they age, and having a tattooed body does not fit with the ideal notion of what women should look like as they age.

The consideration for the ageing body in relation to tattoos has affected the choices of some of the other women, not so much in whether they should get a tattoo or not, but rather, where the tattoos should be positioned:

Well faces changes, faces change and they develop, and, and so do tattoos, and when you have well you know your skin is a certain way and has a particular elasticity, and, and, erm, hopefully your body doesn't change so much that it drops or it changes, but on your face, that would be really difficult cus you get wrinkles and lines and things sag, and you know, and that would really change the tattoo and it would really change your face [Belle]

What is articulated here is the visibility of the face as being the issue in relation to tattoos and the ageing body. Belle has a number of

larger tattoos, but they are all in places that are relatively hidden – with the face being the first thing we see of a person and the primary method for communication (Adams et al, 2012). Again, the issue isn't necessarily with the tattoo, but rather where it is on the body and the change it would cause to the face. As Belle points out, given the way that the face can change as we age, it would change the tattoo, and would therefore not look the same as it did when it was at its best. The tattoo further shows the ageing process on the body, which is the issue, rather than the tattoo itself.

Belle does make a comment in the middle of the extract that pertains to not wanting the body to change too much as it ages ('hopefully your body doesn't change so much that it drops or changes'), implying that this would change the person, given the changes to the body. By the body 'dropping', it no longer retains its youthful and more desired appearance (Montemurro & Gillen, 2013).

To summarise the key points relating to the ageing tattooed body, there seems to be two prominent areas that stand out amongst the highly complex issue of the tattooed female body. Firstly, and perhaps most explicitly within the extracts seen above, ageing is a central issue for women in Western society, given the large focus by the media and industries such as beauty and cosmetics in the pursuit of keeping a youthful look. Tattoos visibly show the ageing process on the body, which for some women who try to hide the inevitable process is an issue. This issue was made more specific by some women referring to specific locations on the body for which this would be an issue – and these locations were those which were highly visible. With a tattoo being more visible, it is more open to scrutiny from others. The second key element of the argument relating to ageing bodies is the expectations that relate to ageing. Younger bodies are often positioned as reckless in youth, and that tattoo choices at this age are often irresponsible, not giving thought for important aspects of life such as jobs. However, issue also falls with

an older generation of women who choose to be tattooed, as it is expected that they should know better, and given the recent change in tattoo choices, older women fall prey to gendered expectations of the body more so than the younger generation. Regardless of the position along the ageing timeline, women are still subjected to idealised constructions of the body.

6.2 - Tattoos as a marker of stability

Within the discourse on bodies, an area emerged that highlighted the significance of tattoos and their relation to the body, which centred on the ways that tattoos can be a marker of stability. This permanent marker is embedded within the body, perpetuating a strong meaning for the wearer. This first extract provides an example of how a tattoo can serve as a point of stability in relation to family and relationships:

I've got my son's name, erm and then I've got a script, do you want me to read it out? "at some point there will hardly be any one about and it will most likely be just me and you". Erm it's something that [partner] said. I had a bit of crap going on with some friends here so I just got it done. Like it was a really long text message he sent me and this was a paragraph in the message, so I just thought yeah. It's stuck with me ever since because no matter what happens in your life like, to me like you know, it's a quote about me and my son, because it will always be me and him, but it's nice that [partner] said it to me. That's a bonus (laughs) [Betty]

There is a contextual significance in having her son's name on her wrist – this tattoo would not be possible without her son. This is a strong signifier of motherhood, and produces a construction of motherhood, by showing his name on her skin. Similar to the above, the tattoo has been attained for her son, rather than for herself – she is using her skin as a way of showing her selflessness and her care for her family. There is a cultural significance in having her son's name tattooed too, as this permanent symbol of the bond with her

child is considered as a sign of love and devotion (Sawyer, 2008). The cultural significance of this relates to the 'rules' it is based on – in that it is acceptable for someone to have the tattoo of a family member (i.e. a deceased loved one, a child), but it is not socially acceptable to get the name of a partner tattooed on the skin (ibid). The tattooed name of a partner is read poorly on the skin, as partner names are often cited as a source of regret and removal (Armstrong et al, 1996; DeMello, 2014), and the relationships are not considered as permanent and long lasting as are close family and children. What is of interest within this extract is how she discusses the script that is positioned with the name of her son, as this originally came from her partner, but she has altered the meaning so that it represents the bond she has with her son.

Name tattoos are considered as being synonymous with the construction of the working-class, especially the names of loved ones and family members (Back, 2007). This 'classic' tattoo is often found on a visible body part, with the use of bold ink that can be clearly read on the skin (DeMello, 2014). Building on this, the name can be read as a symbol of ownership (Adams & Raisborough, 2011), as the working class are depicted as visibly displaying their prize possessions for others to see their worth. Though the belonging of that name (child or partner) makes a difference as to how the body is read, the tattoo design itself produces a different construction that relates to social class. The change in meaning of the tattoo that Betty articulates removes some of the stigma associated with certain kinds of tattoos (Lane, 2014) and works with the body it is upon to form a meaningful narrative. Negotiation of this class construction occurs through the language that Betty uses to describe her tattoo. This negotiation between stereotypical working-class constructions of tattoos and middle-class reconstitutions of tattooing shows how tattoos do not allow for people to be pigeon-holed so neatly.

In this extract, she refers to the tattoo as 'script' rather than text, or as a text message, which the tattoo originated from. The use of the word 'script' makes the tattoo sound more serious and meaningful – the tattoo may not be read in the same way if it was firstly alluded to as a text message. The script itself serves to stabilise emotions that she has felt, making them fixed and coherent. Where she states 'I had some crap going on', she refers to 'I' in the sense that she was going through a period of stress, and emerged stronger following from the tattoo. Here, the tattoo serves as a mediating space for locating 'I', who she is. The tattoo itself was borne from an issue – it's a statement, of who she is as a strong person, and how important her family are to her.

Family and relationships are mentioned by the majority of women, with other interviewees also highlighting the stabilising nature of their tattoos:

Well, I went for a tattoo with my daughter who's obsessed with them, it was the end of my career and I was feeling sorry for myself. Oh and the man next door said I needed to bond with my daughter so I got a tattoo on my foot! [Maud]

Here, the tattoo serves as a mediating space for relationships, and enables Maud to bond with her daughter. The use of the wording 'needed to bond', rather than other phrases such as should or could, implies that this was an important thing to do. The connection between the tattoo and bonding is interesting, as they are positioned as being logically connected elements ('I needed to bond with my daughter so I got a tattoo'), though given the context with Maud stating how her daughter is 'obsessed' with tattoos, she sees this as a way to create a permanent strength of relationship with her daughter. Within the extract, it is clear that Maud may have felt an element of insecurity ('it was the end of my career') and also displayed an element of low self-esteem ('I was feeling sorry for myself'). Though research suggests that tattoos are not cited as a

reason for increased self-esteem (Antoszewski et al, 2010; Koziel & Sitek, 2013), there is a suggestion that tattoos enable a sense of belonging and security in the face of uncertainty (Kang & Jones, 2007). In this respect, the tattoo that she subsequently got served as a stabilising point for 'I' – as a mother, and also in the provision of a sense of closure following an end in career. Though she was unsure at this point what would happen with her future career path, she was able to mark that moment in time on her skin, and also link it to her family, something which is more stable and lasting. The imagery in the tattoo is symbolic of her previous career (lily; floristry) and therefore becomes a stable part of who she is through her skin, despite her career changing. It is a marker of time that holds meaning to her, despite a potential future change in context.

The embodiment of stability through the body has also been discussed by other interviewees, detailing important personal events, and the ways that their tattoos provide them with a point of reference in relation to who they are:

the one I've got on my side is a bird, cus my second name [is name of bird] and it's that bird and it's in a cage with an open door because I was in a really abusive relationship and I felt like he put me in a box, I couldn't be who I wanted to be, and I got that, because, when I finally realised, and got rid of him, and I was like so much better in myself I was like, I want to celebrate this, I never want to go back to being that person, so I got that to remind myself and to be proud of myself every day, for walking away [Artoria]

What is interesting within this extract is the symbolic nature of the tattoo imagery, but also the way that she embodies the strength that she feels the tattoo gives her. Firstly, the tattoo is hidden and out of general public view ('on my side'), and is therefore personal to her. As the bird within the tattoo relates to her family name, she shows the symbolism of the imagery to who she is as a person – the tattoo

enables her to strengthen her identity in relation to belonging to and in her family. This permanent representation of the self as embedded within the skin is a personal reminder of a sense of belonging, which then holds more significance when put into context with the rest of the tattoo. She states how she felt that her ex-partner 'put me in a box', which coupled with the imagery of the bird being released from an open cage shows how the tattoo is a marker of emotional stability for Artoria – the literal boxing and subsequent freeing is embedded in her skin. Through the tattoo, Artoria is agentic (Pitts, 1999), reclaiming her body as her own (Kosut, 2000a), and is able to show this through the strong symbolic link to her family. The reclamation of her body is positioned as a way for Artoria to define who she is, rather than this being defined by somebody else. This notion is reinforced when she notes how 'I couldn't be who I wanted to be', and now the tattoo provides a stable point of reminder of who she is. Also of interest within this extract is when Artoria comments how 'I never want to go back to being that person', suggesting that she has changed and developed. The bird and cage tattoo is part of the transformative process that prevents her from going back in time to when she was a 'different person', not the 'real her', so the tattoo gives a sense of stability in moving forward, still allowing for change, but change that is more congruent with who she feels she is as a person. The tattoo enables her to 'remind myself and to be proud of myself everyday' by being a permanent point of reference, a symbol of strength, and embodying her sense of self in relation to her family and the agency she has over her body.

Whilst the other women discussed their tattoos as serving as markers of stability following from an event or something of personal significance, tattoos had also been discussed as a marker of strength for upcoming moments in their lives:

'it's the infinity sign mixed with the golden snitch from (laughs) Harry Potter...[it reminds you] what you get when you

persevere and you have skills so its that perseverance that matters...what's annoying though now I've got it, I think okay so if I fail or I don't do as well as I want, I am going to be so devastated to see that every day and have that reminder you didn't do what Harry did and punish myself'

[Jean]

Here, the tattoo serves as a point of future celebration for her perseverance in her educational studies – an ode to her future self for when she finishes her university degree. Because she got the tattoo before she finished her studies, she feels as though she must not embody the strength that her tattoo gives her, to ensure that she does pass. The tattoo is permanent, and would cause discontent if she were to not achieve an element of herself (perseverance) that she has embedded within her skin. She reinforces this notion by stating how the tattoo would be a 'reminder that you didn't do' well and achieve her goals, so therefore the tattoo provides a marker for future achievement for her to live up to. The fact that the tattoo is representative of the need to persevere means that she embodies the act of perseverance, otherwise she would not be achieving the meaning of her tattoo. Regardless of the outcome of her studies, as long as she does continue to work, she will be achieving the goal of her tattoo ('it's that perseverance that matters'). The tattoo will keep her on track as a marker of stability.

In summary, though the world around us changes at a rapid rate, including aspects such as work and relationships, tattoos allow the body to become a point of stability through their permanence, marking a point in time as significant. This stability provides an element of certainty, provides a sense of belonging, and also serves as a reminder for self-identity.

6.3 – Visibility of tattoos on the body

Throughout the interviews, the women discussed a variety of issues relating to their tattoos, and in places, a common theme formed

which pertained to the origin of the issue – some of the issues were dependent on how visible their tattoos were to other people. The visibility of the tattoo opened them up to potential judgement, and their choice to have tattoos that they were able to cover was discussed in a number of different ways:

R: Is there anywhere that you wouldn't get tattooed?

P: On my face (laughs), on my arms, my legs, somewhere you can see

R: Yeah but it's on your foot, surely that's visible?

P: Yeah but I can cover it up

R: but can you not cover it up if it was on your legs? Or your arms?

P: Mmm no it's different (pause) no (pause) that's unacceptable, that [emphasis] is not where I would have it done, ever ever.

R: Why so?

P: Because society judge you [Maud]

This extract shows the link that has been made with a visible tattoo and the way that you may be perceived by other people for having a visible tattoo. Maud only has one tattoo, on her foot, and discussed in her interview how this was purposeful so that it could not be seen, and she could cover it if she needed to. She distinguishes between different parts of the body in a way that would deem it more or less acceptable to have a tattoo depending on how on show it might be. She furthers this by stating how it is 'unacceptable' to have a tattoo on a part of the body that may deemed to be more visible, and justifies this unacceptability by linking it to society, and the potential judgement from others.

She articulates her perception of acceptability of tattoos on the body from her own perspective, which is that her small, dainty, and mostly hidden tattoo is less open to judgement from others. Whilst arms and legs can be covered, this implicitly seems to relate to the size of the

tattoo – arms and legs, as opposed to wrists, ankles, or feet for that matter, are much larger spaces for a tattoo to occupy.

Within the interview, she also vocalised a laugh when mentioning the first place that she would not get a tattoo – the face - as though it was a laughable thing to suggest that this is an acceptable part of the body to be tattooed – a sentiment also expressed by other interviewees. When linked to the statement that society would judge you, this seems to be a common point that the participants made in relation to the face and potentially bad perceptions:

I think on your face I just don't know, I don't know why anyone would want to do that (pause) you would literally have people staring at you all the time wouldn't you and it's not that I wouldn't mind, I don't care if people stare at me but it's still, like it's the perception of you being a bad person as such ent it really or like in trouble [Gabrielle]

Here, Gabrielle seems to get to the heart of the issue with facial tattoos and the level of visibility, insomuch that you are seen to be a bad person or 'in trouble'. The link to facial tattoos and gang affiliations is well known (Steward, 2008) especially with men, with there being even less research that considers facial tattoos on women in Western society.

She does however contradict herself in her statement regarding people staring, noting how it is not the staring that would bother her, but understands that it must be frustrating in respect to the amount of attention somebody must receive for a facial tattoo. The issue lies with the potential perception that you are a bad person, which is a difficult perception to change (Horne et al, 2007).

Whilst there are a number of places on the body where a tattoo could be labelled as visible, the face seems to be the most contentious of those places. Though other parts of the body may lead to someone experiencing judgement for the tattoo(s) they have, a tattoo on the face leads to a stronger association with crime and criminality

(Adams, 2009b), and coupled with the idea that it is less common in relation to the ways that tattoos have increased in popularity, it carries more judgement than perhaps experienced for elsewhere on the body.

Reasons for visibility of a tattoo (or lack thereof) has also been discussed in less negative terms in relation to other people, but is still implicit in relating the visible tattoo to being available for judgement, and the ways that the women may approach this:

people don't know how many I've got because I haven't started covering the spaces that you can see yet, purely because I don't know what I want yet. I have plans (laughs) but I'm not, for something to be seen I would have to save like a lot of money to get something done by someone I truly respected as an artist, cus it's like a piece of art, at the end of the day
[Artoria]

In this extract, Artoria alludes to the fact that she is aware of the scrutiny her body may receive, and therefore plans her tattoos in accordance with this. Though she does have quite a few tattoos, and they are also large, the placement of these tattoos on her body means that 'people don't know how many' she has, implying that they are currently unable to make a judgement of her that is based on the tattoos.

She also furthers the argument that tattoos should be thought through by stating how she does not know what she wants yet, but implies that this is something she is thinking about, and the tattoos that she has in the future will be thought through. The visibility of the tattoos in this instance is important, and she makes clear that she wants to ensure that these tattoos are of a good quality if people are to see them. This would suggest that a poor-quality tattoo reflects poorly on the person, and she would rather than people see her favourably.

The language that she uses to describe the tattooist is as 'an artist', reinforcing the notion that the tattoo will be of high quality, as the person creating the 'art' is worthy of doing so. This produces a notion of the body that suggests it is a canvas (Kang & Jones, 2007), a piece of work to beautify, and something that is of value.

Another argument that reinforces the notion of quality is the reference she makes to money, and that she would need to 'save like a lot of money' in order to get a good tattoo. This produces the tattoo not as something necessarily working class, but as a luxury commodity that is worn on the body (Kosut, 2006a). It implies that the more money that is spent on the tattoo, the better quality it will be, and therefore reflect favourably upon her body. Art is something to be admired, so fits with her position that the 'art' will be visible to others – something people are able to look at and enjoy, as well as herself. The tattoo being positioned as a luxury item and a piece of art changes the understanding of the tattoo, and produces a very different notion of the body it is on. The tattoo being positioned as art is very much a middle-class notion of tattoos. In addition, the way that she talks about needing to save money is as though there is no other option – she would not consider getting a tattoo by someone who was not seen to be high quality, especially if it was on a visible location on the body.

There is also the implication of a relationship between the person being tattooed and the tattoo artist, and this relationship is also thought out. She states that she would need to find someone who she truly respected as an artist, rather than any tattoo artist who may be available in her local area. In this sense, she is articulating the sense of trust required for somebody to tattoo her body, and for her to be comfortable with that person for doing so.

Another way that the women referred their tattooed bodies in relation to visibility is the ability to self-disclose or not. Given the relationship

between tattoos and identity (Doss & Hubbard, 2009; Ferreira, 2011; Kosut, 2000a), this is an interesting point to be aware of:

I don't, as a therapist I don't tend to show my tattoos (pause) erm, because, why that's a good question, I show them other things, erm, I think it would depend on the client I think if it was a client I've been working with for a long time, then it would be different like other forms of self-disclosure I would probably be more comfortable about it, but in, but in first meeting somebody I don't think I would want that projection
[Belle]

This extract brings another interesting dimension to the body in relation to professionalism – though further aspects of employment are explored in chapter eight. Professionalism and tattoos have been explored in relation to the way that tattoos are not seen to be professional (Timming, 2015) and are often discouraged from being on show (Mishra & Mishra, 2015). In some professions, tattoos do enable a sense of relationship or a conversation starter (Kosut, 2000a), as the example of therapy. For Belle, she distinguishes between the length of time that she has known someone as a reason for why she may choose to cover her tattoos. With first impressions being considered important it implies that certain judgements may be made against her in a way that may question her professionalism (Karl et al., 2013), and therefore removes this as a potential issue. Upon feeling more comfortable with someone – perhaps when they get to know ‘the real you’ (Kosut, 2000a), the tattoo is no longer the first thing that someone sees, and therefore do not present themselves as an issue.

Her use of the word ‘comfortable’ in relation to a client who knows her better is interesting, relating to the notion of ‘being comfortable in your own skin’. Her tattooed skin is something personal to her, and she does not feel as though this needs to be on show to others all of the time, and is dependent on the context. To be considered as

comfortable in your own skin is to be free from judgement of others, or to not be concerned with their judgement, and be happy with yourself (Armstrong et al, 2014). The difference with the example that Belle has provided is that her sense of self is entwined with her sense of professional self, which will show a different side to who she is (or hide a certain aspect of herself). In this sense, she doesn't show the full picture that makes up who she is, and is able to reveal aspects of herself as she wishes – she is in control of what she does and does not disclose. This relates to the notion of tattooed women being agentic (Botz-Bornstein, 2013), and here, Belle shows the way that she is agentic with her body, not just in her choices regarding her tattoos, but also her choice as to whether she reveals them or not. Overall, the visibility of a tattoo on the body is important in respect to the way that the tattooed body is produced, and how the person is constructed. By these women being able to disclose or cover their tattoos shows how they are agentic in their choices in respect to their bodies, both in relation to being tattooed, and how much they choose to show. Tattoo visibility is also of importance in relation to the tattoo that is on show, including more expensive 'art' being likely to appear in visible places on the body, showing that the women have an awareness of how the body may be received, and how a 'better' tattoo may be considered more favourably. Finally, there are almost hidden 'rules' of what society considers acceptable in relation to tattoo visibility, and the face appears to be one of the areas that is most contentious to the women. The issue with the face seems to arise from ideal constructions of femininity, as well as stereotypical representations of 'bad people' being the type of people to have a facial tattoo.

6.4 – Tattoos as art on the body

Many of my participants used the idea of 'art' to describe tattoos, and to delineate what was appropriate / inappropriate in the kinds of tattoos people had. In describing tattoos as 'art', the participants

framed it as something valued and valuable, and as something with potentially inherent aesthetic value. More importantly perhaps, it produces something about the body they are on. For example, use of the term 'art' changes the meaning of the tattoo and the way it is viewed, as well as producing a different construction about the body the tattoo is on. Having 'art' and having a 'tattoo' are constructed as different terms, as seen within this extract:

Tattoos now, some of them don't look like tattoos, because you can get 3D tattoos, like portraits, they look like pictures, it's definitely more of an art, and the way you can say, oh it's by this artist and when people say oh yeah I know who that is, it's just a more, modern way of displaying art [Artoria]

Before this quote, Artoria had described a historical timeline of tattoos, defining different periods in the history of the art form. She differentiates contemporary and historic tattoo forms, positioning tattoos as different in form, and in aesthetic. When described as 'art' the tattoo takes on a different meaning, as a commodity, as an aesthetic form. Within this quote, Artoria produces a different understanding of what a tattoo is. By repositioning it as 'art', the tattoo becomes something more acceptable for women (Botz-Bornstein, 2013), something that fits with feminine decorative ideals. There is also a classed aspect to this commodification. As an expensive piece of artwork, the tattoo becomes an appropriate object for the middle classes, and this enables a distancing from their use by working class women. For this reason, concerns about taste and aesthetics come into play in women's talk about tattoos: tattoos are an acceptable art form, but only if they are done in the 'right' way. There is however, a tension that is articulated here, between embodying art, whereby the body is agentic and communicative, versus the *wearing* of art, with the body being commodified. With the work of the artist being identified, this positions the body as a canvas, a commodity, with the tattoo as an object.

In her suggestion that tattoos are 'a modern way to display art', Artoria produces the body as canvas and frame, with the tattoo as a work to be displayed and admired. The professional tattooist is described as famous, recognised by others as an artist, and this gives the tattoo a sense of desirability and aesthetic value. The art is both displayed and embodied, more integral to the identity performance of the purchaser / wearer than the kind of art displayed on the wall. This creates a hierarchy in relation to the art, with 'better' tattoo artists being more coveted and perhaps more recognisable in relation to their work. For example, Cheryl Cole had a tattoo from Nikko Hurtado, currently considered to be one of the best tattoo artists in the world (Complex UK, 2012) as he completed the large tattoo that she has covering her lower back and bottom (Foster, 2015). However, despite Nico's popularity, his name rarely appeared in any of the news articles that considered Cheryl's large tattoo, and instead chose to focus on the issue of it being large, being on the body of a 'public sweetheart' and being voted as 'the worst celebrity tattoo ever' (Foster, 2015) which seemed to relate more to the notion that this was on the body of a woman, and on a sexualised location on the body (Dann et al., 2016). In this scenario, she chose a world class tattoo artist to do her 'art', but it was not perceived as such within the media. This serves to highlight the issue in meaning for the wearer versus the opinion of others in relation to tattoos on women. Other women participants described the production of the tattoo as a collaborative process between them and their tattooist:

yeah graffiti is art, and I considered my tattoos to be art and you know these are somethings that I've drawn and, designed and put together, my pocket watch was a series of three different pocket watches that I'd drawn, and then taken them to my guy and he sort of put them together [Nora]

Nora articulates that for her, tattoos are a form of art, and likens this to graffiti, which she also considers as art. Graffiti is often not

considered art, especially in the realms of middle class society (Merrill, 2015) and more considered as a nuisance or something that defaces public sites. Similarly, tattooing has been considered as a method for defacing the body (Riley & Cahill, 2005). In this sense, the tattoo represents a subversive gesture, one that disrupts patriarchal society. However, given the societal context within which this subversive act has taken place, it could be argued that the tattoo reflects more of a modern trend, an act of conformity, than an act of resistance. Both graffiti and tattoos as art are subjective, which is exactly the point with tattoos – they make people think, and not all art is to be enjoyed by everyone. The link to graffiti also highlights a subcultural element to the art (Hebdige, 1979) – they are not always considered as good, though the meaning behind them often makes them more justifiable – consider the case of the graffiti artist Banksy, who’s political questioning through art led to his work being highly prized in the art world (Hauge et al, 2016). There is a community aspect to the art – those who appreciate tattoos, and those who appreciate graffiti (Botz-Bornstein, 2013).

Also in this extract, Nora doesn’t just refer to her tattooist as the artist – she describes it as a collaborative process, and that the art comes from both her and the tattooist. This collaborative effort produces a sense of agency – she is embodying who she is, and had an active part in the process. She suggests that the ideas manifesting from her, and she can articulate them as part of her identity and something that she has taken the time to consider and design – this suggests that she is as much of an integral part of the process as the tattooist is. He draws the art on her body, but she had the design. This involvement in the design process for tattoos is frequently discussed (Roberts, 2012) and seems to lend itself to the notion that the tattoo is more significant and of more importance if the person getting the tattoo has helped to design it too, rather than something that the artists themselves has found, or the tattoo comes from a

book. The tattoo becomes more justifiable and personal because they have had an input into the tattoo.

Within the interviews, many of the women recognised how their body is positioned in relation to art:

it just means that you like to wear your art on your body and not necessarily on your walls, and that's what I say to people, my body is my kind of canvas and I like to design my art upon it you know [Lydia]

Lydia positions her body as a canvas, and therefore produces the notion that a canvas is to be worked upon, hence why she has tattoos. She states how she likes to 'design my art upon' her body, showing that she is integral to the process. In this sense, the art is not just something to be admired by others, it is more personal to her, and the artwork is for her. Within this extract, the body is produced as a commodity, as a 'wearer' of art, though she is agentic in her 'choice' for the artwork she wants to display.

By the tattoo being constructed as art, it is positioned against 'traditional' understandings of art which she notes would be found on a wall. This further supports the iteration that tattoos are undergoing an evolution, and that they are developing into something more of an art form, and also, that they are challenging what we consider as both traditional and modern pieces of art. Here, she produced the idea that art is something that is static, and in a traditional form, but reconstitutes it as an embodied practice in relation to her tattoos. Rather than artwork being something static and placed within the home, tattoos being considered as art means that art is constantly changing and moving, and take art outside of the home or a gallery and places it in more public view, moving around rather than being static. The use of 'your' and 'my' throughout this extract shows the relationship she feels between her space and her body, that she has ownership over these spaces and that the tattoos are her choice.

With tattoos being considered as something of an art form, it would be expected that the art is to be on display, for others to admire, as well as the wearer. This notion would appear to be dependent on the context, as well as the location of the tattoo on the body. One of the contexts highlighted within the interviews was the workplace, explored in chapter eight in more detail. However, in relation to artwork, work expectations seem to play a part:

I do think it's bad really like here they tell you to cover them up with a blue plaster or like wear sleeves, if it's offensive then yeah but, it looks worse with a blue plaster on you (pause) it's just art ennit, it is art, that's how I see it [Gabrielle]

Leading up to this extract, Gabrielle had described how her workplace expects that tattoos be covered up. Visible tattoos apparently have to be covered with a blue plaster, and the justification given for this is that her workplace is a place for food production. The way that she discusses this rule as 'bad' is that for her, the tattoo is 'just' art. This use of phrase implies that the tattoo is not something special, or special enough to warrant it to be covered up within a work environment, especially with a plaster. Once the tattoo is healed, it is no longer an open wound, and unlike a piercing, is unlikely to come out when they may be working. The blue plaster policy for tattoos that cannot be covered by uniform is only done so that the tattoo cannot be seen by potential customers – though to an extent, the blue plaster draws more attention to the area of the body, thus rendering it a stigmatising practice. Gabrielle hints at this, by saying how the tattoo 'looks worse with a blue plaster on you', as it draws attention to the area, indicating that it may be due to an injury or something that has caused harm, rather than a tattoo. The plaster reconstitutes the tattoo as something to be offended by, to be censored, whilst at the same time, this draws attention to it.

There is a distinction made within the extract which suggests the kind of things that are acceptable, and also, how art is seen as different

to tattoos. Gabrielle states that if a tattoo is 'offensive' then it should be covered up, though the nature of what is considered as offensive is an interesting subject in itself. The material that Gabrielle may consider as offensive would be something that may cause offense to others, but given the lack of acceptability of tattoos in some work places (Mishra & Mishra, 2015) it may be that in this case, the tattoo itself causes offense, just in its nature. This also serves to position art as not offensive – something that may be considered as art is not constituted as offensive, as it is produced as something to be enjoyed. What is produced within this extract is the notion that Gabrielle sees the tattoo *imagery* as the thing that could be offensive, whereas it is clear that the workplace finds the *tattoo* itself the object that is offensive.

Overall, by tattoos being constituted as art, the meaning of the tattoo changes. An evolution in the ways that tattoos are perceived has added to this construction, with older tattoos being associated traditionally with more 'troublesome' types of people, and those who are getting tattoos now being seen more so as connoisseurs of art. The production of tattoos as art also changes the way that the body is understood – the body is constructed as a 'canvas', and given the nature of a canvas, gives tattoos meaning in covering the body. In the production of tattoos as art, it seems important to some wearers that they form part of the design – there is a personal touch and they also become an artist in part, with a collaborative and creative process as part of their artwork. Tattoos being produced as art changes the meaning of the tattoo to a more positive (if middle class) understanding of tattoos, meaning that they are constructed as acceptable in society, as the old 'traditional' view of tattoos is removed. Less negative constructions are formed on those who are tattooed, especially when they can state how their art is created by a well-known artist, or show off the design.

6.5 – Conclusion

In conclusion, these four key aspects relating to discourses on tattooed women's bodies shows the complexity in their constructions and representations. Specifically in relation to women, the body is governed as to the 'right' and the 'wrong' ways to think and act, with the four areas above being examples of the ways the body is considered. Age is a central issue for Western women due to the focus on youth as a desirable trait. The inclusion tattoos on the ageing body becomes an issue to people because it visibly shows the ageing process of the body – tattoos change and develop as does the body. Though tattoos and age is not just a matter of old age – there are issues produced around ageing bodies, regardless of whether they are young or old – either way, some negative construction is formed about the type of women who would tattoo their body at any age. The skin provides a way of articulating a matter that may not be so easily done in words. The visibility of tattoos is important in the representation of tattooed female bodies, enabling agency in respect to how much they self-disclose in relation to their bodies, whilst at the same time, the topic of visibility highlights the negotiation that takes place in showing the body. Finally, through consideration for the production of tattoos as artwork on the body, tension is articulated in how tattooed women embody art, showing how the body is agentic and communicative, versus the notion of wearing art, with the body being positioned as more of a commodity, and the tattoo being an object. There is an articulation of agency in choice, especially around subversive choices, though there are constraints in agency, with the women negotiating what their tattoos mean for them.

Chapter 7: Variability in feminine positionings

The previous chapter focused on tattooed female bodies, specifically exploring discourses that centred on four main areas - implications of the ageing body in respect to how tattooed bodies are constructed, tattoos as a marker of stability on the body and what this represents, how the visibility of tattoos has an effect on the construction of the body they are on, and finally, how tattoos being reconstituted as art changes the way the body is viewed. I explored how these different areas were interwoven with a tension between embodying tattoo art, incorporating it into the performance of the self, positioning them as a commodity.

In this chapter, I will explore how participants 'produce' the tattooed woman in their talk, and draw on diverse representations of femininities. The variability in women's talk about femininities offers insight into the complexities women must navigate to position themselves within the intersecting discursive formations that constitute 'tattooed women'. I consider how the women negotiate what femininity is to them, and how what the intersections are with their tattooed bodies. Following from this, I explore the perceived expectations of femininities, considering how the variability in positionings plays a part in the conformity and resistance to constructions of femininity. Tattoo imagery is then explored in relation to femininity, showing how it can either be embodied or resisted according the imagery portrayed within the tattoo. Finally, I explore the interactions of femininities, embodiment and class.

7.1 – Negotiating femininities

One of the main aims of the research was to explore how gendered ideas of the feminine body intersects with ideas about tattoos, in order to produce the subject position of 'The Tattooed Woman'. In particular, I was interested in the notion that tattooing was a transgressive social practice for women, that enabled women to resist dominant ideas about femininity. However, as my analysis

developed, it became clear that tattoos were not straightforwardly a liberatory embodied practice, and that instead, the performance of the tattooed feminine body involved both conformity and resistance to feminine ideals. In this theme, I explore the varying ways in which women talked about femininity, and their own body as feminine (or not). Each participant articulated different 'versions' of femininity in their account, and also found it hard to articulate a single definition for what femininity meant to them. In this first extract, the participant articulates the tensions that arise between productions of femininity and the tattooed feminine body:

P: I really really want a massive black panther on my back

R: Covering your back?

P: Yeah, but I don't know, I've got a really nice back (laughs) but yeah I don't know, I don't know if I'd do it.

R: Does it represent anything?

P: I want something to do with strength right, and I saw this image of a panther, and it's just lying down, just looking, and it's absolutely, it's such a beautiful image and you can see the strength in his eyes, and that's what I want I don't want a pair of weights on my arm (laughs) I want something you know what I mean, I want erm something that's hidden but, you know that's what it is with me, I might be all loud and lairy and you know whatever else, but inside, I've got a lot of strength in me, you know, so yeah, I want something that's going to represent that, but I'm not brave enough yet (laughs) [Betty]

The panther image appears to represent feminine strength, for Betty. The panther often represents a sinuous beauty, mysterious and stealthy – clearly articulated in Betty's suggestion that it is a "beautiful image", with "strength in his eyes". There is considerable ambivalence in her description of this desired tattoo: 'I don't know if I'd do it' because 'I've got a really nice back'. On the one hand the description of the tattoo as beautiful appears to conform to dominant

ideas about appropriate decoration for women. However, on the other hand, she is concerned about its potential to disfigure her 'nice back'. In this sense, she is caught between two competing images – on the one hand the sense of the panther as an appropriate, feminine tattoo choice, on the other a concern that any tattoo (and particularly a big one) would damage her feminine attributes (her beautiful back). She emphasizes the 'massive' size of the tattoo – it is not just a small piece of work – and therefore occupies more space on the body. It is a common feature both of my interviews, and of some published work on tattoos, that extensive tattoos, covering a significant amount of skin, are described as unfeminine (Madfis & Arford, 2013). In articulating her tattoo choices, Betty expresses her awareness of the regulative idea that tattoos for women should be small, delicate and dainty. Her ambivalence demonstrates her negotiation of this dominant idea in her positioning of herself as tattooed woman. She wants a large tattoo, but is aware of the social positioning of this as unfeminine. Even though the beauty of the proposed tattoo fits with ideals of feminine beauty, she is also clear that the size of the tattoo might transgress feminine ideals and may not be read by others as feminine. At the same time, Betty is quite decisive about the placement of the tattoo on her back. The location is important as it enables her to have 'something that's hidden', suggesting that this means the tattoo will be private, and just for her. This enables her to be extensively tattooed, but still perform a femininity that can be read by others as 'good', and as conforming to feminine ideals, as they are not likely to see the tattoo and cast judgement on it.

There is a clear sense of a right and a wrong way to express strength that is articulated within the extract. She makes it clear that the panther is the 'right' way for her to express strength, as she gives the example 'I don't want a pair of weights on my arm' to illustrate the 'wrong' way to express this – a manner that would perhaps be more associated with masculinity, and physical strength, rather than

a more sleek, slender 'traditional' feminine strength (Grogan et al., 2004). She positions the imagery in a way that relates to her femininity, also ensuring that the body is read as feminine. A sleek and powerful panther provides more of a good representation of strong femininity than a set of dumbbells, which could be considered masculine. She laughs this away as though the choice would be obvious, that the more feminine choice is the right choice. The imagery is read as feminine, allowing an embodiment of femininity through the tattoo. However at the same time that the tattoo embodies femininity, it also subverts it, through being large, bold, and inked upon a female body.

What is clear from the extract above is that she is drawing on a discursive construction of the right way to *do* femininity, and explores how this might be embodied through the tattoo's imagery. She is self-regulating, in that she produces a notion of what femininity is, whilst at the same time, resists against this with the tattoo. It is acceptable for women to be both feminine and be tattooed, as well as feminine and strong, providing that this is done in the right way, ensuring that the body can be read as feminine. Other examples of negotiation were discussed that highlight some of the complexities of being a tattooed woman, in relation to fashion choices:

I know people that have, erm massive calf tattoos and in the summer they wear tights cus they don't like it, and I never want to say I can't wear that because of my tattoo [Nora]

The inclusion of the size of the tattoo is an indicator as to how the tattoo relates to negotiating femininities. Small and hidden tattoos are often considered as more favourable on women, with links being drawn between the visibility of a tattoo, the size of the tattoo, and the body that the tattoo is on (Hawkes et al., 2004). As the tattoo that is mentioned is not as hidden during the summer months when warmer weather would indicate a change in clothing, the wearer still

chooses to wear items of clothing to cover the tattoo, ensuring that the body is still read as feminine.

As the woman discussed within the extract wear tights, this would indicate that the issue lies in the tattoo being visible (or in this case, not visible) to others. This contradicts Wohlrab et al's (2009), assertion that because women said they get tattoos to enhance personal beauty, they were unaware of the negative connotations of tattoos. Whilst women do choose to get tattoos for aesthetic reasons, this does not mean that they are unaware or unaffected by representations formed by others. Nora does state that she wants tattoos, though she is aware that her tattoo choices are not necessarily free, and does show that she gives thought to the ways that her body may be read if she gets them. Her choices are constrained and regulated by what is seen as acceptable. She does not want to be constrained in her fashion choices, and therefore she negotiates her production of femininity through her tattoo choices. By constraining where her tattoos may be located in the body, she is less constrained by the fashion choices that she makes.

This extract also highlights the importance of the location of the tattoo on the body, because this determines visibility. Both fashion and tattoos function to communicate a performance of the self to be 'read' by those around us. Both can express conformity to dominant ideas of womanhood and of selfhood, and resistance to those ideas (Armstrong et al, 2014). Nora states that she does not want her tattoo choices to dictate her fashion choices. She does not want to change the sense of self that she portrays through her clothing, as would potentially be different if she were to have a visible and permanent representation of self, through a tattoo.

In the above extract, the issue is not just focused on the tattoo, but how the tattooed feminine body is constituted at the interface of fashion choices, and how those intersecting discourses of femininity, class, and embodiment function to regulate the tattooed body. Nora

indicates that the size and visibility of a tattoo are factors in the body being read as feminine. Building on this further, the following extract also focuses on the intersection between the tattooed feminine body and fashion choices, producing femininity as a kind of skilled consumption – the skilled consumer chooses wisely (McRobbie, 2009). Specifically, this extract focuses on a context where traditional constructions of femininities are considered important:

P: I want my tattoos for me so I can cover them and show them when I want, like my sister, for her wedding, she made me wear erm, had long sleeve dress

I: Were you a bridesmaid?

P: Yeah, well it wasn't her it was her husband that didn't want them [Irene]

Western weddings are traditionally typified by heteronormative norms, characterised by hyperfeminine and hypermasculine performances of gender (Kozieł & Sitek, 2013). In this context, there is intense public debate about whether 'the bride' should display tattoos or not (Yang, 2014). As a bridesmaid at her sister's wedding, Irene describes how she became subject to the regulative norms of gender conformity. Her sister 'made her' cover up, at the request of her future husband. Here, Irene is subject to gender scrutiny, and her visible tattoos are seen as unacceptable in the hyperfeminine role of bridesmaid. This account of regulative scrutiny demonstrates how her transgressive (tattooed) feminine body, under the male gaze, was *disciplined*. She moderates her future tattoo choices in relation to this experience of being shamed and 'made' to cover up.

Irene explains that she was 'made' to wear a long-sleeved bridesmaid dress, ensuring that her tattoo was not on display. The covering of the tattoo feeds into stereotypical and heteronormative assumptions made about the feminine body, especially on the day of a wedding. Though it was not her wedding, she produces an understanding that

the tattoo would detract from the day, and that her body should be covered so that this is not given any thought.

In relation to her tattoo choices, Irene does state that her tattoos are for her, so that she can 'cover them and show them when I want'. As in the previous extracts mentioned, this would indicate that the location of the tattoo is important for her, so that she is able to represent herself as she wants to – she is agentic in the way that her body may communicate with others. As she can choose whether the tattoo is visible or not, she can determine the level of communication that her tattoo expresses, and where she feels this to be appropriate. Through mentioning the long sleeve dress that she wore at her sister's wedding, she was able to negotiate her tattooed feminine body with being read as stereotypically feminine – without the tattoo being seen. Whilst she states that her tattoos are for her, they are not obtained without consideration for how she may be read by others, so therefore this part of herself is negotiated.

This extract shows what the constructions are around gendered representations of the body, especially in more specific and traditional contexts, such as weddings. The tattooed woman must negotiate the constructions of the (ideal) feminine body, the consuming body, and constructions of feminine agency as 'choosing' and making 'skillful and authentic choices'. However, this research does not seek to simplify the complexities of the feminine body, and how tattoos are constructed. An interviewee picked out one of the key issues that relate to femininity, centrally as an issue of specific gendered expectations:

if it's not tattoos people are always going to find something else, to erm, hate on someone for, so if it's not her tattoos it's going to be the fact that she's dressed as a slut or whatever
[Jean]

This interesting comment positions tattoos as just another object of the regulative gaze. Jean suggests that the female body in particular

will 'always' be the focus of comment. By using the example of 'slut' as another regulative comment, Jean draws attention to the sexualised nature of the unruly, tattooed feminine body. Her comments here are in some ways the flipside of Irene's account of being disciplined for her tattoos. She was 'made to' cover up, whilst Jean's comment suggests that all expressions of the unruly feminine body will be subject to scrutiny and attempted regulation. But whilst Irene describes reluctant conformity, Jean's comment is more defiant. Femininity and the ways that it is produced will be questioned and discussed regardless of tattoos – though these do add another element to the discussion. Traditional representations of femininity are widely discussed (Bartky, 1990), therefore any way that femininity is seen will be in contrast, and less acceptable, to this ideal. At the same time that Jean acknowledges that tattoos are not necessarily the issue, she continues by considering another way in which feminine bodies are judged, and specifically refers to being 'dressed as a slut'. This still portrays the gender specific negotiations that women face in their representations as feminine – there is a fine line in what is considered feminine and acceptable, and what is considered too much. Parallels can be drawn to the way that tattoos are often understood, a woman who is produced as slutty implies that there is skin on show, and there is an inference made as to the sexual availability of the woman.

Overall, the location on the body seems to be an important factor in how femininities are produced, with the visibility of the tattoo being linked to where the tattoo is located (Kang & Jones, 2007). The visibility (or not) of the tattoo also feeds into negotiations of femininities in that the women feel that they can choose how they represent themselves (Kosut, 2000a), depending on where their tattoos are located, but also, how this intersects with the fashion choices they make. Fashion is an important element in the representation of femininities (Kjeldgaard & Bengtsson, 2005) and can

also dictate whether a tattoo is displayed or not, as well as whether or not society deems tattoos to be appropriately visible given a specific context. In negotiating femininities, the body of a woman will be scrutinised regardless of whether they have a tattoo or not, but this does add an extra element in the ways that femininities are constructed. Within these extracts, the tattoo is constructed as forming a part of the performance of femininity, enabling both the conformity to and resistance against normative constructions. The women position themselves as knowing, as agentic, and as aware of what these constructions are, and how they navigate these constructions with their tattoos. The tattoo is produced as one object of resistance – performing acceptable femininity is regulative, and whilst the tattoos resist this, they make the women aware of what these constructions are. All of the women perform femininity in negotiation with their subjective positionings, from bridesmaid, to strong woman – there are a multitude of ways that femininities are performed.

7.2 – Tattoo imagery

Many participants described tattoo images in ways that seemed to either reproduce or resist hegemonic femininities. Their descriptions often used binary language, positioning tattoos as either masculine or feminine. For example, Amelia says:

Yeah I think I like with my flowers, it's a feminine thing and maybe people who also have flowers associate it with more feminine things than say a skull [Amelia]

The polar construction is clearly evident here. Flowers are feminine, and consequently more appropriate in her eyes than a more apparently masculine image like a skull. This suggests that the femininisation of the tattoo is what enables its non-transgressive incorporation into the feminine body. This construction is extended through her assertion that 'maybe people who also have flowers associate it with more feminine things'. This assumes a collective

reading of flowers as feminine (Craighead, 2011) that functions to underscore the 'appropriateness' of her choices. The examples of imagery that are provided in this extract are quite distinct in respect to being typically feminine (flowers) and typically anti-feminine (skull). What these examples highlight is that tattoo imagery is gendered, and is important in relation to the body it is on, in that traditional notions of femininity can be embodied or resisted.

Not all of the women discussed their tattoos as embodying femininity – some were active in their resistance against traditional representations. However, the complex nature of the tattooed female body is shown through the simultaneous resistance of traditional femininity whilst reinforcing productions of those representations:

I think I've got a mix I think, I've got a mix of feminine and not feminine but I, I like feminine tattoos and I like to look at them but that's not me cus I'm not (pause) feminine to me is whatever you want to be, to me in my head, so to me, having these it makes no difference whether I'm a girl or a boy but at the same time I wouldn't want brightly coloured swirls and flowers and shit I want skulls and dead things (laughs) [Mae]

Mae is the most heavily tattooed of the women who were interviewed, with both arms covered, the majority of her back, and parts of her legs. Elsewhere in her interview, she describes one of her arms, detailing each individual tattoo. The imagery that she describes is still put into categories relating to femininity, therefore defining tattoo imagery in this manner will have an implication for the body that it is on. Further, her assertion of 'feminine' and 'not feminine' interplays with the general disapproval of extensive coverage as *unfeminine* (Swami & Furnham, 2007). She is navigating a tension between resisting normative constructions of femininity, but also conforming to them.

In relation to Mae's own interpretation of femininity, she describes herself as not being feminine, though she does appreciate feminine

tattoos on others ('I like feminine tattoos and I like to look at them but I'm not'). In this sense, femininities are considered as fixed, rather than something that is fluid and open to change – she cannot get a 'feminine' tattoo because she herself is not feminine, and does not discuss this as something that would change. The tattoos subvert normative expectations of femininity – they are produced as an almost anti-femininity that does not align with traditional societal views of femininity. The tattoos that she has are congruent with who she feels she is – she describes her body as a congruent and visible representation of her inner self (Doss & Hubbard, 2009).

Mae states that it 'makes no difference whether I'm a girl or a boy' in relation to the imagery of tattoo choices, which points out that it isn't necessarily the imagery that is gendered, but rather the tattoo is read as gendered once on the female body. In addition, research does suggest that tattooed men are perceived more favourably than tattooed women are (Heywood et al., 2012; Swami, 2012), therefore regardless of the imagery, the feminine body will be read in a different way to the wearer.

The final point from this extract almost contrasts the previous point made by Mae regarding her tattoo choices. She comments that she would not want 'brightly coloured swirls' and would rather have 'skulls and dead things', so whilst stating that her gender does not make a difference in her choices, it also does, in that she does not want imagery that is associated with femininity. This part of the extract stands out as being a production of resistance to conformity – she does not want to be labelled as feminine through her tattoos, but more related to anti-femininity, subversive to traditional readings of the feminine body.

Throughout the interviews, other women also discussed the importance of their tattoo imagery to them, not just in the message it has, but also in the way that it can provide balance to the body:

but you know the left hand side of the body is the more feminine receptive side and the right hand side is the more masculine sort of dynamic side and I think I've got my imagery swapped so I think I can't remember I need to look in the mirror I think I've got the goddess on the right hand side and the erm, the stag man on the left, which is kind of interesting in itself, but it's also you know, it's almost like it forms the backbone of my, so I have the goddess and the sorcerer and they are sort of my backbone [Belle]

The first thing that stands out about this extract is how she provides a context for the tattoos, describing the body in two halves, one half feminine and one-half masculine – she both asserts and transgresses the binary. In addition, she provides key traits that she feels are associated – femininity as receptive, and masculinity as dynamic (Helgeson, 1994). The tattoos that she describes are highly symbolic for her, but as she realises in the interview, the imagery is 'swapped' – she has her goddess tattoo on the masculine side and her sorcerer tattoo in the feminine side. She produces a sense that she has achieved balance – her body is gender neutral, as expressed through these tattoos. However, being a woman, her body will not be read as neutral, and the imagery will also not be read as such. Through explaining what the stereotypical traits are, she reinforces these productions, but also expresses them as though the tattoos allow her to embody these traits, as she has both a feminine and a masculine tattoo. The way that she describes the body as having two very different halves and how the tattoos relate to that are in a very fixed manner – as though this is how the body is and the body cannot change.

The interesting comment from this extract is the point where she describes these tattoos as her backbone. The associations that we make about the backbone are that it is a source of strength, and that we would not be much without it. She discusses the tattoos as not on

her backbone, but rather, they *are* her backbone – they are central to how she defines herself, and what gives her strength. They are on her back, and are produced as symbolic in relation to who she is – the imagery is both strongly masculine and strongly feminine – it gives her body a sense of balance. The tattoos are a part of her, and they form who she is. However, being a woman, it is read differently in respect to femininity. Within this extract, she is not detailing whether or not she wants to be read as feminine or otherwise, but the imagery is significant for her in giving her balance. In contrast, some interviewees who described a clear association between their tattoo imagery and their sense of femininity:

I wouldn't mind having, erm, the goddess you know that's like the beautiful goddess that's just the top half where she's nude and stuff, you know in regards to femininity...the feminine, the feminine the female figures sorry is, much more powerful than any male figure, so I don't know whether if it's about the physical form, it's more about what the form represents for me...I don't wanna ruin my female body but for me you're accentuating you know [Lydia]

Specifically relating to the imagery, Lydia states how the goddess is important to her and how she makes sense of femininity – 'it's more about what the form represents for me'. The imagery allows her to embody femininity, as symbolised importantly through the goddess, which is a strong image. She contrasts this with the male figure which she does not see on the same level – women are more powerful to her, therefore, it makes sense for the powerful imagery to be of a woman. The adding of the 'you know' makes it a mutual understanding between us as tattooed women, that tattoos are a positive thing and not a bad thing for the body – there is support and justification for it in the tattooed community.

After a pause, she produces a concern for ruining her body, as seen by others, whilst at the same time, defends her tattoo choice for

being positive – it allows her to embody femininity and is therefore a good thing. The imagery doesn't ruin her body, but to her, it enhances it and makes it better. The imagery is important in ensuring that her body is read as feminine (which is juxtaposed with being tattooed in the first place as tattoos are not seen as feminine). The meaning of 'the goddess' imagery is important for how Lydia negotiates her position as feminine. The imagery is the essence of femininity – a goddess – and reads as essential femininity on her skin. However, as the tattoo itself may not be considered feminine, it subverts normative constructions of femininity, in the production of the goddess being powerful, and representing strength, rather than more traditionally fragile femininity (McRobbie, 2015). She demonstrates an interplay of authentic femininity, painted on the skin – marked as powerful resistant femininity, and as an essentialised representation of femininity.

In summary, the imagery of the tattoo is important to the women, and is an area of research that needs more consideration – it is not just about being tattooed, but also about what the tattoo contains, and how that is read by those who have the tattoo and other people. To the women in this research, the imagery had personal meaning, and could reflect aspects of themselves, whether that be femininity, anti-femininity, or reflect a sense of balance between masculinity and femininity. Whichever they felt their tattoos to reflect, they are still perpetuating the notion that the tattoo is to be read as something of a masculine or feminine action, especially when applied to the female body. Whilst some imagery was discussed as gender neutral, it does not remain as such once applied to the gender body – therefore, the tattoo will be read differently to the thoughts of the wearer, just through the body being read as a woman. The imagery allows for the conformity to or resistance against normative femininity – it subverts it, it makes it permanent, as inscribed on the skin.

7.3 – Classed femininities

Femininities and class positionings often intersect in British culture (Skeggs, 1997). Normative femininities are historically rooted in white, middle class ideals of being 'ladylike', with other forms of femininities (e.g. black, working class, disabled) often being 'othered' (Lawler, 2005). My participants did not refer directly to class, but they did draw on classed constructions of both tattoos and femininity to narrate their tattooed bodies. For example, in this extract, Nora talks about class and tattoos as an issue for other people:

if you're middle class and you're coated in tattoos, you're gonna get, sort of, shunned from your society from everyone else that's around you, whereas in a lower class where everyone else already has all of the tattoos its culture really, everyone around you has a tattoo you're gonna wanna get one as well
[Nora]

Here, class, like gender, is produced as binary - working class and middle class. She describes it as a shared, working-class phenomenon, framing tattoos as a part of belonging for working-class people (Kosut, 2000b). In contrast, she suggests extensive tattoos are inappropriate for middle class people. She implies there are rules, and that transgressing those can result in being shunned. Middle class people are often cited as referring to tattoos more as 'artwork', changing the meaning of the tattoo to something more admirable (Sturgis, 2014). In addition, they are more likely to favour the small, dainty, and hidden tattoo as this would be more alluring than heavier skin coverage for women. Specifically, in this extract from Nora she seems to refer to more heavy coverage of tattoos ('coated in tattoos'), which would not be seen as something desired by those in the middle classes.

It is positioned almost as abnormal to not be tattooed if you are from a 'lower class' - this class association is influential in the choices made in getting tattooed (Wohlrab et al., 2007). Interesting research discusses how tattooed people are seen in respect to a hierarchy -

those who have more skin coverage and tattoos by more well-known artists are seen to be higher up the hierarchy, with those who have been recently tattooed or only have small and hidden pieces being nearer to the bottom (MacCormack, 2006). This is interesting in the way that it is almost subversive to the idealised views of 'normal' society.

Different positions are produced within the extracts, which highlights variability in the constructions for tattooed feminine bodies. For some, larger tattoos are an indicator of authenticity, whilst for others, they are a sign of poor taste (Wohlrab et al., 2007). Either way, both of these examples show the regulative practices around tattooing, from the point of view of the tattoo community, and also from gendered and classes norms. The perspective of gender and class norms is demonstrated by Maud, discussing the tattoo choices of a friend:

I think she'll regret, she's like so well spoken, and she portrays this image, they don't match the person that she is now...I mean she went to the south of France with his family, and I said did you get your tattoos out did you wear shorts and she said yeah and I said did people look at you and she said yeah, and I said well were you embarrassed and she said well, I wasn't embarrassed because of my tattoos but people were looking at me, so you know, she's not going to have another one [Maud]

Whilst she is discussing the tattoos and associated issues of other people, the story within this extract still articulates Maud's position on tattoos – they should be hidden and they should be small, so that you are not read unfavourably. In this sense, she positions her friend in a way that does not allow her to transcend class boundaries – her extensive tattoo places her in a position of being read as working class, which is a position she is being regulated from. This sits at odds with her current lifestyle, and being a part of an affluent family.

“Tattoo regret” has been noted as common when the symbolic nature of the tattoo no longer represents something meaningful to the wearer (Madfis & Arford, 2013).

The extract does not just detail an issue with tattoos, but also classed locations – it is the social space and context that dictates the appropriateness of the tattoo, or in this case, the revelation of flesh that is tattooed. The normalised discourse for the ‘well spoken’ person produces the kind of femininity that would be appropriate (Fenske, 2007).

The final point about Maud is that in evaluating the other woman’s tattoos, she reproduces a class-based gaze, imposing her own standards for middle class femininity on her friend. Her presumption that others would stare at her friend’s tattoos reflects her own evaluative gaze. She judges her for her tattoo choices, their visibility, and their size. Her suggestion that her friend is ‘well spoken’ and will therefore regret her choice is a clear indication of a class based judgement around appropriate tattoo choices. There is a perceived difference between the class of person who is well spoken and the class of person who has large, visible tattoos. In displaying visible tattoos, she sees her friend as exceeding the boundaries of appropriateness for a nice, ‘well spoken’ lady.

Whilst some of the women were referring to specific class based contexts for their tattoos, they rarely mentioned their own views of their class in an explicit way. Mae however, who is the most heavily tattooed out of the women who were interviewed, drew on her class background frequently, in a way that related to what was almost expected of her as a tattooed woman. Prior to this part of the interview, we were discussing how we may be seen by others as tattooed women, and what she feels about those who she feels judge her:

I don't judge them I don't care if you've got tattoos or you haven't got tattoos...you know I'm from a council area which

was rough as fuck (laughs) like proper ghetto shit, I'm an alright person now it's like I never lived there it's weird [Mae]

The extract starts with her positioning herself in a good light, which is placed in the context of her being from a working-class background. The inference from this statement is that because she has experienced life from a working-class perspective, and those are the kinds of people who are more often than not judged by others, it has taught her not to do the same. She does not see this as a good trait, as though it would make her better than someone else, and she does not want people to think this of her. She relates this more explicitly to those who are tattooed being judged more than those who are not (Tyler, 2013), which suggests the visibility of the tattoo, and therefore the stereotypical social class associated with such a tattooed body – based on her own experiences.

Whilst she discusses her council background in a jokey way, at the same time, she is perpetuating the kinds of stereotypes associated with those from a working class background – she refers to the area that she lived in being 'rough', indicating social issues, issues with employment, drugs and other associated issues (Imogen Tyler, 2008). The fact that she is a heavily tattooed woman feeds into the working-class construction, so whilst she might not feel as though she associates herself with being working class anymore, there is a clear narrative produced with a sense of 'then' versus 'now', which still problematizes the working class roots that she 'doesn't judge'. She explains how she has almost gone through a transformation ('I'm an alright person now'), as though she is expected to continue to be working-class and to act like a working-class individual permanently. Tattoos are not an indicator of how a person will behave or act necessarily, but more an outward reflection of parts of their personal narrative.

A distinction was made between how femininities are viewed in respect to class, as pointed out by Lydia:

I'm a woman but I'm not necessarily a lady (laughs) that's what I would say... you see some really lovely ladies, who really take so much pride in their performance, how they put themselves out there and everything cus it's kind of like god doesn't that it's just draining

[Lydia]

She explicitly makes a distinction between different ways of being a woman, and that it is not just about biology. The way that she positions the term 'lady' is as though it is a term which is more highly regarded, and read as more associated with middle class femininity (Allan, 2009). Being a woman denotes certain behaviours, but being a lady is an extension of that, and requires more effort.

An interesting comment that she makes refers to how the ladies that she refers to take pride in their performance, as opposed to the common phrase pride in appearance. She suggests that 'being a lady' is playing a role, performing something that is not inherent but enacted (Johnson, 2014) and that it is something that requires some effort to maintain. She makes reference to this by stating how 'it's just draining', implying that to be a lady is not necessarily the real person, and requires effort to be. In doing this, she distances herself from being 'ladylike' – it's too tiring for her. She is positioning lady as 'not-me'. By identifying 'lady' as an exhausting performance, she also implies it is inauthentic. In contrast, by extension, her own womanhood is framed as *more authentic*.

It is clear from the analysis so far that women's talk about tattoos draw on discourses of gender, class and community / belonging. In this sense, tattooed women's talk about their bodies and the meaning of their tattoos is not monolithic, it is varied and complex. As they talked about themselves as a 'tattooed woman', my participants engaged in a kind of "identity project", positioning themselves in relation to their sense of how tattoos are both read in relation to gender, class and belonging. As tattoos appear to be an expected

part of working class culture, it is considered more normal and also expected. In middle class communities, tattoos are seen differently – positioned more as art to be seen more favourably, and also vary in their size and their location in relation to working class cultural norms for tattoos. In this sense, tattoos can impede the change in social class – being visibly tattooed may prevent someone from being constructed as middle class, and instead be associated with more working-class behaviours.

At the same time, this is not to say that working class people and working class tattooed people are bad, though this is positioned as almost expected. Finally in relation to femininities, a distinction is made in respect to being a woman and being a lady, constructing these as two distinct positions, with their own associated behaviours and actions. The middle class 'lady' is associated with dainty and delicate, and part of a performative role. In contrast, the working-class woman is louder, and more visible. Participants negotiate their subject positions in relation to these dominant constructions when positioning themselves as tattooed women, with extensive tattoos as 'working class' or chavvy, in relation to middle class femininity, whilst other women position the 'delicate and small' as inauthentic, suggesting that extensive and artistic tattoos are more 'real'. What is being achieved through these varying positions is a sense that regardless of the type of tattoo, the visibility of it, or the perceived class of the individual, there are multiple ways in which women are regulated in respect to femininities. This regulation is not just imbued by others, but also by the self, and is constituted as skilful consumption in displaying the 'right' kind of femininity at the right time.

7.4 – The perception of normative femininity and the space for tattoos

The perception of femininity is interesting in respect to what is expected, and what relates to the ideal representation of femininity.

These expectations do not just relate to the tattooed feminine body, but also expectations in aspects of life including dating, appearance, and also sexuality. Firstly, Mae notes the discord between societal perceptions of pretty, and how tattoos fit with this:

yeah cus they're not pretty tattoos, if you're a girl you should have pretty tattoos, or they ruin you (pause) my favourite one is actually you're quite good looking so why have you done them for [Mae]

Interesting here is the notion of having a 'pretty' tattoo, which could be read as a more girly looking tattoo, smaller, with imagery that is more related to femininity. This is in contrast to the tattoos of Mae, who explains elsewhere in her interview that she doesn't like girly tattoos, and has several skulls and oddities within the imagery of her tattoos. The point made isn't that women cannot have tattoos – tattoos can still be feminine, but they need to be 'pretty' to be acceptable.

Her point that non-pretty tattoos would 'ruin you' is interesting, reducing the whole person to how the body looks in relation to perceptions of femininity. This produces a construction of how the person must be on the whole, based in the tattoos. Being 'ruined' through a tattoo reduces being a woman to their looks, reinforcing superficial notions of what should be important for women. The statement is positioned almost as a warning, but at the same time, Mae shrugs it off, knowing that it is not the case for her – her tattoos have given her confidence and she does not see herself as being 'ruined' because of the tattoos that she has. In this sense, this creates a distinguishing feature between herself and these 'other women' who may see themselves in this light, implying that it is perhaps a sense of self confidence and a level of identification with her tattoos that enables her to see past this negative construction. At the same time, it is also through the use of constructions such as authenticity

and distancing herself from class representations that she distinguishes herself.

She draws on others' comments on her tattoos to highlight how feminine prettiness is constructed culturally as antithetical to tattoos. In this construction, tattoos become emblematic of a spoiled femininity, as the mark of the 'anti-feminine'. As a traditionally pretty woman, she suggests that others ask her "so why have you done them for", as though you cannot be both pretty and be tattooed. This further serves to reinforce the position that femininity and being pretty are presented in a certain way, a favourable ideal that is without tattoos. This is not to say that those with tattoos cannot be deemed as 'pretty' – however, this statement does suggest that if you are tattooed, you are less likely to be considered attractive (Swami & Furnham, 2007). Here, there is a complex relationship articulated with gaze – Mae simultaneously draws on her position as traditionally feminine, as well as resisting it.

Continuing with the perception of attractiveness in relation to femininity and tattoos, constructions of femininity were not lost on other interviewees either:

it's difficult to accept that women are wanting and getting more tattoos, but it's just look ooh, well, that's not going to look right, and it's the whole, 1940's kind of lady like way, because I still think people expect women to have long hair, not short hair, and to be prim and proper, and not wear, see like, I could wear the same outfit as a boy now, because the fashion and times have changed so much, like I'm wearing Converse boys wear Converse, I'm wearing skinny jeans boys wear skinny jeans now, and just a plain top, they all blend in to one but they still expect you to look feminine, cus if I had short hair and wearing this someone would be like oh she's a lesbian, you just know that there's, they expect you to wear make-up
[Artoria]

An important issue in the perception of femininities is the way that anything less than the ideal can be seen in an unfavourable way, and in this example, one of the constructions that is seen to be unfavourable is to be viewed as a lesbian – as though sexual orientation has an impact on the representation of femininity. The relation to sexual orientation show how the issue of not being perceived as feminine is not just an issue of gender, but also a factor in respect to heteronormative ideals placed upon women (Jackson, 2006). Stereotypes are formed around perceptions of women in relation to sexual orientation, which are othered in relation to ideal femininity (Palder, 2008).

In this extract, Artoria describes how dress sense has evolved over the decades, and suggests that contemporary fashion is more androgynous than it has been previously (Owen-Crocker, 2012). However, she also suggests that to avoid censure as 'too masculine', she needs to manage her appearance, by compensating for her tattoos and short hair with other markers of femininities – for example, by wearing make-up. She makes specific reference to an era whereby femininity was considered as well-groomed – clothing for women was hyper-feminine, hair was quite elaborate, and it was of an age where women did not do as much as they would be able to do today. Clothing and the way that the body is read as feminine changes over time periods (Clarke & Spence, 2013), with policing and self-regulating of dress to show 'appropriate' positionings.

Within the interviews, other women discussed how heteronormative assumptions and ideals of femininity become an issue:

whereas if you've got a woman covered in tattoos they're automatically seen as gay because they're not pretty and pristine, and it's not like that at all, erm, I think for me, it doesn't affect me cus I personally, get the really frustrating thing of you're not gay you're too pretty to be gay and I'm like, excuse me like, because I will like when I go out like I will put

make up on I will have my hair down I will wear heels I'll wear dresses, and, that's an automatic thing for a guy I'm like no
[Violet]

Violet makes explicit reference to the intersections between her sexuality, her tattoos, and the heteronormative assumptions of culture in relation to sexuality and the performance of femininity (Jackson, 2006). She describes how she 'achieves' in some ways the heteronormative standard of femininity– by being pretty and by wearing typically feminine clothes – but her tattoos are at odds with that construction. In this sense, the tattoo might be read as functioning explicitly to disrupt heteronormative standards for feminine beauty.

A key issue that is raised within this extract is the assumption that the performance of femininity is conflated with perceived sexual availability (or willingness?), and that this is for the pleasure of men, rather than being for the woman herself (Guéguen, 2013). Men read her feminine presentation as an indication of (hetero)sexual availability, and she expresses frustration with that. Violet narrates a more complex construction of gender, sexuality and the presentation of femininity. You can have tattoos and still be read as feminine (and straight), if in other senses, you present the complete package of femininity. There is almost an expectation that making 'an effort' and being feminine is for the purpose of others – a heteronormative assumption that Violet does not subscribe to, and in a sense, feels almost removed from given her sexual orientation. At the same time, there is also pressure for women to 'do' their appearance *for themselves*. This is part of the 'because you're worth it' culture of the 21st century (Hemetsberger, Von Wallpach, & Bauer, 2012). Women should want to look attractive, because that expresses the authentic self, because it is a form of self-care. Looking good is framed as a moral virtue in this way. Not caring about your appearance is

regarded as a bit of a character flaw, and dressing nicely *for others* is seen as inauthentic.

In some interviews the conflation of attractiveness, femininity, and being tattoo free was very apparent in discussions about dating experiences. As an example, Belle considered aspects of dating:

I was really shocked on the online dating sites to see a lot of men, particularly, saying, don't get in touch with me if you've got tattoos I don't want women with tattoos...the guy that I'm dating at the moment I was really, I was actually really quite anxious about it, and I thought gosh that's really strange that I'm really anxious when I hadn't given it a second thought, and then I thought no actually I don't really know what he thinks about tattoos [Belle]

In this extract, some men's expressed preference for women without tattoos is described as unsettling Belle, and disrupts her sense of confidence. There are certain assumptions surrounding online dating sites and the kinds of interactions that take place (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006), and more specifically, what men look for in women (Best & Delmege, 2012). As pointed out by Belle elsewhere in her interview, tattooed women are perceived as agentic (Kosut, 2000a) and because femininity is seen as passive, agentic women are seen as off-putting to men (Guéguen, 2013).

In the world of 'dating', she effectively exposes herself to the male gaze, and in the world of online dating in particular, with its wish lists and explicit criteria, the male gaze intersects with a kind of consumer culture, that makes her tattoos a 'feature', for the consumer to accept or reject. She is opening herself to scrutiny from others, and that scrutiny includes her body and her tattoos. Though this should not be an issue to others as it is her body, the perceptions of how women should be and their ideals in the world of dating lead to their lack of acceptance (Hawkes et al., 2004).

7.5 Conclusions

Overall, the perception of femininities and how they are constructed and negotiated is a complex issue, constituted in intersections with factors like gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, race and class. In the UK, the feminine ideal is white, heterosexual, able bodies, and alternative ways of doing and being feminine are cast as 'other' (Kosut, 2000a). Concepts of heteronormativity are applied to femininity, for example, in the realms of dating, being tattooed and 'dressing up' in a feminine manner, though this assumption does not always apply. Regardless of how women dress, there are still certain expectations that need to be adhered to for women to be seen as favourably feminine.

In conclusion, in women's talk about tattoos, it is clear that dominant constructions of idealised femininity play a significant role in how they narrate the tattooed body. This intersects in the interviews I conducted with constructs of class. Tattoos for women are represented as predominantly working class, and for middle class or aspirational women, this needs to be negotiated through the performance of 'the tasteful tattoo'.

However, constructing their own femininities is a fraught process in relation to tattoos, with clear tensions in the need to negotiate a clear sense of self that adheres to expectations of femininity in some respects, whilst at the same time resists traditional and outdated views of femininity through tattoos. Tattoo imagery is of importance in relation to tattoos, enabling women to either resist or conform to constructions of femininity depending on the imagery they choose. There is a need for a focus not just on the concept of having a tattoo or not, but for the imagery that is contained with the tattoo, its meaning to the tattooed woman, and how it might be read by others.

Chapter 8: Inscribed meaning on the skin

The previous analysis chapters have explored discourses that centre on social norms, femininities, class, age, and embodiment, considering some of the intersectional discursive formations within which the subjectivities of tattooed women are constituted. Throughout the chapters, I have shown how these intersecting discursive formations function in regulative ways, showing how the women simultaneously conform to and resist notions of femininity and what it means to be a tattooed woman. It is clear that tattoos provide women with some space for an agentic engagement with dominant discourses of femininity, and some potential to resist their objectification under the male gaze. This, however, is constituted within the neoliberal discourse of 'choice', and as McRobbie (2009) has argued, this notion of choice is already prescribed, and the choices being constrained within hegemonic norms in society.

In this chapter, discourses of inscribed meaning on the body will be explored, considering how women inscribe meaning on their bodies through tattoos, and what this idea of 'meaning' produces. Throughout the interviews, participants described 'meaningfulness' as an integral part of their tattoos. In order to be 'properly tattooed' or an 'authentic tattooed woman', the women appeared to draw on a discourse that represented the tattoos as personally meaningful – they repeatedly narrated that their tattoos were meaningful, and this appeared to function as a rationale for their being tattooed. The 'meaning' of the tattoos was often bound up in personal narratives – of family, community, of belonging – narratives bound up in discourses of care and of belonging. These echo an 'ethic of care' (Gilligan, 1977) which enables women to position their tattoos as feminine and 'appropriate'. The emphasis on meaning also fits clearly with the idea of the self-regulating, therapeutic subject (Guilfoyle, 2016; Rose, 1998). Further, this focus on 'meaning' positions tattoos as reflected choices, not empty decoration, underscoring the

previously discussed self-positioning as a reflexive, choosing subject. I explore women's accounts of their 'meaningful tattoos', considering how they described them as inscribing their care for family, community and belonging onto the skin. In the women's accounts, the 'meaning' of the tattoo was central, not just in describing the tattoo, but also in justifying it. For many women, it seemed that a *meaningful tattoo* was the *right* way to do tattoos as a woman. Finally, the embodiment of pain is discussed in relation to the performance of being a tattooed woman, and explores the negotiation the women make between strong pain bearers, and fragile beings needing to avoid pain.

8.1 – Family and community belonging: traditions and memories written on the body

One way that the meaning of tattoos was articulated by participants was in respect to belonging, and the way that tattoos provide women with a sense of connection to their families and their beliefs. The close links between the tattoo and the family produce an embodied account of care (Hamington, 2004), which positions the women as 'good subjects', fulfilling their family role as carer (Abel & Nelson, 1990). Many of the women talked about their tattoos as being meaningful in relation to their families, as seen below:

okay I've got four in total, erm I've got my flower [she showed me her lower arm; tattoo is on her wrist] which is in between a lily and an orchid, and I got that done when my gran passed away, erm and then I've got my gran and grandads name in Gujarati, they've both passed away so I've got no grandparents now so I really wanted to get something for them they're my dad's parents, because I wanted to get something that's for both of them, something to remind me of them, sometimes you kind of forget do you know what I mean [Betty]

In this extract, Betty positions herself as a family orientated person, and suggests that her tattoos are a display of her particular family

narrative. She highlights her sense of the importance of this narrative through her use of pronouns that mark = ownership, commenting on 'my flower' and 'my gran', rather than 'a flower' or 'a grandparent'. This strengthens the sense of how personally meaningful they are to her. The repetition of the possessive pronoun ('my flower', 'my gran') emphasises the connection between the two, and how her tattoo represents the bond she has with her family. Her grandparent's names are written in Gujarati, signalling a sense of connectedness to her cultural history. Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler (2007) note how personal narratives are commonly cited as the motivation for getting tattooed, as the tattoo allows for the expression of personal values – seen here in the value of the family. The entire extract is focused on the self as relational – as a daughter, and as a grandchild, and shows who 'she' is as a family centred individual (Benson, 2002). Her tattoos are constituted as authentic choices (Kosut, 2000a) because they hold meaning and significance to her. Throughout the extract, she draws connections that emphasise the *authenticity* of the tattoo choice, through their signifying of her personal narrative. For her tattoo to have meaning shows that it is an authentic choice, and the right way for a tattoo to be 'done'.

Betty also describes the contextual significance of a life event that led to the tattoo – her grandmother passing away. This tattoo is a symbolic representation of someone she has lost, but still has a permanent and physical connection with them through the tattoo. The tattoo takes on significance following from this event by becoming an emblem (Kosut, 2000a), and a physical memory of her grandmother. This emblem serves as a stable and permanent reminder of her close relationship to her family, despite other aspects of life being open to change. This is reinforced by 'do you know what I mean', as this part of the conversation implies that I as the researcher (and friend, employee, also with a family) know how busy we are in the society and culture of today, therefore her tattoo choice

is justified as serving as a stable reminder of what is important. Pre-tattoo, her family would still have been of importance to her, though this importance is now solidified through the tattoo.

Similar accounts of family and the representation of family through tattoos are threaded throughout some of the other interviews, showing the link not just to the family, but also to the generational significance of the tattoo. This effectively produces the tattoo as a kind of 'family mark', that signifies her sense of belonging:

I've got flowers on my wrist, I had it when I was nineteen, by a lady, and I had it done to have both my nan and granddads initials in it, cus I wanted something that I would keep forever, and I thought well what better than to have a tattoo, erm and because both my nans had tattoos [Irene]

She describes the tattoo as a marker of continuity, linking a community of women - herself, her tattoo artist, and her grandmothers. Tattooing is produced as a family tradition in her account, and her tattoo joins her to her family in a kind of lineage of matriarchs. The importance of that tradition is that it is the women who hold the tradition - it is not a case of the *grandparents* who have tattoos, but specifically her *grandmothers*. The sense of belonging stands out here as being strong as a woman, as represented first by her grandmothers having tattoos, which she is now doing herself. This understanding of strong female presence makes sense of the inclusion of her tattoo being done 'by a lady', as this is pointed out early on. To point out the gender of the tattoo artist implies that this in itself is of significance, and when related to the tattooed women in her family, shows that Irene has positioned herself as a woman, in a family tradition of tattooed women. This enables her to position herself as multiply feminine as a tattooed woman - as a family woman, and as repeating familial practices.

Whilst her strong sense of belonging and tradition relates to the female members of her family, the tattoo itself relates to her

grandparents, as she has had both of their initials tattooed, with a surrounding flower design. As well as representing her family, her tattoo choices are also significant in the representation of femininity. Being on her wrist, these tattoos are on a visible location on the body, allowing others to see them. As tattoos are not often associated with traditional constructions of 'good' femininity (Swami & Furnham, 2007), the design (flower) and location (wrist, therefore not large in size) produces a construction of femininity that is acceptable (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004) wrists are a traditional location for women to 'wear' feminine adornments, such as bracelets, bangles, and henna tattoos.

Her emphasis on the age she got this tattoo also appears to position it as a 'coming of age' symbol. She was of the age to get a tattoo, so what better way to celebrate that by solidifying the bond that she has not just with the female members of her family, but with her grandparents too. It is as though she has been able to demonstrate her belonging to her family at the earliest (legal) opportunity available to her, and her coming of age as a woman, in a way that enables her to have this connection 'forever', as she positions this tattoo as something she will always be able to keep, always linking her to her family.

Artoria also secured her first tattoo as soon as she was legally able and in a similar vein to Irene, she discussed this tattoo as being explicitly linked to her dad:

I started getting tattoos when I was eighteen, and I think it's because, my dad, because he's got loads, like he's got both of his arms done, his whole back done, and his chest done ...Yeah so he's got them, but, even with my first one, because it's on my back, that's the style he's got, you know like the tribal, and the roses [Artoria]

Here, Artoria discusses getting tattoos at eighteen – the first legal age to do so. The use of the word 'started' suggests that this is the

beginning of an ongoing process, rather than a one off, and something she wanted to do as soon as she was able to. She indicates the influence of her father in getting tattoos, framing her own extensive coverage as a familial practice. This positions extensive body coverage as acceptable, as a family tradition.

She specifically addresses the first tattoo that she got, and the way that it relates to her dad – the style and the imagery of the tattoo link directly to him. This positions the tattoo almost as a family emblem – something to be proud of, and something that represents the bond that she has with her dad.

She states elsewhere in her interview that 'like I've got my first one, when I look back on it now, the tattooing and the tattooist and the style and the quality, wasn't as good as I could have got' and in this way highlights the historical locatedness of the tattoo, and where her thought process was at the time. For her first tattoo, she has chosen to draw on her family links and display a permanent bond relating to her tattooed dad. Whilst the tattoos she has got since then have represented more of her own personal style, this one represents her family and her dad, and shows her bond with him.

However, it is not just family links that the women talked about in relation to how their tattoos symbolise a sense of belonging. Lydia talked about her tattoos in respect to her spiritual beliefs, and how these are presented on her body:

erm, my close friends in my life are from the same belief paganism as I am, and I say that, though they have tattoos that might be different, all of my friends all of the them have a pentagram, they all have a pentagram in some form, I've got one, I've got my one here [shows top of the arm] [Lydia]

Here, it is clear that the tattoo represents both the bond that Lydia has with her friends, and also, the close link she feels with her beliefs. The tattoo itself provides a permanent link to a specific community (DeMello, 2000) giving her a sense of belonging. Previous research

has considered the interlinking of tattoos and spirituality, particularly focusing on how tattoos produce a sense of closeness and permanence for those who bear them (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

As Lydia notes, whilst the tattoo imagery is centred around one key image – a pentagram – it is not homogenous: she and her friends have slightly different pentagram tattoos. This enables the expression of both a communal and individualist subject position; the common imagery of the tattoos link them together, but at the same time, they are able to express an element of themselves with the imagery surrounding it being unique to each individual in the group. The tattoo is simultaneously important for her sense of self and the relation to her beliefs, as well as being a symbol of the bond between her group of friends and their beliefs. She positions the permanence of the tattoo as a dedication to her beliefs – Lydia discusses other tattoos that she has that are also related to her beliefs, but not as explicit as this one in relation to their imagery.

In summary, participants talk extensively about their tattoos as *meaningful*, with these meanings often being linked to familial and community narratives. By positioning their tattoos as personally meaningful in this way, as symbols of family, heritage and belonging, the women produce a narrative that generally fits with dominant ideas of femininity – the ethic of care (Gilligan, 1977). In this way their positioning as *caring*, and loyal to *family* tradition becomes etched on their skin. The focus on family tradition helps them navigate a positive subject position, aligned with 'good femininity'. To look after the family, to care and to nurture are considered feminine traits (MacRae, 1995). However, their performance of the tattoo is not straightforwardly linked to traditional gender roles. Participants talked about feminine power, drawing on imagery like goddesses to emphasise a sense of feminine strength. The tattoo and the meanings they ascribe to it enables them again to position themselves as simultaneously conforming to ideals of femininity and

expectations, and resisting them. Through the focus on personal meaning, their stories evoke a sense of the *authenticity* of the tattoo. In this way tattoos that have meaning are produced as the 'right' way to do a tattoo, as they are personal to the wearer. Tattoos also represent family tradition and show belonging within a family, whether that be as an emblem of what other family members have, visibly showing links, or if it is through carrying on traditions within family that has continued over generations. The women here navigate both an individual subject position, with their tattoos representing their authentic selves, and also a communal position, producing a sense of belonging.

8.2 – The production of bonding through tattoos

As some of the examples in the previous section illustrated, many of the women I interviewed described their tattoos as a communal experience. In the previous section, one participant narrated the tattoo itself as a co-construction, though other participants described it as something they did with others (particularly other women). There is a production of bonding through tattoos being a form of self-care (Rose, 1998), as illustrated in this next extract from Maud:

Well, I went for a tattoo with my daughter who's obsessed with them, it was the end of my career and I was feeling sorry for myself. Oh and the man next door said I needed to bond with my daughter so I got a tattoo on my foot! [Maud]

Tattooing in this extract is presented as a way of cementing a mother-daughter bond. Within this extract, Maud states how her daughter is 'obsessed' with tattoos, which justifies her decision to get a tattoo, in that she is showing how she has done something that she knows her daughter will appreciate, meaning that they will bond in this joint venture. She makes a point to say how her neighbour was the person who suggested that she bond with her daughter, following this up with 'so I got a tattoo', implying that this was a logical decision to make. Rather than suggesting a day out or something perhaps

considered as more typical of a mother-daughter bonding session, she positions the choice to get a tattoo as logical, and something that makes sense given her context, though may not necessarily actually be considered as a normal day out. The gesture of bonding over tattoos also produces a sense of 'outrage' – there is some shock value articulated, suggesting a kind of 'there's life in the old girl yet' kind of gesture. There is a juxtaposition between it not being a 'normal' activity to do together, but is then normalised as a girly day out, and this makes it memorable for her.

Some of the other women discussed their tattoos as being something they did jointly with friends as well as family, including memories made on a holiday:

my second which is on my foot, I had done when I was in Yarmouth, which I know is like, a bit cheap like, it was like a holiday tattoo, but I was on, I was on holiday on a weekend away with some girls from, that I used to work with, and we, when we went away, everyone was talking about wanting to get tattoos and I'd already had the one on the bottom of my back, and I was just thinking I wanted another one because when you have one they are addictive ain't they, you want another one, so, when I, we were all out there and everyone had a tattoo done [Gabrielle]

In this extract, Gabrielle describes the tattoo as a communal activity, something that they did together – a kind of souvenir of their holiday. However, notable in Gabrielle's account is the various justifications that she inserts into her narrative. Gabrielle states from the start that 'she knows' getting tattooed on holiday 'a bit cheap'. Her declaration here could be seen as defending against accusations of poor taste or tackiness. Getting tattooed whilst drunk, without planning (DeMello, 2000; Roberts, 2012), or on holiday (Cliff, 2016) is more likely to draw censure (indeed, TV programmes like 'Tattoo Fixers' often feature individuals who regret their holiday tattoos). In

asserting she 'knows' this, Gabrielle is asserting her authenticity as a tattooed woman – she understands what is tasteful and acceptable and what is not. She understands the 'rules' of the tattoo community. She defends this choice by drawing on ideas of community, and positions the tattoo as a mark to remind her of an important shared experience. In this way, she draws on an alternative discursive formation that asserts that tattoos for women should be meaningful, and should 'say' something about their life story and relationships. Sharing the experience of being tattooed with friends intertwines with the life stories of the women I interviewed, and women described the tattoos as having a specific meaning in that life context:

I've got aku aku on my left ankle [a video game character] who's awesome from crash bandicoot, and my best friend has crash on her hip so we got it at the same time it was sort of like, erm, yeah cus she's my best mate and we spent, a couple of summers just playing crash bandicoot the whole time but yeah it was like two years ago we were playing it and were like wouldn't it be awesome to get a crash bandicoot tattoo and I thought yeah we're just saying it as a joke and then erm the following summer we were playing it and like, we should actually do this (laughs) and went ahead with it and I love it it's probably my favourite one [Nora]

Nora described the tattoo as having a particular significance, as a symbol of her relationship with her friend, and the time they spent together. The characters that they got are best friends within the game they played together, and therefore the tattoo has multiple levels of significance as a representation of their relationship. The tattoo provides a permanent representation of their bond as friends (Kosut, 2000a). As they have images of characters, rather than each other's names for example, the meaning of the tattoo is personal to them – the layers of meaning of the tattoo cannot be easily read off their body. The tattoo can be read as an object in its own right, but

the meaning of the tattoo in the context of their relationship remains obscure, a secret communication between the friends. If they wanted someone to understand, they have to tell them what the tattoo represents. This underscores the closeness, the personal bond and the intimacy between them, as the meaning of the tattoo is only apparent in the context of their relationship. Both friend's tattoos are meaningful independently, but take on a different meaning when the two are together.

The story that she has told also articulates other thoughts about tattoos – the fact that they spent 'a couple of summers' playing the game together implies that they have taken the time to think about their tattoos – they were not obtained on a whim. Also, they have not selected random imagery – they have selected imagery that is of personal relevance and significance to them, enabling them to be able to provide the background story for why they got the tattoo in the first place. This underscores the commitment within the friendship, but also, that they have solidified that friendship in the right way by doing something that is both meaningful to them, and taken the time to do so.

However, given the permanence of tattoos, it could be argued that some tattoos may outlast the friendships they come to represent. This notion is considered by Artoria when discussing the matching tattoo she got with a friend:

like me and my friend have got them we've got matching ones, [nan's voice] but why, you won't be friends when you're older (laughs) and I'm like well, you don't know that, and I was like even if we're not, I don't have to tell people that [Artoria]

In a similar vein to the previous extracts that focus on bonding, Artoria also got a tattoo with a friend, but the difference with this is that their tattoos were the same. Whilst this is symbolic of their friendship, Artoria considers the future of her tattoo, and the significance of it in relation to her friendship (or potential end of

friendship). This focuses on two key issues in respect to tattoos, the first of these being age. As this has been covered in chapter six in relation to the body, here, the concern with age is more a concern for the time that has passed in relation to the friendship, and the potential changes that may occur in her friendships in the future. In this sense, her nan is articulating a worry that Artoria will have something on her body in the future that may mean less than it does now, especially if their friendship breaks down.

The second issue is the permanence of the tattoo in relation to the friendship, and the potential length of that friendship. Whilst the imagery of the tattoo may be personal to her, it does not outwardly say that it is a matching tattoo that a friend also has. If their relationship was to ever breakdown, as Artoria states, she does not necessarily need to tell people that someone else has the same tattoo and they got it together. In this sense, the personal imagery does not provide a sense of private inclusion (as does with Nora), but rather, it allows her tattoo to take on whatever meaning Artoria might like it to – she is able to reinscribe the meaning of the tattoo. With the meaning of the tattoo being personal to her, it is open to interpretation (and also misinterpretation) from others (Doss & Hubbard, 2009). Whilst the tattoo may be permanent, the meaning behind the imagery can evolve as time passes – indicating a sophisticated choice, not a youthful, or impulsive mistake.

Overall, the construction of bonding is important for the women in discussing their tattoos, enabling a sense of meaning and a personal means of justification for their tattoo choices. The communal element to getting the tattoo produces closeness and a sense of bonding – this form of self-care is important in the position as a good therapeutic subject, a person who can grow and improve. Though the imagery may not be the same, it is the production of bonding together through the tattoo that the meaning is created. However, the meaning behind the imagery is not static, and is open to change

as we age – there is a historical and contextual locatedness to the tattoos that the women produce and reproduce within talk – the tattoo enables reflection, and potential reinscription of meaning. Within these extracts, the women produce a sense of the tattoo being linked to others, be that family or friends, as being the part that is meaningful to them, not just the tattoo. There is the production of taste and awareness that relates to the authenticity of the tattoo, which underscores the construction of there being a ‘right’ way to be tattooed. Whilst the women may wish to produce a sense of belonging to a group, friend or family, this has to be done in the ‘right’ way to be seen as meaningful.

8.3 – Communicating personal narratives with tattoos

With tattoos that hold meaning, the women were often able to articulate this meaning in relation to personal narratives surrounding their tattoos. By telling the story of the tattoo through their narratives, the women were able to construct the meaning of the tattoo that is personal to them within talk – the story itself may not be entirely evident just by looking at the tattoo. The communication needed to understand the tattoo *requires* communication with the woman, not just the non-verbal communication gleaned from seeing the tattoo. It is within these narratives that the meaning can be understood.

One of the women, Mae, provided a lengthy and detailed story of all of her tattoos, of which the following is a short extract from a much larger conversation:

my dad always said don't let people stop you doing what you want to do, so the birdcage is like that, [pointing to the moth tattoo] I like moths because they represent kind of like the ugly side, so butterflies are supposed to be like really pretty and beautiful but moths are supposed to be ugly but technically they're the same thing, they do everything the same, and it comes out at night, and nights evil (laugh) and the key, erm

[points to the key tattoo] I'm obsessed with keys, I like yeah it's got colour in the eye because I wanted a green eye like my eye (laughs) erm (pause) but I like keys because like skeleton keys and stuff like that because you can get into anything, and I just like how old school, they're massive you know like the ones with the massive ring with the old school keys, I just love them, I love it [points to her wrist] I mean carpe diem was for my dad as well, my real dad, he was just like that, yeah that's probably about it really [Mae]

All of the tattoos mentioned here (and the others that are detailed within the interview) relate to the tattoos that she has on one of her arms, which is covered. The tattoos on this arm are an amalgamation of quite a lot of different imagery, rather than one congruent piece, but the way that they are discussed in relation to her and how they hold meaning for her make them work together. She talks about how quite a few of the tattoos relate to her 'real dad' rather than her step-dad, showing the significance that he had in to her life and the kinds of 'rules' that she follows now. In this sense, she is articulating a way of being, almost rules to follow to have a good life, to be a good citizen (McRobbie, 2004), as represented by her tattoo images. If she had not told these stories, a viewer of the tattoos would not necessarily understand the reasoning for these tattoos, or the significance they have in who they relate to and why she got them in the first place. Rather than the tattoos being misunderstood, as some research details tattoo imagery can be (Doss & Hubbard, 2009), here, the narratives that run alongside the tattoos enhance their meaning and understanding in a personal way.

As well as family, she also implies her sense of subversiveness through the moth tattoo – rather than following the trend of butterflies in relation to imagery that represents femininity (Hawkes et al., 2004), she has a moth – as she describes it 'technically they're the same thing', but are viewed in a very different way. This provides

an analogy for the way perhaps tattooed women are seen as opposed to non-tattooed women / ideal femininity, showing her understanding of this social view, and embracing it anyway. With this tattoo, similar to before, the meaning isn't outwardly obvious to someone who sees the tattoo – it would only be through talking to Mae that the real meaning transpires. The tattoo is positioned as having personal meaning, and she positions herself as agentic in sharing her narrative or keeping it private.

Throughout these extracts it is clear that participants draw on a sense that when a tattoo is considered to be authentic to the wearer, it is considered as more justifiable to others (Madfis & Arford, 2013). Tattoo narratives are also described in relation to the passage of time and the relation to life events. Here, developments in the life course are symbolised through a tattoo:

so with this tattoo [takes her jumper off to show her arm] it's got the maid the mother the crone [touching this part of the tattoo] so it's talking about the cycles in life in womanhood so obviously I've passed the maiden stage cus I'm not a teenager any more, I've passed the mother stage so now I'm kind of going into the crone so the crone is kind of representing where I am now within my life, academically within the educational field, wanting to learn to move forward cus obviously the crone represents intellect and intelligence [Lydia]

The tattoo that Lydia talks about here is detailing important life events, detailed up until the point she is at now. Tattoos are often cited as a way to mark significant life events (Mun et al., 2012), providing a permanent memory and celebration of events such as significant birthdays, births, and deaths. This tattoo represents the passage of time, as she discusses how she has moved into a new stage in her life – 'the crone', and articulates how where she is in terms of her life stages relates to her tattoo. As the crone represents 'intellect', she can be confident that she is achieving what her tattoo

represents through her university studies. In this sense, the tattoo serves as a marker of this time for future stories, and at this present time, guides her into the activities that she should be focussed on. This tattoo also serves to highlight the transformative status of the body – her tattoos will develop as she does, with them becoming more meaningful as she reaches the stages that are represented within the tattoo imagery. The production of the body as transformative is produced differently to how tattoos are considered as transformative within the media analysis in chapter four. Lydia's tattoo is not about getting a sense of femininity 'back', but instead, the tattoo serves as a marker for her subjective significant events, acknowledging the passage of time. The passing of time goes against normative ideals of femininity – the body as youthful (Hurd, 2000) – as her tattoo will show visible signs of ageing with her body. Whilst the tattoo is permanent, her life changes and develops, and this is shown through the tattoo.

Not all of the women discussed tattoos that they had as completed entities, but some also discussed their future plans for tattoos, and what they will come to mean for them:

I'm going back to him [the tattoo artist] in two weeks, to get a compass put on my hip to do with my travelling, and I want it when erm like bit by bit extended into like a travel, piece thing, cus I'm not made to stay in one country [Violet]

Here, the future tattoo plans are discussed in relation to Violet's life experiences, of which travelling is important to her. She talks about how the future tattoos that she will get will be related to travel and the places that she goes to, showing the evolutionary nature of the body, which will develop the more that she travels. The original imagery, the compass, provides a starting point for her narrative regarding travel, to which she can add to when she goes to a new destination.

Whilst she states that she is 'not made to stay in one country', the evolving tattoo will be the point of permanence that links her to these travel destinations, as the memories that these tattoos will be formed from will become a permanent part of the narrative of travel that she will be telling through her tattoos. For some people, they may choose to buy a memento from a travel destination or keep photos from their journeys, but here, Violet discusses the tattoo as the right option for her in respect to how she will make sense of her travels. Whilst she will not necessarily be staying in the same place, the tattoo will give her an anchoring point of stability, with the central theme being travel.

The final extract in relation to tattoo narratives shows a reflective consideration for a tattoo, showing a personal narrative intertwined with multiple meanings for the wearer:

So that was very heavy with meaning partly because it meant a lot to me, erm and I'd studied the not only the image and the people who created it but the place that it came from and all that kind of thing, erm but also because it was erm very symbolic in my relationship, of erm, having come through erm, a very difficult patch [Belle]

It is clear from this extract, and the rest of the interview, that the meaning is highly personal for Belle, to the point that this meaning is not fully shared. With the tattoo imagery being representative of this personal narrative, the full story is not on display for others to see, and the wearer has the agency as to whether they share their story or not. With the participant reflecting back on this tattoo, they mention how it is symbolic of everything that was happening at the time of the tattoo – the meaning of this tattoo is contextually located, though now she can reflect upon this meaning as time has passed – the tattoo is produced as a form of self-care (Rose, 1998) that serves as a marker of what she has come through.

Overall, personal narratives are produced as important in relation to tattooed women, and whilst they may be able to choose the tattoo that they feel best represents their story, the stories that are being produced in dialogue are significant to the wearer. These stories are reconstituted in talk over time, showing their contextual and historical locatedness, which underscores the multiplicity of meanings produced in talk. Whilst the imagery might suggest things about the wearer, it is through the co/construction of the stories relating to the tattoos that the personal meaning becomes evident. The narratives serve to highlight how tattoos are representative of a certain historical and personal context – reflection back on these times shows the multiplicity of meanings, rather than meaning being one static notion, and shows the other things that may influence tattoo choices that had not necessarily been considered at the time. These permanent markers allow a reflection on past experiences, which justifies their being through positioning the women as reflective, therapeutic subjects.

8.4 – The embodied practice of pain

Throughout the interviews, all of the women talked about the pain experienced when getting a tattoo. Within research, debates continue in respect to the way pain is understood in tattooing, with focus being on issues surrounding self-harm (MacCormack, 2006). None of the women talked about pain as a pleasurable part of the tattooing process, but what they did talk about served to normalise pain as necessary when getting a tattoo. This pain was talked about as a normal and expected part of the process, but what I found most interesting about the discussions of pain were what this produced about the women's own subjective positions. Whilst they all experienced pain, the way this was produced within talk differed between them. The women all navigate a complex position of them as strong pain bearers (Hall, 2016; Skuladottir & Halldorsdottir, 2008) versus a more fragile position of woman (Jasienska, 2013;

Smith-Dijulio, Windsor, & Anderson, 2010), who should be protected from pain. Within each of the extracts within this section, I will unpack some of the tension between the strong versus fragile positions that women produced when discussing tattoo pain. Consider this first extract from Jean:

Erm, the thing is with any tattoo, it was trying to find, firstly, erm, all the places on my body, that is wouldn't hurt (laughs) and then all the places on my body that my mum wouldn't see it, but unfortunately most of the places that my mum wouldn't see would be quite painful so I said I'd get it on my arm [Jean]

In the extract, Jean positions herself as a rational decision maker, ruling out options based on a clear set of criteria. This underscores that the tattoo is being done 'right' – it is thought through, not decided on upon a whim. Jean knew that pain would be associated with the tattoo - this had been accepted – so she negotiates her position as a 'strong' woman in getting the tattoo with a location on her body that she felt would cause the least discomfort. In this sense, the visible location of the tattoo serves as a visible reminder of her strength through pain. Shields Dobson (2015) notes how popular culture discourses of femininity normalises power and strength as 'good femininity', and must be visible to be acknowledged. As the tattoo is meaningful to her, the pain is justified (Skuladottir & Halldorsdottir, 2008), and the visible location positions her as strong and feminine. However, feelings of pain are subjective (Kosut, 2000a), so without knowing what the pain felt like, it is difficult to ascertain where would be the 'best' place for the tattoo. It is inferred that she has either discussed her tattoo choices with others to find out a suitable location, or has researched body locations and pain. Whilst Jean may have positioned herself as a rational decision maker, linking the pain of the tattoo to the location on her body, other women used their subjective experiences of pain as justification for their reactions to the pain. The justification of reaction – which in the

extract below could be considered extreme – positions her as simultaneously fragile and strong:

P: I'm huge wimp I'm not good at things on bones, I just find it all hurts, so for two of them I had hypnosis, yeah, so for my arm at the goddess I had hypnosis, and for the other one I just took, an inordinately large amount of codeine, I was off my trolley

R: Was it more you were worried about the pain?

P: Yeah I can't cus I've got a redheads skin so, and so actually I really feel it I really feel the pain and I'm very sensitive so for me it was like uhh [Belle]

Belle relates the experience of being tattooed to the subjective experience of her body, noting that this might be different to what others experience. She says that she has 'redhead skin', suggesting that she is more sensitive to things such as the sun, and also seems to experience pain more intensely. The research in this area suggests that there is a relationship between red hair and skin sensitivity (Little & Wolff, 1981), though other factors such as eye colour are also discussed. Pointing this out as a factor in the level of pain she experiences serves to position her as strong – as though despite the potential increase in pain, she still decided to get the tattoo. Through getting the tattoo, she is constructed as 'strong'.

The mention of 'redhead skin' also serves as justification for her response to the pain – she calls herself a 'huge wimp'. The use of the word wimp positions her as more fragile – not a strong woman, and someone who does not cope well with pain. 'Good' femininity and womanhood is built on women being able to cope with pain (Hall, 2016), so whilst she does not produce the right kind of femininity in this sense, the tattoo itself, and the construction of it being quite a big deal (hypnosis, medication – just to be tattooed) allows her to negotiate her position as a strong woman.

As well as the position of 'strong' in respect to being a tattooed woman, authenticity was also produced within talk of pain. Below, Gabrielle articulates the difference in pain between different kinds of tattooing:

In fact I'd say the one on the bottom of my back hurt more because, well especially when it came down to where my bum were cus thats really sensitive area I felt and it did hurt a bit there, but I was also I think, I was sat there for about two hours and I used to smoke back then aswell and I think I had a fag break in that time as well, I needed a break, I feel like the colouring in hurt the most, yeah so I felt like that hurt more than the outline did it didn't bother me the outline, and to be fair the colouring in is the main part isn't it [Int: yeah, that hurts more] like if you're having it coloured in cus it's like it takes a lot longer than the outline does doesn't it (pause)
[Gabrielle]

Central to this discussion of pain was how I as the researcher became a part of the shared experience, and also served to justify her authenticity as a tattooed woman through agreement with the comments she was making. She understands the difference between the two ways of tattooing (doing outline work, and then shading/colour work), and is supported in her knowing through my agreement. Gabrielle produces a sense of 'knowing', and must therefore be 'authentic' as a tattooee, and she can distinguish between the different elements in being tattooed. The mutual understanding is interesting in the way that the pain itself is normalised – neither within this extract, nor within the other interviews, was pain constructed as a surprise. There appear to be parts of the body that are deemed as more painful to get a tattoo (Sweetman, 1999), making it acceptable to discuss the feeling of pain in relation to these areas, as Gabrielle has done above.

Whilst there is a shared experience of pain in getting the tattoo, the level of pain experienced will be subjective according to the individual. One element of this subjectivity that was explored by one of the women details the gender specific nature of pain and tattoos, and the impact this had on her experience:

Obviously like tattoos, you know, they don't tickle, they do hurt a little bit I've got to be honest one thing I will say to anybody who hasn't got a tattoo is never have a tattoo on your period I never realised, god I remember when I had this tattoo started I was on my period and I was, god I wasn't crying but I was in a lot of pain, so I took a couple of tramadol, and I remember I think he'd only done an hour and a half, and that was barely the outline I remember so you know, it felt to me like somebody had got a lighter and was going round it and I was like I'm really sorry, I felt I started feeling quite anxious cus I thought god if it's hurting this much how am I going to get the rest of it done, but then the next like, he actually said are you on your time of the month and I said yeah, and he went well that generally happens [Lydia]

Explicit links are drawn between being a woman and the impact that has on the tattoo process, in respect to periods and the sensitivity felt by the body. Similar to Belle's extract, Lydia's reaction to getting the tattoo is justified through her subjective experience of pain being heightened due to her period – this positions her as a strong woman, capable of dealing with multiple pains. Research on reproduction has suggested that women's pain equips women with a 'natural' ability to endure pain (Bendelow, 2000), therefore positioning Lydia as not 'naturally' feminine or woman-like for not dealing with the pain well. However, she does persevere and get the tattoo – the visibility of the object of pain on her skin renders the pain as justified, as she has something to show for it (Grace & MacBride-Stewart, 2007), that is meaningful to her. The pain itself is embodied within the tattoo – it

is something she can now reflect on, producing a sense of strength in talk, as she got the tattoo and can now discuss the experience with others.

Overall, acknowledging the experience of pain is important in making sense of women's subjective positionings, because it is not something visible – however, the pain is made visible and embodied through the tattoo. Within the extracts, a complex position is navigated between being strong and pain bearing – a sign of 'good' femininity – and resisting the position as fragile, not being able to cope with pain. Embedded within this discussion of pain is the gender specific ways that pain is experienced, with the female body being intertwined with the ways that pain is experienced and expected. Justification is made for the reactions the women had regarding the pain through gendered practices such as menstrual cycles, and stereotypical constructions of skin type. The willingness of the women to continue with their tattoos constructs them as strong – strong as visible through the skin. There is a shared understanding that pain will be experienced, which serves more as a function of their authenticity as tattooed women, rendering their tattoo choices as 'right'.

8.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, women often deploy the construct of 'authenticity' to make sense of their tattoos, whether the meaning they produce relates to family, belonging, or the experience of pain. Within this section, there is a strong production of authenticity that gives the tattoo meaning, as those who would get a tattoo without personal meaning are constructed as tasteless. Producing personal narratives through the skin serves to function as a justifiable means of expression for the women and the important things in their lives that they have represented through their tattoos. The personal narratives that they wish to share must hold an element of meaning to the wearer for them to be justified, therefore showing the regulative nature of meaning in tattoos. Through a therapeutic discourse of

confession and personal growth (Rose, 1999), the personally-meaningful-tattoo enables women to position themselves as 'good citizens' (McRobbie, 2004) making good tattoo choices. Done 'properly', tattoos are produced not as indicative of spoiled womanhood, but as emblematic of the 'good woman'. It does not seem accidental that this sense of personally meaningful tattoos is often achieved through links to family and care. The 'authentic' tattoo is a relational object, embedded in personal narratives, and the positioning of strength and survival through pain. The good tattoo becomes emblematic of good womanhood, tied into their role as carer, partner, mother and friend (Gilligan, 1982). Finally, the way that pain is constituted as a normative part of the performance of being tattooed produces the wearer as an authentic tattooed woman, someone who is 'tough enough' – womanly enough – to go through the pain. The production of pain in the extracts serve as a resistance against femininity being fragile, and serves to position the women as strong.

Chapter 9 – Reflexivity

As a tattooed woman, my journey through this thesis was complex. In this chapter, I explore my experiences as a researcher, reflecting on my production of the research, from inception to completion. I posed a variety of different questions to myself, providing a context for why I decided to do the research, with the intention of being able to show the development of my own awareness as a researcher, as an academic, as a feminist, and a tattooed woman. Throughout this chapter I draw on the work of Wilkinson (1988) to approach the subject of reflexivity from a personal position, as well as considering the disciplinary position for the research.

9.1 – How has my previous history led to my interest in this topic?

In order to appropriately address the experiences of tattooed women in this research, I firstly need to acknowledge how I came to choose the topic to explore. As an undergraduate student, I explored the ways that women manage their conformity to fashion trends, which incorporated topics such as media influence, body size and opinions on fashion trends. An in-depth account of how the women conformed to and resisted against fashion proved interesting to me, because I personally didn't follow fashion trends religiously, but was aware of the influence of society and culture to an extent. Reflecting on this, I appreciate the position of 'awareness' and 'knowing' that the women expressed within the interviews, and how this had an impact on how they produced their subjective positionings.

Between then and the time I started my thesis, I had been on a personal journey, resulting in me learning more about how to take agency over my own body. At the time, the key element to this agency was gleaned through the attainment of tattoos. Reflecting on this, I know that the more tattoos that I got, the more that I felt comfortable with my own body, and took less notice to passing fashion trends, and whether or not I had divulged in them. As my own tattoos represented a form of agency over my body, I took to

the opinion that tattoos were something to be celebrated – they were liberatory, and something positive. Over the course of the research, and only on completion did I start to realise that the liberatory view of tattoos is somewhat naïve, and the reality is much more nuanced and complex, as expressed within the extracts in the previous chapters. At this point, it makes sense for me to catalogue the experiences that stand out to me with respect to my own tattoos, charting the developing change in understanding. I outline eight significant personal points of interest, and reflect on their relationship to my research. As pointed out by Wilkinson (1988), we become our own sources for research, therefore it is important to acknowledge the contextual and historical locatedness of these important events, and how they relate to the research.

Assumptions made about employment

Something that I used to hear frequently, especially before I became more visibly tattooed and pierced was the phrase ‘you don’t look like the type to get tattooed!’, suggesting that there is a ‘type’ of person who does get tattooed. In my mind, I am not ‘the type’ because I am female, I aim to present myself professionally, and I have a respectable job. I frequently get told that I cannot work in higher education, because of my tattoos.

In 2014, when I was working in retail before venturing into higher education, I wrote in to the employer gazette (who shall remain nameless), a magazine which all employees read. A decision had recently been made regarding visible tattoos, that no matter their size, they should be covered up. To take from my letter, I lauded the way management had rendered tattooed employee’s views as ‘ill-advised’, highlighted the ‘derogatory’ language used about tattoos partners (referred to essentially as low-lives), and importantly in my mind, for them to consider why they thought it acceptable to ‘outcast’

a group of their employees. The response simply stated that there would be no more discussion on the matter, but it resonated with me to the point of ensuring that employment was discussed within the interviews – I did not want it to be swept under the carpet.

There is a perception – echoed by the media analysis, and also evident within the women’s interviews – that having tattoos renders you irresponsible, and not career minded. Tattoos are framed as being reserved for people that do not have a good education (i.e., they then can’t make informed decisions), and work in low paid jobs. Implicitly what is being drawn in here is a perception of social class – who tattoos belong to, the kinds of bodies they appear on, and the perception of taste as understood through the skin. There is the construction that those who are working class don’t have jobs that are as well paid and that they are poorly educated. I do come from a working-class family, and I do work in order to pay my bills. I do not believe that there should be such a clear-cut link between tattoos and working class, though as seen within the thesis, class underscores the discourses produced, but this is more nuanced than perhaps considered previously.

Perceptions of visible versus private tattoos

As a woman, and getting my first tattoo, I became aware of the importance of tattoo placement on the female body, and the differences in perception for having a private tattoo, and a public tattoo. The hidden tattoo positions a woman as mysterious, sexy, and alluring – the visible tattoo is seen as something different. My first tattoo is on my lower back, and comprises of tribal work either side of a pink lily. At the time I got it in 2005, the lower back was a ‘trendy’ body part for women to get a tattoo. It was also seen as sexy and alluring, as it hinted at mystery by being in a place where it could not be seen, unless a woman was bending over therefore visible in the

gap between top and bottoms, or when they are more undressed. It is also an interesting area in that you cannot see it yourself unless you look in a mirror – it is more readily viewable by others. This location of course soon fell out of fashion, and is now understood as a part of that historical context, along with a construction of promiscuity. The 'tramp stamp', as it became known, became associated with attempts at femininity – failed attempts considered too crass, too much, too working class (Pini & Previte, 2013). There are not many other places on women's bodies that are negatively associated with tattoos like the 'tramp stamp', and there is no male equivalent for tattoos on their bodies.

Over time, I started to cover my body more in artwork. Until 2012, all of the tattoo locations were still private - lower stomach, ribs, and thigh. There is a general consensus when starting out getting tattooed, that you choose places in the body that are less visible – either because the artwork that you get will inevitably be cheaper, so will not be as good, or because you don't want to 'taint' your body so early on (also noted in research by Roberts, 2012). There is almost a level that you build up towards for getting tattooed. The majority of good tattoo artists will not tattoo head, neck or hands, for example, until the majority of the body is covered in tattoos. These three areas – head, neck and hands – are of the most visible to other people, and therefore, tattoos in these areas must be 'justified' through extensive coverage elsewhere. In terms of employment, where the majority of the reasoning comes from, for people to be tattooed in such visible places makes them unemployable. This would seem to place the onus then not on the tattoo, but on the part of the body that the tattoo sits, and how visible it is to the public. I learned this first hand, when I got my most visible tattoo to date, on my forearm.

At this point, I received several negative reactions from family members and friends. It was not the design – consisting of an eagle, a flower, and a ship in bold colouring – but rather the size of it, and

where it is on my body. I was told I look cheap, I won't be able to get a good job, and that people will think of me as a bad person when they see it. This was a turning point for me in my own experiences as being tattooed, because I loved my tattoo, as with my others, but this one was not just about me, it clearly meant something to other people too. Though I had not changed as a person, by having this more visible tattoo, it changed the way other people view me as a person. The only time I become more aware of this visible tattoo is depending on the context I am in – in professional situations, my tattoos will always be covered up. After this I started to question how other women might experience their visible tattoos, and what positions they negotiate with them.

The final key point about a tattoo being private or visible, is how it affects others in how they react to your body. There have been several occasions where strangers have decided to touch a tattooed part of my body without consent, or grabbed a limb to take a closer look at a tattoo. This became an issue when I visited Egypt – tattoos are against the predominant religion there, and whilst I did not leave the resort, staff at the hotel stood and made remarks about my body, and on several occasions, grabbed it so they could have a look at what I had. There is the perception that because my tattoos are visible to other people, it means that they have the right to react to it, including touching and grabbing body parts that the tattoos belong to. Though this is not akin to experiences such as women of colour and the fascination with touching afro hair (Thompson, 2009), it made me aware of how different intersections produce differing and complex experiences.

Age as a means of regulation

When referring to age in relation to tattoos, I'm not looking to state that there is a perfect age to get tattooed, or even to suggest that there is an age whereby it may become acceptable to have a tattoo. The issue is that it does not matter what age you are, there will

always be a judgement passed for having a tattoo as a woman. Age is used as a gateway to control women's bodies, through the use of negativity and what is considered (socially acceptable) age appropriate behaviours. I myself can only comment on the 12 years for which I have been tattooed, starting at the age of 17.

Figure 1 – my first tattoo



Firstly, the legal age of tattooing in the UK is 18. 18 years of age is considered as the point from which people can be designated as adult. At this age, you do not require parental consent (not that you can use parental consent to get a tattoo under that age), and are considered capable of making informed decisions, including those concerning what you would like to do with your body. However, when it comes to tattoos, early adulthood is not considered as an entirely appropriate age to do so, especially for women. As displayed on the numerous television shows recalling tattoo embarrassments (Tattoo Fixers, My Tattoo Hell), young men can get tattooed on a variety of places on the body, with all manner of designs, and have them laughed off. For young women, they are almost sneered at, with people exclaiming why would they do such a thing to their bodies. When people say 'think about what you'll look like when you're older', it's not so much the skin that they are referring to (as older women must cover up their bodies as they age), but important events in the lifespan that are imbued with societal expectation, such as forming a relationship, getting married, having children, being a mother on the playground, and building a career. By advising women to not get tattooed at a young age is another form of social control over the bodies of young women.

Whilst I may be currently short of being considered middle aged, and am far off from being considered elderly, I know through seeing and hearing the experiences of older tattooed bodies the way that they are perceived. Many women exclaim how they wish they would have gotten their tattoo at an earlier age, but at that time, they felt that they could not because of what other people were telling them, and how they would be viewed. From this perspective, the tattoo is used as a celebration – whether achieving a landmark birthday, or realisation of reaching an age whereby they now feel comfortable enough to make the decision to ink their skin. But the celebratory potential of the tattoo is intertwined with the negotiation of women’s multiple positionings, producing a much more nuanced view of the tattoo.

Figure 2 – My ‘meaningful’ tattoo following from working in America



The tattoo itself also draws attention to the process of ageing, providing a visual reminder of the age of the skin. At a talk I gave about this research in early 2015, I was approached by a mature woman, an academic, who was intrigued by my research. As the conversation developed (following from the usual discussion of ‘oh my son/daughter has a tattoo / I was thinking about getting a tattoo’) it became apparent that the clear message for her was positioned around age. Her concern was centred on the question ‘but think about what your tattoos will look like when you’re 60’. And then rather than this being about my research, it becomes personal. I explained that at this present time, I am not concerned with how my tattooed skin

looks at a given age – having a tattoo will not make a difference to my opinion of my ageing skin. What was clear from the discussion was that again, this was less an issue about the tattoo itself, but the fact that the tattoo will make the ageing process more visible, because of the way that tattoo designs and colours change with age. Therefore, the tattoo is serving as a permanent marker of the ageing skin, which, in a society focussed on being youthful, is a negative thing to draw attention to.

The need for justification

Frequently, and much more so for women, there is a need to justify and provide reasons for the tattoos that they have. Men are rarely questioned as to why they decided to get Mr Potato Head tattooed on their bum whilst they were on holiday in Magaluf (Barns, 2017), but if a woman gets a small heart on her shoulder, she has to provide a reason for doing so. The larger and more visible the tattoo, the more valid a reason is needed. If there does not seem to be a valid reason for getting the tattoo, the woman comes under fire with many more questions, along the same lines, as 'what did you get that for?' 'why would you do that?' 'I think you'll regret that' 'what about your job?' 'think about what you'll look like on your wedding day'... When I have stated that for some of my tattoos, I simply liked the artwork, I'm further probed as to 'why?'. Simply stating I just like it does not seem to be a valid reason on young, female skin. The position of 'authenticity' threads through the interviews, produced through the need to have a meaning behind the tattoos that the women have. Where tattoos have been discussed as not having an explicit meaning, the women in the interviews position themselves as doing their tattoos right, and these 'other' women as wrong – not embodying femininity correctly. The 'othering' of tattooed women came as a surprise to me within the interviews, as I had expected almost a feeling of solidarity amongst all tattooed women (clearly naively) as a form of belonging. The production of 'authenticity'

served as a key point for me as a researcher in learning from them that being a tattooed woman was much more complex to navigate than being seen as one homogenous group.

Normative ideals of wedding days

I find the question 'but what will you look like on your wedding day?' the most presumptive out of the general array of questions I – and I am sure many other women – get asked. Firstly, this question makes the point that in order to be a good woman, then you are to be married. That you are to be straight, wear a nice white wedding dress, and get married to a seemingly good man. When I respond that I do not want to get married, that in itself seems to add into the construction of being tattooed and 'failing' at femininity.

In addition to the first assumption, it also presumes that to be a good bride, you cannot have tattoos. What this leads to is less of an issue of the tattoo as such, but more of a need to control the female body. Getting a tattoo does not prevent you from getting married, but it can 'taint' the normative ideal of what a young, virginal bride should look like on her wedding day.

I have also been asked, on one occasion, to cover my visible arm tattoos as a guest at a wedding. The bride herself had tattoos, but they were small and on inconspicuous locations on her body. Myself and a friend, who is also heavily tattooed, were asked to cover them up for the wedding, as to not ruin the wedding photos. This has not happened at every wedding I have been to, but as explained to me, the family of this particular bride were quite 'posh' and did not want to see such things at a wedding, because tattoos don't have a place at a wedding. This further supports class-based discourses of tattoos and the relationship to taste and tasteful bodies.

Discourses of pain

Trying to make sense of the production of pain within the interviews was one of the more difficult tasks for me with this research. I know that pain is a subjective feeling, so my experience would be different

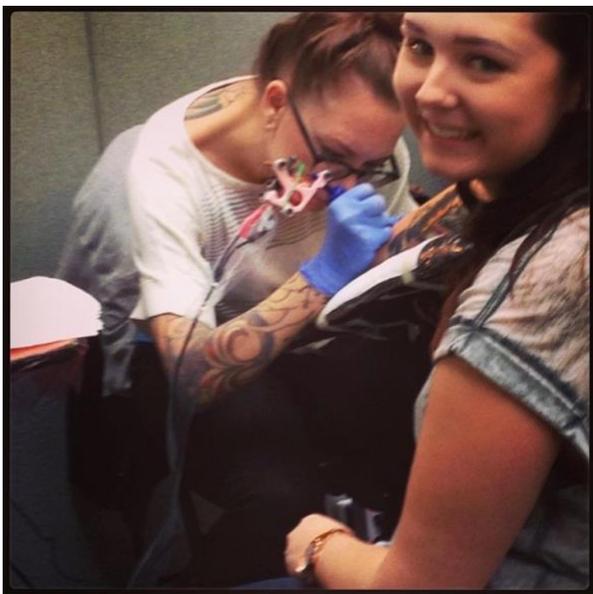
to that of each of the women who discussed it, and also how they articulated it in talk. I think this was because the way that pain was produced within the interviews was so different to some more general understandings of tattoos and pain that I have come across. Tattoos are debated as a glorified form of self-harm (Vine, 2014). To position tattoos as such would be to see self-harm as something entirely negative and detrimental. At a presentation of my work in 2015 I was asked whether tattoos being seen as self-harm was actually something positive, in that self-harm itself shouldn't always necessarily be seen as a bad thing. At the time, I struggled to make sense of the question, as from my own position, I had ultimately always viewed self-harm as a negative thing. By self-harm, I refer to practices such as cutting. In reality, overeating, smoking, drug taking and excessive alcohol abuse could also be seen as self-harm. Because self-harm was not discussed by any of the women, I had to consider what was being produced by their talk of pain. Rather than being produced as an act of violence to the body, the pain was produced as a way for them to show strength – women as strong pain bearers – and thus embodying 'good' femininity. This has made me re-think the way that tattoo pain is understood, and I see it as providing a new perspective to consider discourses of pain in women.

Tattoos and convention spaces

On reflection, I feel it would have been interesting to unpack 'appropriate' spaces for tattooed bodies, in the context of convention spaces. There are many of these events held in the UK across the year (as well as globally), with the biggest being the Annual London Tattoo Convention, held in September each year. The venue is the Tobacco Docks, home to a glorious old ship – relating to the tattooed subculture as almost depicting a pirate ship. Tattooing aside, the venue is full of 'alternative' clothing adorned with skulls, bars solely providing rum, taxidermy stands, and motorcycle exhibitions, to name but a few of the staples. The halls are full of tattoo artists from

around the world, showcasing their different specialisms. In order to be tattooed at a convention, it is often planned ahead with the artist, so they can ensure that you 'sit well', i.e. don't fidget, cry, or pull faces, so that people passing can appreciate the art, rather than laugh at the person being tattooed. To sit well is to be tattooed well, and reflects well on the tattoo artist. It is a very public display of tattooing, which is interesting in that this used to be considered a circus 'freak show' act in the early 20s and 30s. I have been fortunate enough to be tattooed at a convention, so have experienced both the public viewing aspect, and the being viewed.

Figure 3 – Being tattooed at the London Tattoo Convention



My tattoo artist, whom I have several other pieces of work from, is well known in the USA for her distinctive, traditional American but feminine style. Through the three hours that I was with her, many people came to watch, staring at the design and the needle for lengthy periods of time, but in admiration, not disgust. Reflecting on the attention, it was enjoyable to see people genuinely interested in the tattoo, sharing their own experiences, and being so open about being tattooed. Many people were asking if they could be tattooed next – a commonality for conventions, especially when the artist is from abroad – and she became fully booked for the weekend. Other

artists also stopped by when they had their breaks, and also admired the work. The convention space becomes a public meeting ground, but also a space for them to admire each other's art work, and make connections for future studio visits.

In respect to the convention space itself, there is an interesting way in which societal norms are subverted. In a convention context, anyone who isn't tattooed, pierced, or looking 'alternative' is in the minority. Whereas in society outside of this space, those who are heavily tattooed/ pierced/ alternative are different, and are 'othered'. At a convention in Brighton, throughout the whole day, a young, blonde girl, highly tanned, and wearing a bright pink velour tracksuit with no visible tattoos drew a lot of attention from people exclaiming what her 'type' was doing in a tattoo convention space. She was with her partner, who was quite heavily tattooed, and simply said that she was joining him for the day. However, this is not to say that all forms of being alternative are accepted within this space – at the other end of the spectrum, there are those who are very heavily tattooed (for example, full body and eyeballs), pierced (full facial piercings) and alternative (dermals – including horns and head ridges, acid green half-shaved hair, and 6-inch platform leather fetish boots). This suggests that even in these alternative spaces, there is a degree to which being alternative is accepted, and also a point for which it becomes a talking point. The women discussed what is considered 'appropriate' for being a tattooed woman within the interviews, but with different positions (as mother, as professional, as older woman) intertwining with the tattoos as to what is 'right'.

Within this space, the show I enjoy the most is the beauty pageant. This pin-up girl showcase is usually advertised ahead of the convention, to allow women to apply, and send their best photos in order to be selected. At the convention itself, the women come in 50s style dress, hair and make-up, and parade on stage, as well as

performing their selected talent, whether that be dancing, singing or other. The difference in this beauty show is that the pin-up girls are heavily tattooed – a subversive hyper-feminine performance. The show itself is very much mirrored on the typical kind of pageant that you would find outside of this space, but unlike those shows, tattoos are essentially a prerequisite. The kind of woman presented is hyper feminine – heavy eye make-up and vivid red lips, hair preened and curled into perfect victory rolls, and beautiful shapely mid length dresses, showing off bust and figure. The inclusion of the tattoos with this imagery is what gives the women the encouragement to take part. In addition, the women are less likely to all be a size 8 and be blonde – there is much more variety in body shape and size, giving a more open (but clearly still constituted as alternative) view of what is considered beautiful.

It is very much the norm here for more skin to be on display, for both men and women. The display of more skin is less about being sexualised, and more about displaying the body as a canvas, for other like-minded people to admire tattoo work. Whereas those who are being tattooed in the booths are still, and are able to be viewed like an exhibition piece, those who are walking around are more like living art that people can admire more up close.

My own experiences of being tattooed have made me much more aware of class representations, especially outside of tattoo convention spaces. There have been occasions where I have been asked to cover my tattoos, and also occasions where my tattoos have made people visibly uncomfortable. I have also been followed in shops by security guards. The kinds of attitudes that relate to class are those that are quite explicitly class based – an example of this is when I stayed in London, and had tattooed arms at this point. I stayed in Chelsea, and it was quite obvious that people in Chelsea, specifically 'good' women, do not get big, visible tattoos. I did not

see any on my trip whilst staying in that area. It is interesting as tattoos are a display of money spent, a luxury consumer product bought and displayed by the skilful consumer. Tattoos being produced as a consumer product has changed the way that tattoos are constructed, and in some instances, has made them more accessible to the middle class.

What femininity is

Throughout my thesis, I refer to the notion of femininity, in its traditional and stereotypical form. This ideal has been formed by my experiences of how women are portrayed in the media, at home, and at work. For the majority of my childhood and into my teens, my mom did not work – she went to evening classes at college to better educate herself (though in ‘stereotypically’ womanly things such as interior design and floristry) – she was expected to look after my brother and I, to clean the house, and to have dinner on the table every day. This was similar for my nan, who was a carer for her whole life. Again, during the time I spent with her, her house was pristine, and there was always food offered – she even talks now about taking the ‘good hostess’ role, as that was what was expected of her when she was married. The television programmes that were around when I was in my teens focused on the lives of Playboy ‘bunnies’, and considered the lives of the rich and the famous, including the money that they spent on designer clothes and plastic surgery. In the magazines, they included articles about how to ensure you do sex right for your man, and consistently featured diet and exercise plans. Taking an overview of this, the majority of the women that I now recognise in these forms were white, heterosexual, able bodied and obedient to the men in their lives. There was little that I saw outside of this ideal. None of these women were tattooed. Prior to the research, I saw Western femininity in these very narrow terms, and through research and talk with other women, I now understand

femininities to be much more diverse, and also how what is considered 'feminine' changes depending on positioning.

My shift in perception of tattoos

The last personal reflection that I can make is a recent one, only realised through discussions in the last few months of working on this thesis. At the start of the research journey, tattoos were something exciting to me, representing a form of liberation, and I thought this was a widely shared view. Only after looking back on the past few years of research did I realise that the way that the women in my research had produced tattoos in talk was more nuanced and complex than I initially could have made sense of. I had not anticipated how much motherhood would form a central form of regulation of tattooed bodies, or how the positioning of tattoos as artwork changes the class-based construction of the tattooed body. The way that tattoos were discussed within the media articles were the kinds of things I had expected to hear from the women, but in contrast, they produced tensions in how they constituted themselves as tattooed women.

9.2 – What are my personal value systems?

Over the course of working through this research, my own personal value systems have developed, with me becoming more aware of feminist literature, and applying feminist thought to my own studies. This has developed as part of the reflective process of doing research, as prior to this, I had not given as much thought to this research area. I now feel that I understand the importance of feminist research, and am aware that this will influence my research outcomes, given the focus on it throughout the entire process.

9.3 – Where is the power held in relation to my research and where am I in the power hierarchy?

With respect to this research, my position is interesting. Being tattooed myself, I can be considered as an insider with my participants – I'm in the know, and I am a part of the tattoo community with them. Because of this, the participants might feel

more comfortable opening up to me about their experiences of being tattooed, because they may feel that I can share some of those experiences. In opposition to this, the number of tattoos that I have, and the placement of my tattoos, might also be a factor. Because I have quite a few big and visible tattoos, those with smaller or less tattoos may feel intimidated, or 'not worthy', because they don't have the same kind of status that I do with respect to my tattoos. Also, those who are more heavily tattooed may feel that they have the power in this situation, as they could be perceived as having more power. An interesting point that has come out following from talking to people about their tattoos is the notion that they have had a big input in designing their tattoos, that they drew them and designed them, and that this is seen as better than leaving it up to the tattoo artist.

Chapter 10 – Conclusions

This thesis has explored constructions of tattooed women, focusing on the multiplicity of positionings which produce subjective experiences relating to important factors such as gender, class, and age. The positions that the women produced were complex and nuanced, contrasting the almost expected discourses produced within media spaces, and far from my initial naïve view as tattoos as (only) liberatory and celebratory. I have argued that class underscores much of how tattooed women are constructed, and that their accounts of their tattoos are constituted in relation to dominant gendered and classed accounts of tattoos. As a consequence, this serves as one of the regulatory forces in respect to women's bodies, as women's accounts are always constituted in relation to these discursive formations, either as conforming, or as resisting them. In this final chapter, I draw together the key methodological and theoretical implications and applications of my research, including what this research has provided in respect to conducting feminist research. My main methodological points relate to the need for reflexivity and how myself as researcher (and tattooed woman) co-constructed the discourses produced, and why the inclusion of the self is important for continuing feminist research. An intersectional focus has been embedded within the research from the start, and the multiplicity of the women's positions show why intersectionality is key for feminist research. I then discuss the significant theoretical contribution that this research has for the area of class, as well as the intersection with gender. I finish the chapter by summarising the thread that has brought together the thesis – the regulation of women's bodies – and what this tells us as feminists for understanding male gaze, control, and resistance.

10.1 – The importance of feminist research

Whilst the inclusion of reflexivity in feminist research is not a new concept, my research does add to this methodological standpoint,

and offers up some positions to be given thought when conducting feminist research. Being a tattooed woman myself, I was always going to be a part of the research, co-constructing the discourses that were produced. However, my own tattooed body presented issues that I had to navigate in relation to this thesis.

My own visible tattoos provided a common ground for the women in my interviews (as discussed in the methodology chapter regarding insider/outside positions). I had not initially considered the position of power I was in as a researcher and as an academic – a researcher of women’s tattooed bodies – and how this may have affected how the women constructed their tattoos with me in talk:

Int: So do you want to get any more?

Gabrielle: I do but I don't know where (pause) I don't really, I'm the sort of person like I wouldn't want them in the places that you can that are really noticeable, you know, but, I wouldn't be able to have them on my arm I just don't think it would suit me like with yours I love like, but for me I couldn't have anything, like I don't know I just don't think it would suit me I think I would look like a bit of a thug (laughs) do you know what I mean but that is the perception isn't it, not that I would think, not like if I seen you out I wouldn't see you as a thug but I would perceive myself as a thug

Whilst Gabrielle did not specify what she felt the difference to be between how I am seen with my visible tattoos versus how she would be seen, she does produce a difference, which could relate to a number of positionings – me as researcher and academic being one of them. Rather than ignoring the co-production of discourses, I make use of reflexivity in acknowledging how my own histories, values and positions of power come to affect how the discourses are presented here in the thesis. To ignore the potential biases of feminist qualitative work is to ignore the nuances produced from these positions, and halts a conversation that needs to be had in relation

to how valuable these nuances are in research. As noted by England (1994), greater reflexivity on the part of the researcher produces more inclusive and informed methodologies that take power relations into account in research. Whilst there is no straightforward resolution for making sense of biases in research, the personal ultimately plays a central role in the research process and production of theses, and acknowledging this makes for more honest and open research.

At the core of the thesis is the intersectionality, informing the methodology, and the discourses presented. Whilst intersectional research has been conducted for decades, my research adds another 'element' to the intersectional web, highlighting the multiplicity of factors that influence how subjective positionings are produced. In the early days of this research, I was asked at several different academic events why I was not focusing on how men experienced being tattooed. Here, I think, is one of the reasons why an intersectional focus is important – it is not just about the differing experiences of gender, but also of the multiplicity of gender, class, age and other intersections. The way that women experience their tattooed bodies is not as a homogenous group, but is nuanced and complex in respect to their subjective positionings. The tensions that the women navigate in their positionings adds to this field of research, and provides more positions to unpack.

10.2 – Tattooed bodies as gendered and classed

Within the research itself, the discourses that were produced show the multiplicity of constructions of tattooed women, unpacking intersections of gender, class, and age. The first analysis chapter produced from the women's interviews brought explicit attention to the production of regulation and social norms around women's tattooed bodies. This discourse functions as a way of articulating the unsaid rules that govern tattooing practices and embodiment of the tattoo. A clear sense of 'right' and 'wrong' is produced, which is linked to the women's subjective experiences of being tattooed, and

wanting to be positioned as doing the 'right' thing themselves. The 'wrong' rules were often discussed as those being broken by others – specifically, other tattooed women – rather than themselves. Throughout the interviews, the women positioned themselves as knowing, and aware of social norms for doing tattoos in the right way. Whilst they present themselves as aware, producing the tattoo as almost a resistant act, the women also self-regulate as 'good' women, performing a certain kind of femininity (white, middle-class) and conforming to normative expectations for positions such as 'mother' and 'professional'. Through these positions, class is a point of regulation, functioning to 'other' working-class constructions, and favouring normative, middle-class constructions of femininities.

In the chapter focusing on bodies and embodiment, a key intersection that highlighted the complexity of feminine positions was that of age, and the ways that tattooed bodies are discussed and judged, because of but also regardless of age. As well as the age of the body that the tattoo is on producing constructions of the women, issue also lies with how the tattoo enhances the visibility of the ageing process on the skin, resisting against normative Western ideals of youthfulness as performing good femininity. The positioning of tattoos as 'artwork' produces a different understanding of the tattooed body, one that reifies 'the tattoo' as a working-class emblem, and 'artwork' as accessible and appealing to the middle-class. The function of the tattoo as artwork renders that body as tasteful and good. The woman who chooses good and tasteful artwork positions herself as a 'skilful consumer', making good choices, simultaneously resisting normative ideals of femininity through the tattoo, but conforming to ideals through the way the tattoo is produced and embodied.

In exploring the variability of feminine positionings, the production of 'taste' was central in performing the 'right' kind of femininity. The extracts here show how class transcends the body and moves into social spaces – the feminine position is co/re-produced with social

spaces, and in talk. The positioning of tattoos as working class (and therefore seen on the working-class body) is negotiated by the women through the production of taste. Taste and authenticity function as resistance to the working-class position.

The final analysis chapter sought to unpack discourses of authenticity by considering how meaning is inscribed on the body through the tattoo, and how that functions as a marker of taste. The narratives that the women produced in the interviews supported 'good' choices, both informed and aware, that also served to support their positions as 'good' women. They discussed tattoos that linked them to family and traditions, to experiences of bonding, and to strength through pain – all points which support the construction of the good woman. With respect to the previous research literature, the focus on femininities, embodiment, and social discourses provided a contextual rationale for where this research is located. The majority of research that explored tattoos focuses on men and men's bodies, rather than consider the intertwining nuances of women and women's bodies. Research by Skeggs (1997) showed the class-based nature of women's bodies, and gave a central focus for the research. Butler (1990) is positioned as key in respect to literature informing the research, discussing the ways that femininity is embodied, and enables the performance of gender. It is through these performances that gendered expectations are produced. My research expands on this by considering femininities in multiplicity, rather than a singular term – women can express different ways of being feminine, and tattoos can be one of these ways. As Holland (2004) notes – negotiations occur not just in resisting or conforming to dominant constructions of femininities, but are also intertwined with cultural understandings of things such as age and class.

The original contribution to knowledge that this thesis provides is centred around the constructions of class, but not just working class. As tattoos have been associated with working class women (Skeggs,

1997), it is interesting to see the shift in construction of tattoos becoming accessible to middle class women, and what this produces in relation to tattooed feminine bodies. By tattoos being constructed as 'artwork' for and on the body, this has made them more available and alluring to a wider community of women. Through the very nature of this accessibility and availability, tattoos being produced as art functions to reduce negative class associations. Whilst the reframing of tattoos as art is important, it is still worthwhile acknowledging that reducing women to a specific class group is still a simplistic way of understanding femininities – the multiplicity of positionings still plays an important part in how women negotiate their class identity. What can be said from this research is that there is value in exploring these multiplicities in relation to women from more classes than just the working class.

10.3 – Regulation and resistance

The central question upon which the research is built from is concerned with exploring constructions of femininities in relation to tattooed women's subjective positionings. This thesis has presented five analytic chapters – one presenting media discourses, and four presenting discourses produced within the interviews – all of which are produced through a sense of regulation. The exploration has been achieved through three sub-questions, focusing on how women constitute themselves as tattooed subjects, how social discourses surrounding tattoos and femininities are constructed in contemporary British culture, and what the implications are for how women position themselves as tattooed feminine subjects.

Firstly, tattoos intersect with the construction of feminine subjectivities in multiple ways, which are nuanced, complex, and individual. Tattoos are another strand in the intersectional web which includes age, class and gender amongst others. Classed expectations of femininities are at the forefront of how tattoos on women are understood, with smaller, daintier, and less visible pieces seeming to

relate to more normative and idealised constructions of femininities than women who have more extensive coverage. Second, social discourses surrounding tattoos and femininities in British culture are constructed in relation to contemporary contexts within which tattoos are more acceptable. Whilst they may appear more in the media, and with research emerging that focuses on tattooed bodies (DeMello, 2014; Holland, 2004; Mifflin, 2013), the discourses produced are still expected – tattoos as trending consumer products, ‘giving back’ femininity in the face of illness, and morality tales to warn off ‘good’ women from ruining their bodies.

These media discourses sit at odds with the tensions and multiplicity of positionings produced by the women in the interviews, though both the media and interview analyses are underscored by the production of regulation. Whilst there were differences between the discourses produced within the interviews and the media discourses, the way in which they integrate together says something important about tattooed feminine bodies. The media articles were focused around trends, morality, and transformation – things that were ‘expected’ to come from the media. They were expected in the sense that what is produced is for a specific purpose – to show women what’s okay and what is not in relation to tattoos. This sense of regulation is what makes the discourses similar to that of the interview discourses, but the main difference here is that the interviews go more in-depth into the complexities of being a tattooed woman. The ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to be tattooed are not as clear cut as they are presented within the media articles – the interview discourses show the negotiations women must navigate, and how this depends on context. The media articles present the women from a singular position, whereas the interview discourses function as an exploration of the multiplicity of women’s positions. The second point for which the media and interview discourses integrate is through the construction of class – though, they diverge again in how these constructions are

negotiated. The media articles present class as either working class or middle class, with specific tattoos, styles, or images being related to different (opposing) class groups. The women who were interviewed however, produce much more nuanced views of class – resisting and conforming to class stereotypes, which relate to their own class positionings. For the women who were interviewed, they negotiate class in multiple ways – not just via their tattoos – and this is something that the media articles do not explore. Whilst the women may have discussed some of the ‘expected’ topics that relate to wider social discourses of tattooed feminine bodies, the unexpected elements of the discourses came from the tensions the women produced in relation to these topics.

Third, the implications for how women position themselves as tattooed subjects is not so easily unpacked. The positioning as tattooed subjects functions as a point of negotiation between several key tensions as discussed within the thesis: as ‘othered’ versus common, as working-class/tacky versus middle-class/arty, as visible versus invisible, and as embodying good wellbeing versus embodying mental health difficulties. Women negotiate how they simultaneously conform to and resist against normative ideals of femininity through their multiple subjective positionings.

For feminist researchers, this research tells a few things about gaze, regulation, and resistance. Tattoos do not necessarily remove women from the male gaze – tattooed bodies may in some ways subvert normative gendered expectations, but they also conform to and reinforce them in others. The regulation that is produced within the research is not just produced by social norms, but also through self-surveillance, and the othering of tattooed women by reinforcing one’s own position as a tattooed woman – the production of authenticity and taste is central to regulation, as underscored by class. Finally, tattooed feminine bodies are produced as a resistance against singular positionings – ‘woman’, ‘femininity’, ‘working-class’, ‘old’.

The multiplicity of positionings is something that future research should seek to unpack.

From this research, I would recommend two areas for future consideration, building on what has been explored here to inform new areas of research and policy change. The main area in respect to informing policy would be surrounding employment practices and how tattooed women are regulated within the workplace. Almost all of the women discussed the workplace in some form, and not many of them has positive things to say in respect to how their tattoos are perceived, and what their thoughts were in relation to company policies on tattoos. Further research focusing on employment and tattoos would feed into current areas of research that consider how tattoos are either beneficial or detrimental to the workplace (Timming, 2015), providing a critical exploration of the differences in perceptions for tattooed women, giving acknowledgement to the issue that men and women are viewed differently in relation to their tattooed bodies. In addition, my research fills existing gaps in gendered constructions of class, specific to the focus of tattoos, showing that tattoos are not just available and acceptable to working class women, but also, the reconceptualization of tattoos as art that makes them more acceptable to middle class women. The unpacking of classed positionings is required for a greater understanding of how women constitute themselves through negotiation of multiple positionings.

For research limitations, whilst this research took an intersectional approach, enabling a more critical exploration of factors such as gender, class, and age, I am aware that this in itself is quite limited in respect to the reaches of intersectionality. Given that the research emerged from work conducted by Crenshaw (1991) and focuses on the voices of women of colour, factors such as ethnicity did not emerge within the research. Again, this could be linked to the diversity of the women who took part in the research, as only two out

of the fourteen were from minority ethnic backgrounds. I feel that this would have also been a key element to explore in relation to constructions of tattooed women, but did not have the data to support this exploration. In addition to the reach of the intersectional focus, the women interviewed for the research were all from the Midlands area, and therefore, it would be beneficial for future research to include other areas in the UK.

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Appendix A – Ethical documentation for the project

Ethical Approval

All stages of research will adhere to the British Psychological Society's ethical guidelines and those of the The University of Northampton; "Ethics Codes and Procedures".

Full ethical approval is being applied for, and the study will be carried out in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Ethical guidelines for Psychological research. Detailed below is a summary of ethical guidelines that will apply to the whole research project; different aspects will apply for the different sections of the project.

Recruitment procedures

Participants will be sought through convenience sampling, in that they meet the necessary requirements for the research i.e. women with tattoos; women with opinions of tattoos. This will be done through posts on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr, and using pages or hash tags relevant to the desired participants. All participants will be over the age of 18.

For the photo elicitation interviews, participants who have already been interviewed will be invited to take part in a follow up interview, including the discussion of images.

Identification of researcher

The researcher will identify themselves to participants by presenting their PhD research student card and other ID will be available if participants would like to see it, e.g. driving license to verify the identity on the student card.

Consent

All participants who will be interviewed for the research will be over the age of 18. They will be made fully aware of the aims and the nature of the research, details of which will be provided for them in an information sheet before they take part. This will also include a copy of the interview schedule. If participants are happy with the information provided and want to take part, they will be given a consent form to sign, and will be made aware that they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time during the interview process, and within one month of overall interview completion. Contact details of the researcher will be provided from the outset.

Conduct of Research

There will not be any elements of deception throughout the research process; participants will be fully aware of the nature of the research. Interviews will take place in a private and quiet setting, in the interview rooms on campus, which are to be booked ahead of time. They are both safe and comfortable for both the researcher and the participant. Participants will also be made aware from the outset that they do not have to answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable in answering, unless they wish to do so.

Any images that are used for analysis that are taken from the media will only be used if copyright is approved to do so.

Recordings

Participants of the research project will be made aware on their version of the information sheet that they receive before taking part, that the researcher would like to audio record the interview to enable them to transcribe the content. They will be given a tick box on the consent form which will allow them to give additional consent for whether they mind having the interview taped or not. If they do not consent to having the interview audio recorded, the interview process will not proceed. Participants will be made aware, before

giving consent, of the processes by which the recording will be stored, what it will be used for, and for how long it will exist.

Storage of data

In accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998); data will be stored securely by the researcher using one folder for any paper copies of transcripts etc., which will be kept in a locked drawer or locker, and by using a folder on the researcher's computer which is password protected and is only used by the researcher.

Participants will be made aware in the information sheet about how, where and the length of time in which their data will be stored, whether electronically or on paper. The data would be stored from the start of the interviews, until the final analysis has been completed. Audio recordings would be stored on a password protected computer, and any notes made would be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked room.

The audio player will be stored securely, alongside the paper copies of any questionnaires and consent forms etc. The transcripts and audio files will be kept securely on the researcher's computer which is password protected, and if transcripts are printed, they will be kept in a secure folder when transferred and within a locked drawer or locker when being stored. Audio files and copies of transcript will be destroyed following the analyses.

Potential Harm

A risk assessment will be carried out to ensure that any necessary arrangements are made or measures are employed to overcome or avoid any harm to the participant and researcher.

For example, items that may be included in the risk assessment are assessing the interview schedule for any potentially upsetting or personal questions, so that the researcher is prepared to skip over

these if necessary (participants will be aware that they do not need to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering). The venue of the interviews will also be assessed for the researchers and participants safety.

No harm should come to any participants of the research project. However, if participants suffer from upset or distress due to the interviews, participants will be directed to their local mental health service.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants' identities will be kept anonymous through the use of an alias within the qualitative interviews. For the photo elicitation interviews, participants will be informed not to use photos or images that may lead to them being identified.

To ensure confidentiality of data and participant details, all hard copies of data will be destroyed once analysis has been completed. Participants will be made aware of the length of time in which their data will be kept, and how it will be stored. In addition, all data will be kept securely and will only be seen by the researcher and supervisory team.

In the case of databases being made with contact details for participants, these will be destroyed once all data has been collected for that stage of research.

Debriefing participants

Each participant will be given contact details of the researcher via the debrief sheet. This will detail the aims of the study, the email address of the researcher and the date by which they can withdraw their data and how this can be done. Participants will be informed that they can be given overall findings of the study, and from which date this information will be available if they wish to contact the researcher.

Participant information sheet

PROJECT SUMMARY

The feminine ideal, flawed: A qualitative view of identity, performance and stereotypes in tattooed women.

The research that is being carried out is looking to explore issues surrounding the views of tattooed women, how women inform their identity and how stereotypes are built about women with tattoos. I am a graduate teaching assistant in Psychology undertaking this research for my PhD, supervised by Jane Callaghan and Lisa Fellin. This research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

In this study, the researcher would like to interview women with a series of open ended questions for the interviewee to respond with honest thoughts and feelings. Every question does not need to be answered; only those that the interview wishes to answer. Participants have the right to withdraw at any time during the interview process, and a month thereafter the interviews are completed, for which a date will be provided.

Any data gained through the interviews will be stored safely and securely on a password protected computer, or in one folder which will be securely locked away in a locked room, and only to be seen by the researcher and the supervisory team. If participants do not wish for the interview to be audio recorded, the interview will not commence, and the participant will not continue in this study.

TIME COMMITMENT

The interview will typically take between 20-60 minutes, depending on the depth of your answer. Follow up interviews may be required at a later date. The interviews are to take place over the space of a year; therefore it may be some time before participants are contacted again.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

Participants may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time during the interview, or up to four weeks after the interview, without explanation. They have the right to ask that any data they have supplied to that point be withdrawn and destroyed. They also have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked. They have the right to have questions about the procedures answered. If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

There are no known benefits or risks in this study. However, if the interviews cause any distress or upset, I can advise local mental health services dependant on your location.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The data that will be collected will not contain any personal information about participants; an alias will be provided throughout the research; only the researcher and the supervisory team will be aware. No one will link the data provided to the identifying information supplied to the researcher i.e. name, email address, telephone number.

The data provided could be used for presentation at conferences and in publication, though there will be no material to identify individual participants, only the alias.

Any information gained from you for the research will be stored in a secure place (either locker or password encoded computer) and will be destroyed upon completing analysis of the interviews.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

I will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact me through email at charlotte.dann@northampton.ac.uk.

If you want to find out about the final results of this study, or have any queries regarding feedback from your interview, you can provide an email address that only the researcher will see, and let you know the details once they are finalised.

Thank you for your interest and support. If you would like to participate in the research, please complete and return the consent form and the contact details form in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Consent form

The feminine ideal, flawed: A qualitative view of identity, performance and stereotypes in tattooed women

Please tick yes or no to show your consent in participating in this study.

If no is selected for any of the answers, you will not be able to participate in this research.

I have read and understood the information sheet for the project 'The feminine ideal, flawed: A qualitative view of identity, performance and stereotypes in tattooed women'. I acknowledge that:

	YES	NO
The purpose of the study has been fully explained to me		
I have the right to withdraw at any point during the interview, and up to four weeks after by contacting the researcher		
I have the right to not answer any question if I so wish		
I understand that the interview will be audio recorded		
All interviews will be transcribed word for word, but my name and other identifying information will be removed from the transcripts to protect my anonymity		
Anonymised quotes from my interview will be used within the report and any subsequent scholarly publication		
I am able to contact the researcher if I have any queries		

Signed :

Print name :

Date :

Initial Interview Questions

There will be elements of flexibility through the interview, with prompts being utilized to gain more detail. Future interview schedules will be based on data gained from the first collection.

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself?
What do you do for a living? Hobbies? Family?
2. What does 'being feminine' mean to you?
How would you describe femininity?
3. Tell me a bit about your tattoos
Do they mean anything to you?
4. Do you feel that there is a stigma attached to tattoos?
Do you think this might be different for men and women?
5. How do you think women with tattoos are viewed in the UK?

Appendix B – Examples of initial coding for analysis

What's happening? She's positioning herself as family oriented & showing their importance to her.

The family is reinforced here as an important institution – the concept of a strong family / connection is important!

signifying ownership (not just 'a' tattoo, but 'my' tattoo; meaningful)

flowers representing femininity

not by name, but their 'role' who they are to her.

What she has (tattoo) against what she does not have (grandparents)

her family is constituted on her skin.

The tattoos are meaningful to her, so she position her tattoo choices as right + justified + authentic.

positioned in respect to a conversation - that I understand what 'busy life is like' & so understand her justification for the tattoo.

asked in conversation context - read to make sense of it's importance

do you want me to read it out? "at some point there will hardly be any one about and it will most likely be just me and you". Erm it's something that [partner] said, I had a bit of crap going on with some friends here so I just got it done. Like it was a really long text message he sent me and this was a paragraph in the message, so I just thought yeah. It's stuck with me ever since because no matter what happens in your life like, to me like you know, it's a quote about me and my son, because it will always be me and him, but it's nice that [partner] said it to me. That's a bonus (laughs)

as though it doesn't matter who said it, she'd still relate it to her & her son.

interesting difference in perception of the meaning here. As from the partner representing their relationship, it sounds quite 'creepy' & controlling. As a mother-son bond, it's more heart-felt.

stabilizing an emotion - pain / distress that is fraught, but made fixed (and coherent?) through the tattoo.

overarching theme of family & strength.

how she constructs the tattoo in this way makes it sound more meaningful & serious. May not be perceived in the same way if just positioned as a text.

interesting ownership of family, with 'a script' only made significant from the son.

I've got (my son's name), erm and then I've got a script

do you want me to read it out? "at some point there will hardly be any one about and it will most likely be just me and you". Erm it's something that [partner] said, I had a bit of crap going on with some friends here so I just got it done. Like it was a really long text message he sent me and this was a paragraph in the message, so I just thought yeah. It's stuck with me ever since because no matter what happens in your life like, to me like you know, it's a quote about me and my son, because it will always be me and him, but it's nice that [partner] said it to me. That's a bonus (laughs)

quite a working class construction - not mysterious (?) easily read (mis-understood) significance of the belonging / name changes the perception of the tattoo

going through stress & emerging stronger. The tattoo is the mediating space for locating 'I'.

* 'I' AS A SUBJECT POSITION - Benson, C. (2002) The Cultural Psychology of self: Place, morality & art in human worlds / Ratner, C. (2006) Cultural Psychology: a perspective on psychological functioning... <CLASS>

I as a mother / daughter / partner / grandchild / friend
I as relational

as though ready to start a lengthy story

an act of kindness (it's not a selfish choice, it's a selfless choice) - but sits at odds with 'I wanted'. That changes the perception of the tattoo because then it's not about her.

contextual production - pre-tattoo, her family was still important to her. The importance is solidified through the tattoo.

interesting ownership of family, with 'a script' only made significant from the son.

I've got (my son's name), erm and then I've got a script

do you want me to read it out? "at some point there will hardly be any one about and it will most likely be just me and you". Erm it's something that [partner] said, I had a bit of crap going on with some friends here so I just got it done. Like it was a really long text message he sent me and this was a paragraph in the message, so I just thought yeah. It's stuck with me ever since because no matter what happens in your life like, to me like you know, it's a quote about me and my son, because it will always be me and him, but it's nice that [partner] said it to me. That's a bonus (laughs)

quite a working class construction - not mysterious (?) easily read (mis-understood) significance of the belonging / name changes the perception of the tattoo

going through stress & emerging stronger. The tattoo is the mediating space for locating 'I'.

* 'I' AS A SUBJECT POSITION - Benson, C. (2002) The Cultural Psychology of self: Place, morality & art in human worlds / Ratner, C. (2006) Cultural Psychology: a perspective on psychological functioning... <CLASS>

I as a mother / daughter / partner / grandchild / friend
I as relational

wording is suggestive of collecting. It's not one, it's repetitive, it's a collection; it's more 'knows than just 'a thing'.

okay I've got four in total, erm I've got my flower [on her wrist] which is in between a lily and an orchid, and I got that done when my gran passed away, erm and then I've got my gran and granddad's name in Gujarati, they've both passed away so I've got no grandparents now so I really wanted to get something for them they're my dad's parents, because I wanted to get something that's for both of them, something to remind me of them, sometimes you kind of forget do you know what I mean

relates to feeling of belonging & contextual significance of life event - what significance does it then take on to have after? Memory, emblem, familial institution now gone

omission of mothers' parents?

what is forgotten? The people? or what they represent?

alluding to her heritage, in respect to it symbolising and bringing her closer to her family. Representative of belonging, identity.

asked in conversation context - read to make sense of it's importance

do you want me to read it out? "at some point there will hardly be any one about and it will most likely be just me and you". Erm it's something that [partner] said, I had a bit of crap going on with some friends here so I just got it done. Like it was a really long text message he sent me and this was a paragraph in the message, so I just thought yeah. It's stuck with me ever since because no matter what happens in your life like, to me like you know, it's a quote about me and my son, because it will always be me and him, but it's nice that [partner] said it to me. That's a bonus (laughs)

quite a working class construction - not mysterious (?) easily read (mis-understood) significance of the belonging / name changes the perception of the tattoo

going through stress & emerging stronger. The tattoo is the mediating space for locating 'I'.

* 'I' AS A SUBJECT POSITION - Benson, C. (2002) The Cultural Psychology of self: Place, morality & art in human worlds / Ratner, C. (2006) Cultural Psychology: a perspective on psychological functioning... <CLASS>

I as a mother / daughter / partner / grandchild / friend
I as relational

JUST A THOUGHT

- thread of a social (role?) discourse?
Tattoos as embodying those roles; self constituted in the tattoos?

in reference to customers.
As though they have concern?
A tattoo is nothing to be concerned with.

tattoos are constituted as authentic because they are meaningful to her.

[discussing Dior's tattoo policy of plasters over the tattoos]

taken for granted as a normal thing for her cultural context.

P: Yeah! People are like ah what have you done to your arm? Oh nothing it's just a tattoo! I don't

resisting the coercion - blaming and shaming for nothing worth shaming (a tattoo)

agree with it, and I think, at the end of the day, they're personal, they're personal to me, I'm not

going to carry a picture of my gran around all day, every day, I can't stick it to my forehead or stick it

ownership of her

to my arm (laughs) so I got her name, I got her name because it reminds me all the time (pause) and

not just her - it's a community / cultural thing; in our society now ↓ cultural justification for tattoo (places blame on culture almost)

we're so busy in our lives yeah, every single day, we're that busy, and you forget about the things

overwhelming

Making it cultural / societal

Contextually for her, family is most important

work as busy, stressful (positioned against loving family life).

that are most important and that's why I got them done, because, whether I'm working ten days in a row, or twenty four hours a day seven days a week well it doesn't really matter, you still forget

work almost positioned as separate to self,

sometimes you get caught up in stuff, for me, especially with my gran and being so close to her,

hence the 'need' to remind her who she is. Tattoo as constituting / representing her family role,

that's just going to be with me to remind me, and it does to be fair I think about her every single day

she's not fully articulating exactly what it reminds her of. not just her grandparents.

and I don't think if I had the tattoo of her name that I would, because you just get caught up in the

everyday normal, repetition, monotony tattoos serving as another point of stabilization - a stop point. (self-stability)

Tattoos are linked to family, which is an important element of herself. Her tattoos are an embodiment of the self as relational, familial.

What's happening? She's expressing a narrative of self.

It's 'just a tattoo' (not important) that's personal to her (important).

More from venting frustration of work to discussing her sense of self. (work as suppressing that?)

* culturally, the position here is of 'employee', worker, (provider?). Very different to family position.

tattoos discussed in relation to family are personal & meaningful.

Tattoos as discussed in relation to work are 'not professional', need covering, hiding. 'Employee' as a broad term rather than personalised. Need justification.

Appendix D – Table of Media Articles for analysis

No.	Author	Year	Publication	Length	Title
1	Bourke, F.	2015	Birmingham Mail	1,173	Henna holiday tattoo woman dies after allergic reaction to hair dye four years later
2	Della-Ragione, J.	2015	Mail Online	963	Would you have a DIY tattoo? Woman inspired by celebrity 'stick and poke' trend has ink pricked into her palm by HAND... but says it's not for the squeamish
3	Carty, S,	2014	Mail Online	527	'I take five minutes out of my day to keep her smiling': Tattoo artist applies stick on designs to Down Syndrome woman every Friday because she likes to show off her 'ink'
4	Moodie, A.	2016	The Guardian	1409	Tattoo ink contains cancer-causing chemicals - so why isn't it regulated?
5	Cleary, B.	2017	Mail Online	1972	Bodybuilder fiance of accused cocaine smuggler Cassandra Sainsbury, 22, visits tattoo parlour to get 'Illuminati' symbol inked on his arm - while wife-to-be languishes in a Colombian prison
6	Kelly, A.	2014	The Guardian	1232	Survivors Ink: tattoos of freedom - in pictures
7	Saul, H.	2017	i	1068	Purple gaze: the woman with tattoo eyes
8	Ziniak, A.	2014	Mail Online	920	'We don't want tattoos in here': Two women with sleeve tattoos ordered to leave restaurant because they were 'offending' other diners

9	Stern, C.	2015	Mail Online	1018	Ouch! Woman gets ELEVEN tattoos in one week to spotlight the work of talented tattoo artists from the last century - and the different body art trends they inspired
10	Robinson, I.	2016	Mirror	632	Woman gets EastEnders tattoo of homeless Ian Beale but swears: 'I'm not a weirdo'
11	Sturgis, I.	2014	Scottish Daily Mail	1609	The strange rise of middle-class TATTOOS; Today's tattoo parlours resemble health spas - and are full of career women and respectable mums. What IS going on?
12	Laws, R.	2015	Birmingham Mail	601	Birmingham woman's WILLY tattoo shame; Former wild child Holly Aston tells documentary about the horror of living with the most embarrassing tattoo in Britain
13	Sturgis, I.	2014	Mail Online	1633	Today's tattoo parlours resemble health spas
14	Brewer, K.	2016	The Guardian	907	'My tattoo art helps women feel beautiful after breast cancer'
15	Hulse, C.	2017	Birmingham Mail	510	These photos show the horrifying burns suffered by a young woman after getting a Black Henna tattoo on holiday
16	Eddie, R and Tolj, B.	2016	Mail Online	563	Woman auctioning off the chance to tattoo her buttocks closes the deal at \$6,500 - as other young women copy her cheeky money-making scheme
17	Ireland, K.	2016	Belfast Telegraph	1171	So what if people hate our tattoos...they work for us

18	Webb, S.	2015	Mirror	834	What does this tattoo say to you? Woman's inking movingly reveals her secret battle with depression
19	Goldwin, C.	2017	Daily Mail	2047	WHY DO SO SMART WOMEN HAVE TATTOOS
20	Telegraph Reporters	2016	Telegraph	534	This woman is offering free tattoos to people with self-harm scars
21	Chia, J.	2016	Mail Online	613	Woman with '420' cannabis tattoo across her forehead raises more than \$1,000 to get it removed - but is it all smoke and mirrors?
22	Stern, C.	2015	Mail Online	959	Young woman with 17 tattoos reveals her extensive body art to her conservative Christian parents after hiding it under long sleeves and trousers for 12 YEARS
23	Gander, K.	2017	The Independent	811	'No longer victims': The woman who tattoos sexual abuse survivors
24	Waterlow, L.	2016	Mail Online	559	Woman who bought a DIY tattoo gun reveals her regret after inking her own name on her GROIN when she was drunk
25	Huffadine, L.	2016	Mail Online	504	Woman horrified by her ghoulish fairytale tattoo apologises for blasting parlour - as they reveal the Disney-themed zombie design 'she asked for'
26	Towner, M.	2015	Mail Online	546	Doctors mistake ink from California woman's tattoos for cancer on body scan and only realized after surgery
27	Newton, J.	2014	Mail Online	521	HEAD TO TOE IN TATTOOS...WOULD YOU WANT THIS WOMAN TO TEACH YOUR CHILDREN?

28	Corkery, C.	2016	Mail Online	677	Woman spends £12,000 to learn how to tattoo new NIPPLES on her best friend after she lost part of her breasts to cancer
29	Ingram, L.	2016	Mail Online	578	Cosmetic tattoo horror stories: As yet another woman shares her disastrous experience, doctors reveal what you MUST know before getting permanent makeup
30	Cashmore, A.	2017	The Independent	1078	Amanda Cashmore talks to women who are using tattoos to cover up mastectomy scars and in the process taking a renewed pride in their appearance
31	Wheatstone, R.	2015	Mirror	722	'It's called vitiligo': Woman with rare skin condition gets TATTOO as perfect response to people's stares
32	Kirkova, D.	2014	Mail Online	1749	What happens when a tattoo artist is given free rein over woman's body for SIX HOURS? Find out what she thought when she saw the huge design for first time...
33	Schwab Dunn, B.	2017	Mail Online	749	'Grow through what you go through': Woman, 22, gets inspirational tree tattoo inked over her self-harm scars as she says 'the darkest parts of your life can be beautiful if you choose'
34	Smyth, L.	2017	Sunday Life	943	TATTOO SPELT LOVE FOR NINA; EXCLUSIVE HOW BANGOR WOMAN'S DISEASE HELPED HER DISCO FIGHT HELPED HER DISCOVER HER SOULMATE

35	Gander, K.	2016	The Independent	532	'I've regained control over my body': Woman gets chest tattoo to cover mastectomy scars; 'Cancer doesn't have to leave the last mark'
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