Inked in Narrative: Body Diversity, tattooing, and its Representation in Young Adult Literature

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Abstract

This dissertation explores notions of body diversity within Western culture in terms of weight, race, disability, gender, and sexuality with a specific focus on tattooed bodies. Historically, tattooing has been associated with negative behaviours such as drunkenness, irresponsible behaviour, and prostitution. Individuals who do not fit into Western cultural ideas of beauty have faced discrimination and marginalisation. In particularly heavily tattooed women have received negative criticism relating to challenging accepted beauty norms.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how tattooed protagonists are represented in young adult literature through a feminist lens in relation to character traits, physical appearance, personal relationships, and overall story arc. Its aim is to ascertain whether literature portraying tattooed protagonists reinforces social stereotypes or challenges them.

I explored this representation through qualitative interviews with university students and questionnaires aimed at readers between eleven and fourteen. I analysed these responses using critical discourse analysis. The literary representation of tattooed protagonists was also explored in nine young adult novels using textual analysis. A variety of themes were explored and compared with the data gained from the critical discourse analysis.

The overall results from all three sets of data suggested that although tattooed individuals have traditionally been vilified and marginalised, social perceptions are changing as is clarified by the range of books available which feature tattooed protagonists although in some, more traditionally minded areas of society, the stigma remains.

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Introduction

As a heavily tattooed woman I have experienced discrimination relating to my physical appearance both within the workplace and outside of it. I have also experienced continuous frustration and irritation regarding the lack of diversity in film, television, magazines, and literature. This frustration came about as a result of seeing only one type of body represented in mainstream media – that is, thin, white, and unmarked. In recent years, however, this has begun to change in mainstream media with the focus on mixed race and LGBTQ characters in film and television. Companies such as Primark and Ann Summers now also feature more diverse models including older women and models with disabilities, and those with tattoos. My MA focussed on gender stereotyping in children's literature, and I briefly explored issues surrounding body image and the social and cultural pressure to maintain an appearance deemed acceptable. For my PhD I wanted to examine this subject further and have combined two topics I am fervently interested in – young adult literature and body image in Western society with particular focus on tattooing. My decision to write this dissertation has come from a lifelong passion relating to the desire to promote body diversity and the acceptance of bodies that do not conform to traditional social and cultural ideals.

The female body in Western society has habitually undergone a significant degree of scrutiny and criticism. The pressure to maintain a certain appearance is reinforced in mainstream culture by the media through advertising, television, and film. The thin ideal has been popularised and bodies which fail to conform to this paradigm have typically been considered unattractive. People whose bodies are larger, non-white, or

disabled have customarily experienced prejudice and marginalisation. Such negative attitudes have also extended to bodies which have been modified, for example, bodies that are heavily pierced or tattooed. The main focus of this dissertation is tattooing - the history of tattooing, tattooing and women, and the portrayal of tattooed protagonists in young adult literature.

Historically tattooing has been imbued with negative connotations having been associated with gangs, unsociable behaviour, and prostitution (Osterud, 2009). Tattooed females have typically been viewed more negatively than tattooed men, being considered less physically attractive than women who do not have tattoos (Pitts, 2003, Yuen Thompson, 2015). They have also been heavily criticised for deliberately challenging conventional beauty norms (Pitts, 2003). The importance of research such as this is its potential to enhance the understanding of a subject that has been stigmatized and tainted with taboo. For example, there are currently no laws prohibiting employers discriminating against individuals with tattoos (The Equality Act 2010). Although social attitudes to tattooing are slowly changing due to exposure in mainstream culture and its increased popularity within the middle classes, in some areas of society, negative attitudes towards the practice still remain, especially relating to heavily tattooed women (Yuen Thompson, 2015). Renewed knowledge and understanding of a topic may eventually lead to improved attitudes towards it and a subsequent reduction in discrimination and marginalisation.

Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this research is to explore how tattooed protagonists in young adult literature are portrayed and whether this portrayal reinforces social stereotypes or challenges them. This has been broken down into the following objectives:

1. To find out how readers perceive literary characters whose bodies have been tattooed.
2. To identify whether literary characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative, positive, or ambiguous way.
3. To ascertain whether there are any differences in the portrayal of male and female characters with body modifications, specifically tattoos.

Literature

There is a plethora of secondary literature available regarding theories of the body and ways in which the female body has been objectified and vilified across the ages. In *The Beauty Myth* (1990), Naomi Wolf explores how the beauty, diet, and fashion industries influence women to spend money by reinforcing insecurities relating to their bodies. Sandra Lee Bartky (2003) focusses on 'the tyranny of slenderness' where women are confronted with social pressure to remain slim. In *Unbearable Weight* (1993) by Susan Bordo, the focus is on issues of weight, dieting, and eating disorders. More recent publications relating to the theories of the body include *The Vagenda* (2014) by Holly Baxter and Rhiannan Cosslett which scrutinizes the ways in which women's magazines reinforce cultural ideals relating to the body. Feminist authors

focussing on tattooing include Beverly Yuen Thompson and Victoria Pitts. In *Covered in Ink* (2015), Beverly Yuen Thompson researched heavily tattooed women and the reasons for their decisions to become tattooed. Through a series of interviews, *In the Flesh* (2003) by Victoria Pitts explores a variety of body modification methods and the motivations of the individuals who choose to experience them. Both explore the significance of tattooing for the women who choose to wear them and the themes of cultural beauty ideals. Amelia Osterud (2009) in her book *The Tattooed Lady* examines the history of women and tattooing with particular emphasis on the tattooed ladies in the circus sideshows of the nineteenth century. Literature relating to the critique of young adult fiction includes Michael Cart (1996), Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000), Beth Younger (2009), and Pat Pinsent (2010) and typically focuses on young adult themes such as coming of age, sexual relationships, parental conflict, and identity formation. In terms of race, Melanie Ramdarshan Bold in her book *Inclusive Young Adult Fiction* (2019) maintains that there is a shortage of black authors in publishing. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas examines the absence of black female protagonists in young adult fantasy. Her book *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games* (2019) explores the reasons why this is so.

Although tattooed protagonists appear in a range of genres, most feature in the fantasy genre for reasons I will explore. A variant of this is the tattoo magic genre which appeared on the market in the mid-2000s and portrays a selection of diverse characters. Books such as *Ink in the Blood* (2020) by Kim Smejkal and *Clipped Wings* (2014) by Helena Hunting fall into this category. Although there is a comprehensive selection of secondary critical literature relating to the body and to tattooing, literature focussing on

tattooed protagonists is sparse thus creating a research gap which this dissertation will attempt to fill.

Methodology

Due to the fact that this dissertation places its main focus on the female body– its objectification and vilification - this research was undertaken from a feminist perspective and uses a multi methods approach. The main premise of the research is that tattooed protagonists would be portrayed in negative and stereotypical ways. To assist me with the above aims and objectives, I divided the research up into a series of stages. Firstly, I interviewed twelve participants over the age of eighteen and asked them a series of questions regarding their reading choices, how they perceive heroes and heroines in literature, and their opinions relating to tattooed protagonists. This was followed by asking a small group of younger readers aged between eleven and fourteen a similar, but less detailed set of questions. As this dissertation focusses on themes of power and the imbalance of power, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to analyse the responses to both the interviews and the questionnaires. The interviews were conducted using feminist qualitative interview techniques. This involved informal, semi-structured interviewing whereby the participants were encouraged to talk openly about their reading choices and opinions. These responses were analysed according to dominant themes related to power which emerged from multiple readings of the responses. The above two tasks address the first research objective: **to find out how readers perceive literary characters whose bodies have been tattooed**. Thirdly, nine young adult novels featuring tattooed protagonists were read and analysed using textual

analysis. The nine novels chosen for analysis were divided into three categories: social realism, fantasy, and tattoo magic. There were three novels in each genre. Themes which emerged from the textual analysis were compared with the emerging themes from the critical discourse analysis. This final undertaking addresses my second and third research objectives – **to identify whether literary characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative, positive, or ambiguous way** and **to ascertain whether there are any differences in the ways in which tattooed male and female characters are portrayed**.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation is comprised of eight chapters and the following section provides an overview of each of them as follows.

Chapter One – Review of Literature

Chapter one presents a review of the literature relating to issues and themes connected to body diversity in general and more specifically to young adult literature. Literature in this review includes both secondary sources which focus on the theories of the body and works of fiction featuring protagonists facing challenges related to their physical appearance centred around race, disability, and weight, and tattooing. The chapter begins by defining young adult literature and moves on to explore the issues and debates in mainstream young adult fiction. Literature which focusses on the general themes of body diversity is explored with the final emphasis on tattooed protagonists in young adult literature and the emergence of the tattoo magic genre.

Chapter Two – Theories of the Body and the History of Tattooing

Historically bodies that have dominated in popular media have been thin and white with limited representation of alternative body types. Although there has been a shift in society's perceptions and attitudes towards diverse bodies, tattooed bodies have generally remained marginalised along with disabled, dark-skinned, and larger bodies. Theories of the body are related to the traditions and conventions surrounding the female form and the subsequent pressure faced by women (and to a lesser degree, men) regarding their physical appearance. The chapter begins by discussing deviance relating to weight, disability, deformity, transsexuality, and tattooing. It evolves to consider the theories of the body from a feminist perspective and places significant focus on feminist authors such as Naomi Wolf and Susie Orbach. Finally, it explores the history of tattooing, from the first recorded tattoo to the present day.

The cultural significance of tattooing has changed across the centuries and this chapter places importance upon its evolution within Western culture. It further focusses on the social stigma surrounding the practice and its negative associations with bikers, gang culture, and prostitution. Tribal membership and affiliation and the cultural significance of tattoos are discussed along with the changing social attitudes towards tattooing through mainstream media exposure. Further topics outlined in this chapter are the significance of tattooing for women in Western society, and the importance and significance of tattooing within the LGBTQ community.

Chapter Three – Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological framework of this study and the overall research design. It outlines the aims and objectives of the study and profiles feminist perspectives on multi methods research design and feminist methodology. The reasons for opting for a qualitative feminist approach are discussed along with the steps involved in carrying out the critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the textual analysis. The merits of interpretivism as opposed to traditional positivist approaches are also explored. Detailed outlines of the data collection, participant selection, ethical considerations, and the analysis of data are presented. The challenges and obstacles regarding participant selection as a result of the COVID 19 epidemic are also addressed. The chapter concludes with a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the study.

Chapter Four – Critical Discourse Analysis of the Interviews and Questionnaire Responses

Chapter four presents the critical discourse analysis of the responses to the questionnaires and interviews which involved small groups of readers responding to a series of questions relating to their reading choices. The questions encouraged respondents to consider factors such as the portrayal of heroes and heroines in literature, whether they felt there was enough diversity in young adult literature, and their thoughts on tattooed protagonists. The analysis explores themes relating to power structures within society and the imbalance of power such as marginalisation, social expectations, and stereotyping. It examines the themes which emerged from the

analysis relating to the first aim of the study: **how readers perceive literary characters who have been tattooed**.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven – Textual Analysis of Nine Young Adult Novels

The following three chapters outline the textual analysis of nine young adult novels featuring tattooed protagonists. The novels fall into three genre categories – social realism, fantasy, and tattoo magic. Three novels from each category were read and analysed. The novels will be analysed separately but have been grouped according to genre – social realism, fantasy, and tattoo magic. The criterion for novel selection was that the protagonist(s) have tattoos. A more detailed account of the selection criteria can be found in chapter three. These narratives are all published in either Britain, the United States or Australia and feature a variety of characters from different economic and social backgrounds: some inhabit the 'real world' facing challenges in common with many young adults regarding sexuality, parental relationships, and friendships; others inhabit magical worlds and parallel universes occupied by vampires, werewolves, and faeries. The analysis explores the ways in which the protagonists are portrayed within each narrative. It examines the story tropes and the personal and physical characteristics of each character, focussing on the ways in which protagonists respond to the obstacles and challenges with which they are confronted. It also draws upon the theoretical approaches outlined in chapter two which explored theories of the body from varying perspectives.

Came Back to Show You I Could Fly (1999) by Robin Klein, *Ink is Thicker than Water* (2013) by Amy Spalding, and *Henna Wars* (2020) by Adiba Jaigirdar conform to the social

realism genre, *Ink* (2017) by Alice Broadway, *Green Angel* (2003) by Alice Hoffman, and *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi were chosen from the fantasy genre. The final three tattoo magic novels selected for analysis were *Frost Moon* (2010) by Anthony Francis, *Stolen Ink* (2017) by Holly Evans, and *Ink Exchange* (2008) by Melissa Marr. Due to its lengthy content, the analysis is broken down into three separate chapters, each focussing on a different genre. Themes common to all nine narratives such as the significance of the protagonists' tattoos and the hero's journey are discussed. Other emerging themes relevant to specific novels such as sexuality, racism, and bullying are also addressed in detail. The aim of these chapters is to address the second two research aims: **to identify whether literary characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative, positive, or ambiguous way** and **to ascertain whether there are any differences in the portrayal of male and female characters with tattoos.**

Chapter Eight - Conclusions

Chapter eight examines the findings and conclusions which stemmed from the textual analysis of nine young adult novels. It also discusses the discourse analysis of the questionnaires and interview responses. Findings from both sets of analysis are explored and the themes which emerged from each are compared and contrasted. These two sets of findings are further compared with the theories and themes from secondary research. The limitations of this study and recommendations for the future are also outlined in this chapter together with personal reflections and the ways in which this research has contributed new knowledge.

Chapter 1

Review of Literature

1.1: Body Diversity in Young Adult Literature

This review of literature explores the ways in which literary protagonists whose physicality is visibly different from contemporary society's notion of the ideal body are portrayed in young adult literature within Western society. It begins by defining young adult literature, outlining the varying terms used to describe it as well as examining how it differs from children's literature. This is followed by a history of young adult literature with a particular emphasis on narratives which focus on characters whose bodies deviate from the norm in terms of weight, sexuality, disability, and tattooing, and the critical literature relating to those topics. Following this is a subsection exploring young adult literature and body image: how physical appearance or obsession with it is a common theme in adolescent literature (Younger, 2009). Further sections of this chapter focus on texts which depict a range of physically diverse characters in terms of body size, race, disability, and sexual diversity. Finally, it examines the ways in which tattooed protagonists are portrayed in young adult literature placing emphasis on the tattoo magic genre.

1.2: Defining Young Adult Literature

Young adult literature is typically aimed at adolescents between the ages eleven to eighteen although some sources claim that it encompasses the wider age range of ten to nineteen (Glaus, 2013). Young adult literature differs from children's literature in

terms of its subject matter. While young adult literature deals with themes of sexuality and sexual relationships and may include bad language, children's literature tends to focus on more age-appropriate topics and does not include sexual references or swearing. Terms used to describe this literary genre vary: 'Teen' literature is, for the most part, aimed at twelve to fourteen-year-olds whereas 'young adult' targets readers of fourteen years upwards and focuses on themes such as sex, relationships, mental health, and other social problems and challenges faced by the contemporary teenager (Williams, 2023). Issues of sexuality present a common theme in young adult literature with increasing focus on sexual diversity, LGBTQ themes and protagonists who question their sexuality. Herz and Gallo (2005) compiled an extensive list of the characteristics of young adult literature. Included in the list are the following:

> The main characters are teenagers; The length of the book is around two hundred pages; The story is usually told in the voice of the teenager; The point of view is most likely first person and is usually that of the teenager (Herz and Gallo, 2005, in Alsup, 2010, p.195).

Perhaps a fitting definition for young adult literature, therefore, would be 'texts in which teenagers are the main characters dealing with issues in which teens can relate' (Glaus, 2013, p.408). According to Younger, young adult literature has been a mainstay of the literary world since the 1960s and: 'Because of its focus on adolescents in formation, the genre also frequently centres on sexuality and sexual development' (Younger, 2009, p.xi). The American Library Association has defined three categories of young adult literature. These are as follows: 'Books written specifically for adolescents; books written for the general trade market which have adolescent heroes and heroines;

general books of interest to young adults' (Seelinger-Trites, 2000, p.2). For the purpose of this study, I will be focusing on narratives written specifically for adolescent readers.

Prior to the Second World War, the concept of the teenager did not exist at all (Waller, 2008; Cart, 2010). According to Waller:

> The category of 'teenager' is a recent one and has had less time than childhood to build up those concrete layers of meaning in social history, art, religion or, indeed, fiction. Adolescence is, after all, a less stable and more fluid concept, defined by its 'in-between-ness', its transitory position between childhood and adulthood, and its dependence on fleeting popular culture. (Waller, 2008, p.6)

Young adult literature itself only began to be identified and acknowledged as a genre about thirty years ago (Stevanovsky, 2019), and is consequently a relatively new type of children's literature (Pearson, 2011). The study and critique of *children's* literature per se only really became prevalent in the 1970s (Pinsent, 2016). According to Pearson (2011), however, literature aimed at adolescent readers appeared as early as the 1950s at the same time as the emergence of the 'teenager'. Cart (2010) maintains that the first book ever marketed specifically for young adults was Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer*, published in 1942. J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) was first written for adults but rapidly gained a teenage following. Subsequent publications were heavily influenced by this novel. Books written specifically for young adults in that era include *Wait for Marcy* by Rosamond du Jardin (1950) and *Beany has a Secret Life* by Lenora Mattingly Weber (1955).

In terms of literature with a theme of body deviance, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, could be considered an early publication of this theme as its central character, a nameless 'monster' created by Victor Frankenstein is shunned both by society and his creator due to his unnatural and unconventional appearance. Later narratives focusing on body diversity relating to disability include *Pollyanna* by Eleanor Porter (1913), *Sweet Frannie* by Susan Sallis (1982) and *Izzy, Willy Nilly* by Cynthia Voigt (1986). In terms of fantasy publications, the late 1990s and early 21st century witnessed a plethora of vampire and monster fantasy novels for young adults (Pearson, 2011). Since this study focuses to some extent on fantasy literature in that three of the publications chosen for analysis are from the fantasy genre, it seems fitting at this point to include a definition of fantasy and discuss its meaning within the context of this study. Fantasy then, can be defined as '[…] a departure from the accepted rules which by which individuals perceive the world around them; it represents that which is impossible […] and outside the parameters of our own reality' (Roslan et al, 2016, p.216). Fantasy in certain contexts, then, broadly applies to events and universal laws outside of our reality and is: 'related to the magical stories of myth, legend, folk tale and folklore from all over the world' (Matthews, 2002, p.1).

However, it can be said also, that fantasy can relate to any event or experience that has never occurred (Grenby, 2008). In a sense then, all literature could be classified as fantasy. For the purpose of this study, however, fantasy refers to events that take place outside of the world as we understand it – in alternative realities where magic exists, and which are inhabited by magical and mythological beings such as werewolves and vampires.

Modern-day offshoots of the aforementioned *Frankenstein* still hold great appeal for young adults - for example, *Dr. Frankenstein's Daughters* by Suzanne Weyn, published in 2013, and *This Monstrous Thing* by Makenzie Lee, published in 2015. Over the past few years there has been a steady stream of vampire, werewolf and monster novels which fall into the category of fantasy, Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga being among the most well-known. However, series fiction such as this has been heavily criticised for its reinforcement of social expectations by placing importance on the appearance of the female protagonist (Younger, 2009).

1.3: Issues and Debates in Mainstream Young Adult Literature

Before moving on to examine issues of body diversity, it is useful at this juncture to provide a clear outline of the dominant themes which occur in young adult literature. Typical issues presented in contemporary Western literature for adolescents include sexuality, identity formation and coming-of-age. In recent decades, darker issues have been tackled, for example: 'stark, reality-based fiction […] exploring themes such as rape, mental illness and murder (Duin, 2000, in Crowe, 2001, p.148) as opposed to the more traditional themes of divorce, teenage pregnancy (Crowe, 2001), friendships, fitting in with peer groups and parental frustrations (Alsup, 2010): 'Within the past ten years, some authors have focused their writing on tough issues, such as domestic violence, rape, drug addiction, suicide […] cults' (Alsup, 2010, p.196).

One major theme in young adult literature is the heteronormative boy-meets-girl narrative promoting the idea that attracting a boyfriend is the crowning achievement in

the life of a female protagonist: 'To have a boyfriend is presented in the text as the ultimate goal and the inevitable course of events' (Jacobs, 2004, p.21). A further recurring theme relating to this is the damsel-in-distress trope where the female in the story needs to be rescued from a challenging situation or a set of difficult circumstances by a stronger male protagonist. In such narratives the female has limited agency and is depicted as being somewhat helpless while she waits for her handsome prince or knight in shining armour. According to Peterson: 'The ubiquitous stereotype of a female victim as a damsel-in-distress, passive and waiting for a prince to rescue her has its roots in the centuries-old folk tales that dominated early oral traditions' (Peterson, 1996, p.1).

Mainstream young adult literature also echoes the norms and expectations of the culture in which they were written where the tendency is to focus on Western standards of beauty and heteronormative tropes. In her critique of contemporary young adult novels, Dorothy Karlin (2014) argues that the desires and hopes of protagonists often reflect the ambitions and goals that the reader is expected to aspire to and eventually conform to. One mainstay of adolescent literature is the appearance of the female protagonist, particularly where an overweight lead female character sets out to lose weight in order to win the approval of friends and family and ultimately receive positive attention from her male 'crush' (Quick, 2008). Sarah Shelton coined the phrase 'fat quest' which is: '[…] a culturally constructed set of steps that must be taken before a fat protagonist can be considered human enough, thin enough, and worthy enough of dreams and quests that 'normal' teen protagonists get to undertake' (Shelton, 2016, p.180). In these narratives the protagonist's attempts to lose the weight becomes her way of finally attaining a 'normal' life (Beineke, 1998, in Quick, 2008) where weight loss is equal to a happy ending (Quick, 2008, in Amato, 2019) and the

character will live 'thinly ever after' (Shelton, 2016, p.181). However, in recent years there has been a move towards a more positive portrayal of larger female and male protagonists who do not view their body negatively and where weight loss is neither the main theme in the story nor the ultimate goal. These narratives along with the theme of weight in adolescent literature will be explored at a later stage in this chapter.

The following section focuses on ways in which issues of body diversity have been tackled in young adult literature relating to the availability of texts with body diversity themes and how availability is affected and influenced by social trends and expectations.

1.4: Young Adult Literature and Body Image

Preoccupation with physical appearance is a recurring theme in young adult literature (Younger, 2009). On the other hand, it can be argued that it is normal and natural for teenagers to become preoccupied with, and self-conscious of, their changing bodies. Younger (2009) claims that literary characters whose appearance does not conform to certain social standards are often under-represented, marginalised, or portrayed in negative ways, thus reinforcing social norms and expectations and pressure to conform to unattainable standards of beauty. In her book, *Learning Curves*, she argues that novels, along with other forms of media, promote messages about clothing, makeup and diet (Younger, 2009). Also, according to Younger, conforming to society's ideals of beauty yields reward, whereas failing to do so results in punishment. This may manifest itself in lack of success in sexual relationships or, in wider society, in lack of

career success and social status, and can be reflected in YA literature (Younger, 2009). On the other hand, literature is capable of reflecting upon and addressing social trends and themes in a more positive way, offering adolescents help and advice which may provide guidance through difficult or challenging times (Pearson, 2011). For example, books that tackle issues surrounding gender reassignment and indeed any kind of sexual diversity would not have been as easily available twenty years ago as they are today since these subjects were once considered taboo and illegal. Introducing sensitive topics to young readers may encourage those who are confused about their sexuality, and it may also inform others whose lack of understanding may otherwise result in negative responses and judgemental behaviour. Therefore, literature may educate readers and provide them with the opportunity to understand and acknowledge their confusion and negativity, thus enabling them to potentially seek alternative, more positive ways of dealing with such situations (Reynolds, 2007). This observation is backed up by Nodelman, who claims that denying children and young people the opportunity to read literature containing controversial material such as issues surrounding mental illness, disability, sexuality, and religious conflict will result in literature becoming less relevant to them. Literature dealing with controversial issues may offer an insight into and increase the awareness of the experiences of adolescents for whom these issues are a reality (Younger, 2009). Furthermore, if they have personal experience of deviating from cultural norms or being in a situation that is confusing or alienating, reading about somebody else in a similar situation will potentially leave them feeling less alone in their experience (Nodelman and Reimer, 1996, in Reynolds, 2007). Exposure to informative, intelligent literature, where characters are portrayed sensitively and honestly, could provide a worthwhile educational resource. For

example, if adolescent readers are not provided with the opportunity to read about topics that are stigmatized or considered taboo, how will they ever be able to make informed decisions or formulate an opinion on subjects that have typically been considered controversial? Young adult author of *Junk* (1996), Melvin Burgess claims that:

> There was a period where writing for young people was changing. Modern themes […] such as sexuality, drugs culture, family break-down were being more honestly portrayed, and people were discovering that young people were far more sophisticated than the material previously written for them would suggest. (Burgess, 2009, p. 315)

Literature, therefore, as well as being read for pleasure, can serve as a valuable information source and potentially encourage readers to alter their perception of a person, sub-group or issue (Reynolds, 2007) although there is a plethora of series fiction on the market in which there is *less* scope for diversity, since this type of 'packaged' literature has been developed according to the dictates of marketing and public relations companies (Christian-Smith, 1990, in Younger, 2009) and may subscribe to and perpetuate unrealistic standards of beauty. On the other hand, there is currently a strict diversity agenda within publishing companies today encouraging a more diverse working environment which represents the multiplicity of the British population. This agenda signposts authors towards the inclusion of specific topics and issues in an attempt to improve inclusivity within the publishing industry. The following link provides more information on this matter: www.publisher.org.uk/about-publishing/diversity-inclusion/.

According to Nilson (1993), in the past, young adult fiction was regulated by educators – teachers and librarians had the budget to choose suitable books for this age group. During the past few decades, funding for public sector institutions has significantly declined, resulting in publishers trading directly with bookstores. Therefore, unless a book has the potential to be a strong seller, it stands little chance of being published. It is further suggested by Nodelman and Reimer (2003), that publishers are more likely to select books according to how well they will sell on the mass market as opposed to selecting stories that promote alternative messages and unconventional characters presenting 'only some aspects of reality and unifying the freakish unacceptability of others' (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003, p. 130). Nodelman also claims that 'Publishers have tended to focus more and more on achieving […] huge success and to show less interest in publishing innovative or quirky or otherwise unusual books that might be less likely to achieve wide success' (Nodelman, 2003, p. 122). Since 2003, however, more books representing diverse characters have been published due to the increased demand from readers (Aviles, 2019). For example, Malinda Lo, author of young adult novel *Ash* (2009), conducted extensive research into the number of LGBTQ-themed texts published between the years 2003-2016 (Lo, 2017). She found that there has been a steady increase in the number of books published with this theme. For example, in 2003, the number of books published with an LGBTQ theme was twenty. By 2016, this had increased to seventy-nine (Lo, 2017). This also extends to transgender characters. In 2016, there were six novels featuring transgender characters as well as novels written by transgender authors, *Spot the Difference by* Juno Dawson and *If I was Your Girl* by Meredith Russo (Lo, 2017).

Books that dominate the shelves, however, are more likely to contain themes that appeal to mainstream society and contain characters whose lifestyles mirror that of the dominant culture. Moreover, within mainstream culture there exists less dominant sub-cultures whose book choices may lean towards specific themes and topics, for example, fantasy or science fiction. Furthermore, Trites (2000), maintains that young adult fiction educates young adults about the expectations of the social establishments of which they are part – education, family, state, race and ethnicity, all play a part in shaping the behaviour of an adolescent:

> Since institutions such as school, religion, church […] and family are invested in socializing adolescents, the depiction of these institutions in adolescent literature are logically implicated in the establishment of narrative authority and in the ideological manipulation of the reader. (Trites, 2000, p.142)

These concepts and issues will be addressed in the textual analysis of nine young adult narratives which will appear in chapters five, six, and seven.

Pearson (2011), claims that the choice of publications available is limited and directed by the dominant consumer culture. Furthermore, according to Nodelman (2003), most people at schools, publishing houses, and libraries are not members of marginalised groups or minorities, which leads to limited choice and the underrepresentation or even elimination of books written by or about members of subcultures or other marginalised groups. Despite some of the negative aspects of young adult literature stated above, since the turn of the millennium, there does appear to be a move towards a more inclusive selection of literature which reiterates the importance of respecting the differences of others and embraces diverse lifestyles,

opinions, and physical characteristics (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). *Big Bones* by Laura Dockrill is a novel featuring a larger female protagonist does not achieve her 'happy-ever-after' by losing weight. *Leah on the Offbeat* (2018) by Becky Albertalli, depicts a heroine who is overweight and bisexual. The overarching themes in both of these books will be explored in more detail in the section below; The Larger Body in Young Adult Literature.

1.5: The Larger Body in Young Adult Literature

Adolescence is a time when appearance and a sense of belonging are of great importance (Parsons, 2016), and young adult literature is a potentially powerful influence when communicating dominant expectations (Peterson, 1996) and socio-cultural attitudes (Younger, 2009). Jacobs maintains that mainstream publications consistently promote messages relating to social conventions regarding physical presentation:

> In […] popular titles, initial descriptions of characters are wrought with detailed narrative of the girls' physical features, loaded with adjectives and sometimes filling a full page of text. (Jacobs, 2004, p.21)

Series fiction, that is, fiction which follows the same set of characters in similar settings, for example, *The Twilight Saga* (2008-2011) by Stephanie Myers and *Vampire Academy* (2007-2010) by Rachel Read, often reinforces social expectations by placing importance on the appearance of the female protagonist (Younger, 2009). Beauty in the form of slimness, therefore, appears to be the 'ticket to romantic success, power and prestige'

(Christian-Smith, 1990, in Younger, 2009, p.116). This notion is backed up by Karlin (2014) who suggests that rather than challenge social norms, young adult literature tends to reiterate the messages promoted by magazines and television by presenting thinness as normal and setting heavily gendered mandates for physical appearance, makeup, and dress.

In common with society at large, young adult novels reward overweight characters who diet successfully while characters whose body weight is perceived to be too heavy are considered abnormal or 'freaks' (Karlin, 2014). Furthermore, larger characters are often portrayed as the comedy relief, the overweight best friend, or the comedy sidekick. Rarely are they presented as the heroine in film or literature. Losing weight after dieting, then, becomes the modern-day 'happy-ever-after' – the female protagonist loses weight, gets the boy of her dreams and becomes socially successful. The theme of fatness linked to being socially unacceptable is reiterated by Shelton (2016) who claims that: 'at its core, ableism is sizeist and fatphobic. It sets the able body as the baseline of human worth, allowing […] concern for others' health to mask discrimination that might otherwise be more widely challenged' (Shelton, 2016, p.174). For example, *Life in the Fat Lane* (1998) by Cherie Bennett is centred around female protagonist, Lara, who is rejected by her friends after putting on one hundred pounds in weight due to a rare metabolic disorder. Her weight gain also affects the relationship she has with her parents – her mother cannot stop believing that being beautiful is the key to a successful life and her father stops calling her 'princess'. Although the story does support the notion that being thin is not necessarily the key to happiness, it remains a sad fact that the heroine in this story is perceived in a less positive way as a result of

gaining weight. *Artichoke's Heart* (2008) by Suzanne Supplee is a novel in which yet another female protagonist begins to gain confidence and popularity after beginning an exercise and diet regime which in turn, presents her with new social opportunities and a new level of confidence.

Once again, becoming thinner appears to be associated with social success and worth (Quick, 2008). In *Skinny* (2013), by Donna Cooner, the heroine takes drastic measures to lose weight but discovers that weight loss is not the answer to all her problems, which is arguably a more realistic outcome than other stories about weight loss suggest: 'A shrinking waistline does not automatically or actually solve a character's problems' (Shelton, 2016, p.185).

Books that offer an alternative to the thin, beautiful heroine and the handsome, athletic hero provide adolescents with a variety of perspectives other than the predictable – that conforming to a set of social norms is not necessarily a prerequisite for social success and acceptance. Books which challenge clichéd norms - for example, the boy-meets-girl theme or the stereotypical thin and beautiful heroine - are appearing with more frequency. *Dumplin'* (2015) and its sequel *Puddin'* (2018) by Julie Murphy are examples of this. Whereas both stories present characters whose bodies are larger than the typical heroine, *Dumplin'* gives a cynical overview of the American beauty pageant. Books such as *Leah on the Offbeat* (2018) by Becky Albertalli and *Big Bones* (2018) by Laura Dockrill feature strong female characters whose bodies are larger than the classic slim heroine. However, there is still a fixation on the body shape of both of these characters, although neither girl is portrayed in a negative way in terms of relationships with family members, personal achievement or friendships. In *Big Bones,* Bluebell,

despite criticism from her friends and peers, likes who she is and feels comfortable in her own skin because: '[…] there's something of me. I feel wholesome, there, alive' (*Big Bones,* 2018, p. 20). The book is written in the form of a food diary after Bluebell is advised by the school nurse to lose weight, even though Bluebell has no personal issues with her weight. For example, the nurse responds to Bluebell's weight by accusing her of being selfish for being overweight (*Big Bones*, 2018, p.7). Bluebell also recounts an incident that occurred once on a bus: '[…] a girl threw a chip at me and sniggered, Eat it, Fatty' (*Big Bones*, 2018, p. 78). Furthermore, even though Bluebell appears to accept her body, she focuses on her weight a great deal. During a conversation with her slimmer sister who points out that: 'You talk about fatness quite a lot for somebody who doesn't care about being fat'. To this Bluebell replies: 'No, I just like to point it out before somebody points it out to me' (Big Bones, 2018, p. 67). Although this is a novel that advocates selflove and body positivity, it also conveys the message that, as a society, we still have a long way to go regarding the acceptance of bodies that are larger than those which prevail in the media. Furthermore, although larger bodies are more prevalent in the media than they once were, it is often only certain *types* of larger bodies that are granted visibility. For example, women with hour-glass figures and lighter skin are currently more visible than darker skinned women and women whose bodies cannot be described as above (Yeboah, 2020). The author, however, does give her heroine a powerful voice. While defending her lifestyle and food choices, Bluebell declares that: 'The skinniness equals happiness myth is just a terrible sum created by the media and brands to make women believe that if they are thin, they are leading a perfect, carefree, successful life' (*Big Bones*, 2018, p. 63), echoing the observations made by feminist writers such as Naomi Wolf and Susan Bordo.

Leah on the Offbeat features a heroine who is overweight and bisexual. This story does not focus heavily on the weight of the protagonist but concentrates instead on issues of friendship and sexuality. In stark contrast to the above narratives, *Skinny* by Donna Cooner tells the story of Ever who chooses to undergo weight-loss surgery to escape the taunts of her peers, to achieve self-acceptance, and to become sexually desirable. Whereas Bluebell perceives her body in a positive way, Ever says the following:

> It just wasn't fair. God made people naturally skinny and some people naturally fat […] This one will be blonde with long, thin legs and great skin. This one will be short and fat with legs that rub together when she walks. I just knew I wasn't one of the lucky ones. (*Skinny*, p. 91)

Arguably, both characters are victims of a society where thin is accepted and revered and fat is denigrated and ostracised. Furthermore, critics of young adult literature focusing on plus-size teenagers have accused authors and publishers of promoting obesity and that 'one of the main objections to featuring plus size heroes in teen books is that these heroes may be validating obesity as an acceptable lifestyle choice' (Morrissette, 2009, in Quick, 2008. n.p.). That said, there is significant difference between wearing a size sixteen and being morbidly obese. It is, however, '[…] rare for the young adult novel to portray fat, or even a little extra weight as beautiful – or even as an alternative standard of beauty' (Doll, 2012).

Body image and weight are at the centre of all three stories, yet one protagonist struggles with low self-esteem because of her weight whereas the other is a proponent of self-acceptance and enjoys having a bigger body despite the criticism of others. In

retrospect, this may be due to the era in which the books were published. *Skinny* was published in 2013, whereas *Big Bones* was published more recently in 2018. Over the past five years, there has been an emergence of books whose characters are more diverse regarding disability, sexuality and body size and weight. Acceptance of larger bodies in todays' society is a relatively new concept and although it may be considered a positive move to publish books that feature larger heroines, it is also relevant to ask why the weight of any hero or heroine should be the topic of a novel at all. On the other hand, presenting heroines whose appearance is different from the norm is a step towards accepting and embracing individual difference.

Books featuring male protagonists whose bodies are larger than the norm are few and far between and there appears to be little research on the subject. However, making the assumption that boys and men do not feel insecure about their bodies would be wrong. Research by Schnackenburg (2016) has suggested that this is not the case. *Fat Boy Swim* by Catherine Forde, published in 2015, is a good example of a story of a positive portrayal of an overweight boy. *Fat Kid Rules the World* (2003) by K. L. Going also features an overweight male protagonist.

The remainder of this chapter considers marginalised sub-cultures which, due to either choice or circumstance, do not fit into society's definition of 'normal'. These may be individuals or whole communities whose 'cultural practices are not represented or supported by the state and who have limited representation at the level of parliament and other social institutions' (Allen, 2008, p.31). Firstly, racial diversity in young adult literature is explored alongside topics such as representation and portrayal of non-white characters. It continues by addressing the portrayal of disabled protagonists in young

adult fiction and examines how they have evolved from being pitied or vilified to being portrayed in more positive ways where disability is not the only factor that defines them. This section also focuses on 'sick lit', a term used by critics to describe fiction containing themes of disability, illness, and death. An overarching theme in this type of literature is the coming to terms with an illness or disability or struggling to live a fulfilling life despite of it. It moves on to discuss issues of sexuality in terms of books representing characters from the LGBTQ community and gives a brief, historical overview of books featuring gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters. The main theme within these texts is the protagonist coming to terms with his or her sexuality or struggling to be accepted by friends, family, and their communities. Its final focus is on tattooed protagonists and their representation in 'real life' narratives and the fantasy and tattoo magic genres. Investigations into tattooed protagonists is limited presenting a gap in current research and the purpose of this study is to attempt to fill this gap in a meaningful way.

1.6: Race and Young Adult Literature

The previous section explored body diversity relating to weight and size and publications that either reinforce social and cultural ideals or challenge them. This section considers racial diversity in publishing and examines how widely people of colour are represented in young adult literature. Young adult literature has historically not been renowned for its inclusivity or incorporation of diverse characters. Until recently it was heavily focused on white middle class readers and protagonists (Sands

O'Connor, 2022). When non-white characters did appear in books, for example, *The Trouble with Donovan Croft* (1977) by Bernard Ashley and *Amazing Grace* (1991) by Mary Hoffman, they were portrayed by white authors who failed to accurately depict racial and cultural differences (Sands O'Connor). In her book *Inclusive Young Adult Fiction: Authors of Colour in the United Kingdom* (2019), Melanie Ramdarshan Bold claims that: '[…] the majority of young adult books, particularly best-sellers, feature white, able-bodied, cisgender, and heterosexual protagonists' (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019, p.7).

Until relatively recently major publishing houses in Britain and America were white dominated, both in terms of authors and those working within publishing itself (Cart, 2010), with a significant deficit of black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) staff. Due to the increase in immigration, however, there is a growing demand for greater diversity in children's and young adult literature. In the United States, for example, ethnic minority groups have increased rapidly since the 1980s (Cart, 2010). In the United Kingdom, government figures reveal that thirteen per cent of the population is comprised of Black, Asian, Mixed race, or other ethnic groups (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). This demand, however, has not always received a positive reaction. Malorie Blackman, author of *Noughts and Crosses* (2001) and *Check Mate* (2005) and the first black children's laureate, experienced harassment and racist abuse when she expressed concern regarding the lack of diversity in books written for young adults (Flood, 2014).

The realm of publishing is largely populated by individuals who are not members of marginalised groups (Cart, 2010, Ramdarshan Bold, 2019) and are therefore less likely to ensure that a more diverse range of publications are available. According to Cart

(2010), publishers are more concerned with the requirements and desires and demands of the majority than those of minority groups because their interest lies predominantly in money-making endeavours. Cart maintains that:

> […] 'there still aren't enough editors of colour, there still aren't enough writers of colour […] the sale of multicultural books simply isn't generating enough dollars to entice publishers to significantly expand their offerings.' (Cart, 2010, p.126)

Libraries also have been criticised for limiting the availability of books written by and featuring people of colour but are receiving greater demand for books featuring protagonists from varied backgrounds and cultures (Rawson, 2011). According to Rawson: 'Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of giving young adults access to titles in which they can see a reflection of themselves' (Rawson, 2011, n.p.) and Blackman maintains that there is '[…] a very significant message that goes out when you cannot see yourself at all in the books you are reading' (Blackman, 2014, in Flood, 2014, n.p.). Furthermore, reading about individuals who are different from oneself gives an important and valid insight into the lives of others and potentially encourages empathy and an alternative world view:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author (Sims Bishop, 1990, in Ramdarshan Bold, 2019, p.ix).

Alongside issues of marginalisation, there is also the matter of tokenism. Tokenism occurs as a moneymaking endeavour and is considered to be a negative aspect of the publishing, television, and film industries (Medina, 2019, in Podoshen, Ekpo and Abiru, 2021). When the representation of minority groups becomes commodified, this contrasts significantly to meaningful inclusion (Mashburn and Papalia, 2019, in Podoshen, Ekpo and Abiru, 2021). Meaningful inclusion relates to the attempt to 'reflect the demographic shift and demand for more visibility of underrepresented communities' (Sims, 2023, n.p.) and represent readers in sensitive and realistic ways. Often black or other non-white characters are misrepresented, relegated to the periphery of the story, or killed off (Garvey, 2020). A further criticism of literature featuring non-white protagonists is the notion that they must experience or fight against a social injustice based on their skin colour (Ockler, 2012). The idea that this is the only issue that a non-white character will encounter is inaccurate and clichéd:

> Can a black kid slay dragons without turning his quest into an anti-racism manifesto? […] Can we see his unique and special worldview as a young black dragon slayer, or does he have to take a stand against bigotry too? (Ockler, 2012, n.p.)

Lack of diverse representation in the media is slowly changing with an increased availability of books written by non-white authors tackling a wide range of topics and issues (Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). Black Lives Matter which began in 2013 and was founded by Alicia Garza aims to promote anti-racism and challenge discrimination. The We Need More Diverse Books campaign was launched in 2014 to advocate for greater availability of books featuring diverse characters from a range of backgrounds.

Examples of this include *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas which features African American Starr whose life is shattered when her friend Khalil is shot and killed by the police. Sixteen-year-old Starr is caught between the middle-class lifestyle of her school mates and the poverty-stricken neighbourhood where she lives and feels conflicted between loyalty towards Khalil and the safety of her family. *A Song Below Water* (2020) by Bethany C. Morrow tells a very different story – a modern fantasy involving Tavia, a black siren who must keep her magical abilities hidden. *You Think you Know Me* (2023) by Ayaan Mohamud presents Hanan, a Muslim teenager who experiences racism and bullying at her grammar school. After a Muslim terrorist shoots a member of staff at her school, the bullying increases, and Hanan is faced with conflict between family traditions, friendships, and what she believes is right.

It is evident that there currently is a growing number of books available on the market featuring non-white characters. However, it is also apparent that there is a growing number of *fantasy* publications portraying a diverse range of protagonists. This is possibly due to greater demand, greater acknowledgement of the fact that we do not live in a homogenous society, and the success of campaigns such as We Need More Diverse Books. In her book *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games,* Ebony Elizabeth Thomas maintains that young adult fantasy novels have historically featured a marked lack of non-white characters (Thomas, 2019). Coining the phrase 'Black fantastic', she discusses the importance of inclusion within this genre and the difficulties encouraging young readers to identify with the 'Dark Other' (Thomas, 2019). Examples of this are *The Belles Trilogy* (2018-2023) by Dhonielle Clayton, *The Library of Broken Worlds* (2024), and *Children on Blood*

and Bone (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi which will be discussed further in chapter six. These are all the first books in their series and feature black female protagonists.

The following section explores young adult literature and social class – the ways in which working class characters are often under-represented in literature and how this may impact upon the lives of working-class young adults themselves.

1.7: Class and Young Adult Literature

Although social class cannot be considered a form of *physical* diversity, this thesis explores issues of marginalisation and social prejudice. Working class characters, for example, have historically often been overlooked or portrayed in clichéd, stereotypical ways (Carthew, 2020). One of the novels chosen for analysis, *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi (2018) places significant importance on the class of the protagonists with issues of prejudice and discrimination at its core. This narrative will, however, be explored in more detail in chapter six. Furthermore, tattooing has traditionally been linked with the working classes in a way that brings along with it stigma and negative social attitude. For these reasons, I considered that it is important to include a section relating to social class in this study. Natasha Carthew, author of *Only the Ocean* (2019), maintains that:

> 'The debate about diversity in young adult fiction is not new, but when we refer to diversity in literature, we tend to talk about gender,

> sexuality, race and disabilities […] where are the champions for the working-class kid?' (Carthew, 2020, n.p.)

The literary world has been criticised for a deficit of working-class authors and publishers (Cantrell, 2020), and there has been a demand for greater representation of working-class protagonists (Carthew, 2020; Ainsworth, 2023) as well as protagonists whose stories are relatable and generate a feeling of hope as opposed to a bleak world of economic struggle and few opportunities (Carthew, 2020).

In common with other forms of marginalisation, this lack of visibility potentially results in working-class children and young adults feeling unheard with their stories untold. Inclusivity arguably contributes to feelings of empowerment instead of isolation, with children and young people feeling 'respected and validated […] when they see themselves and their wider communities reflected in books' (Carthew, 2020, n.p.). Jacqueline Wilson, author of over one hundred novels featuring working-class characters including *The Illustrated Mum* (1999) which is explored further in chapter two, and the *Tracy Beaker* series (1991-2019) claims that she felt uncomfortable '[…] with a soft, pastel world without any serious quarrels or money worries.' (Wilson, 2020, n.p.). Wilson's stories typically feature children from underprivileged backgrounds who are experiencing an unpleasant life event like parental illness and divorce, mental illness or the absence of a parent. Failing to represent the working-classes within literature may furthermore create a marked misunderstanding of this demographic, resulting in a vicious cycle of reinforced stereotypes and further discrimination. Eve Ainsworth, author of *Know my Place* (2021) and *Magpie* (2021) stresses that: 'The imposter syndrome looms deep inside working-class people. It's a

nagging voice that never shuts up, no matter how successful you become.' (Ainsworth, 2023, n.p.). Each of the above books feature working -class protagonists; *Know my Place* features Amy, a child in the foster care system who feels betrayed when she is sent to a new foster family, while the second, *Magpie* features Alice, a victim of abuse at the hands of her mother's boyfriend.

Marginalisation or misrepresentation in any form may in turn result in lack of self-esteem, isolation and feelings of disempowerment. Meaningful representation potentially creates greater visibility. This in turn may contribute to self-belief, more opportunities for marginalised groups and recognition that economic disadvantage should not create barriers to education, employment and overall social acceptance.

The following section explores disability in young adult literature and the ways in which protagonists are portrayed within this genre. Although this topic represents an important aspect of body diversity, none of the nine books chosen for analysis feature characters with a disability. I maintain, however, that individuals with disabilities face discrimination, prejudice, and marginalisation due to their physical differences. I therefore did not want to eliminate it from my research.

1.8: Disability and Young Adult Literature

Quick (2008) observes that in young adult literature, the only type of body presented as beautiful is the 'ideal body' and that characters who do not fit into that social stereotype are either reviled or ignored altogether. Over the past five years, however,

this stereotype has begun to change, with authors portraying more diverse characters in positive ways. *Rosie Loves Jack* (2018) by Mel Darbon and *How we Roll* (2019) by Natasha Friend, are two examples of books written for young adults which depict disabled characters in a positive way. Arguably, when stories *do* portray disabled characters and do so in a stereotypical manner, this in turn, affects the way in which readers perceive them. Quick claims that this only serves to reinforce current social trends (Quick, 2008, in Parsons, 2016). Arguably some authors may portray unconventional and diverse characters in a negative way quite deliberately as a social comment in order to be realistic - although social attitude to difference is slowly changing, prejudice still remains, and inaccurate assumptions are often made relating to individuals or sub-cultures whose appearance diverts from the standard. This brings us on to the issue of social realism versus fantasy representations. Arguably, unconventional protagonists inhabiting a diverse magical universe occupied by werewolves, vampires, and other supernatural beings where weirdness is commonplace, will be portrayed more positively than characters who have a more mundane existence in real world scenarios. They may also enjoy more positive experiences simply because their unusual appearance and demeanour is expected. Eccentricity or difference in realistic representations of the world are often met with disapproval or uncertainty, a notion that is backed up by Beth Younger who maintains that young adult literature regularly succeeds in reinforcing 'the social and sexual standards of the dominant culture' (Younger, 2009, p.xi). Nodelman (2003) states that although it is important for educators to select books about minority groups, tolerance and understanding will not occur if the portrayal of such characters and their experiences is untruthful and unrealistic. Negative portrayals of minority group

characters, or more to the point, negative experiences undergone *by* them, may be seen as being more realistic than pessimistic. For example, in *Big Bones* by Laura Dockrill, the female protagonist, Bluebell, is portrayed as being a happy, bright young woman who is comfortable in her larger body, but who, at the same time, still experiences negative reactions from others regarding her weight and body size.

A selection of books dealing with the subject of disability were published in the 1980s. *Sweet Frannie* by Susan Sallis, and *The Bus People* by Rachel Anderson, were published in 1981 and 1989 respectively. Earlier texts with a disability theme which would be classified as children's stories as opposed to young adult novels include *What Katy Did* by Susan Coolidge, published in 1872, *Pollyanna*, by Eleanor H. Porter (1913), and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* published in 1911. During the 1980s, there was also an emergence of teen 'sick-lit', a genre which combined illness and disability with a romantic theme. 'Sick lit' is a relatively new phrase used to define a genre of realistic fiction which deals with themes of illness, disability and death. It is a 'genre of adolescent fiction that fused illness and romance narrative to reinforce the interdependent norms of ablebodiedness and heteronormativity' (Elman, 2012, p. 175). The etymology of the term 'sick lit' is difficult to find. However, it may have its origins in the 1950s when medical treatment became more readily available to the public, promoting an 'era of biomedical optimism' (Hall-Clifford, 2015, p.357) and the introduction of autopathologies outlining patients' treatment, coping strategies and recovery (Hall-Clifford, 2015). Teen sick lit 'became another means by which teen life could be portrayed with sicknesses such as cancer, self-harm, and emotional illnesses as the vehicles to examine the 'coming-of-age' theme apparent in most young adult

literature' (Ostenson, 2016, n.p.). Such books have typically dealt with themes of illness and disability in ways in which marginalise disabled protagonists and glorify illness (Elman, 2012).

Critics of sick lit have maintained that young adult problem novels of the 1970s presented a realistic overview of racism, sexism, and homophobia due to the second-wave feminism of the late 1960s that encompassed sexual liberation and movements for race and disability rights. Literature published a decade later, however, produced a shift into traditional tropes of conformist gendered attitudes (Elman, 2012). Teen sick lit focuses on a hero or heroine who is defined by their illness – their life restricted by discomfort, pain, and disability. In common with Bordo, Elman argues that this type of literature 'compels readers to examine their own bodies as subject to an endless body project […] not only for signs of illness but also for other markers of undesirability or abnormality that might be improved' (Elman, 2012, p. 178-179). This typically reinforces the traditional values of the body being a work in progress or a problem to be corrected. Moreover, earlier texts with a disability/illness theme at their core frequently desexualise characters and present them in stereotypical ways. Literary classics such as *Richard III* and *Moby Dick* (1851) demonise disabled protagonists so that they become somebody to fear and avoid (Curwood, 2003). For example, Richard III was portrayed as a murdering hunchback and *Moby Dick's* Captain Ahab obsessively hunts for the whale that destroyed one of his legs. In contrast, in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Tiny Tim is presented as a helpless invalid, a character to be pitied (Curwood, 2012). *What Katy Did* (1872) by Susan Coolidge implies that if you are good, sweet-natured and well-behaved illness and pain can be overcome. Similarly,

Pollyanna (1913) by Eleonor Porter portrays disability as something to be born with a smile on your face and a positive frame of mind. The above characters reinforce the traditional image of the disabled - they are 'poster children for the fantasy of impaired people as naturally angelic, a dehumanizing dream that is the flip side of the no less dehumanizing nightmare of impaired people as demonic' (Michaels and McTiernan, 2018, p.3).

Sick lit from the 1980s, therefore, does little to dispel the image of the helpless invalid and much to reinforce conformist attitudes to disability, sexuality, and gender. Moreover, along with romanticising sickness, such literature consistently links heterosexuality with health. In Lurlene McDaniel's *Dawn Rochelle* series (1985-1993), a white, teenaged girl is diagnosed with leukaemia. Predictably, she is concerned with her appearance, which changes during chemotherapy. Furthermore, as is characteristic of this genre, the male protagonist is healthy and non-disabled (Elman, 2012). It would appear, then, that teen sick lit meets a similar criterion to traditional boy-meets-girl stories – the female protagonist is not only aiming for a cure and subsequent wellness, her happy-ever-after also includes meeting the boy of her dreams. However, despite heavy criticism, this genre at the very least deals with issues that are being faced by children and teenagers. For many, illness is an unpleasant reality. In adolescence, being concerned with physical appearance is normal behaviour. Surely, worrying about the outward effects of chemotherapy, or the effects that any illness has on physical appearance, is a normal reaction to the physical changes brought on by illness. At the very least, it is a constant reminder that the person is no longer in good health.

Literature with a disability theme at its core may be perceived to be glorifying illness and presenting characters in a manner which may be considered maudlin and over-sentimental. However, like many genres that deal with difficult or sensitive issues, sick lit may enable readers to understand the implications and experience of illness and disability. The romance aspect of sick-lit has been heavily criticised in that it is perceived to be shallow and insubstantial in the context of to having a disease such as cancer (Elman, 2012). Yet perhaps, for any reader who is experiencing a disease or has a disability, seemingly trivial concerns like romantic attachments and physical appearance may be a way of focusing on something unrelated to the disease or disability. That there can be other things in the lives of disabled protagonists may provide a welcome relief for those who experience illness and disability on a day-to-day basis. Arguably, the contrast between characters portrayed as thin and those who are (often negatively) depicted with larger bodies is paralleled by a similar disparity between characters with bodies that are physically able and those who are labelled 'disabled' due to being confined to a wheelchair, missing a limb or having an illness or condition which impedes mobility. Acceptance of others regardless of their differences is generally perceived to be a worthy endeavour, and books may be selected by teachers purely on the basis that they feature characters from minority groups (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). When these characters are portrayed unrealistically, however, any acceptance or open-mindedness may be superficial or short-lived. The following section addresses sexuality in young adult literature. For the purpose of this dissertation, sexuality relates to sexual diversity as opposed to heteronormativity.

1.9: Sexual Diversity and Young Adult Literature

Up until recently, publications with LGBTQ protagonists have been limited. Over the past five years, however, this has begun to change, arguably as a result of the repeal of section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 which prohibited the promotion of homosexuality by schools and local councils. There is, currently available on the market, a growing selection of books featuring gay, lesbian and bi-sexual protagonists. In *Leah on the Offbeat*, Leah herself is bi-sexual and is by no means demeaned for her sexual preferences. In fact, Leah's sexuality is not the main focus of the story – Leah is a multi-faceted character who is faced with a variety of challenges in this coming-of-age novel. Other examples include *The Difference Between You and Me* (2012) by Madeleine George which tells the story of two female protagonists, Jesse who is a lesbian and Emily who is bisexual and the complicated relationship between them. *Almost Perfect* (2009) by Brian Katcher portrays two bisexual girls, Sophie and Mina and *Far from You* (2014) by Tess Sharpe features transsexual teen Sage who keeps her identity secret and heterosexual Logan. Pioneering narratives featuring gay male protagonists include *A Boy's Own Story* (1982) by Edmund White in which the narrator who remains nameless withdraws into his own imagination in an era where homosexuality is vilified. *Two Boys Kissing* (2015) by David Levithan features two male teens' attempts to kiss for thirty-two hours in order to break the Guiness world record.

Young adult novels that focus on transgender issues have emerged even more recently. *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters was published in 2004 and is one of the earliest examples of a young adult novel with a transgender theme. It is told from the perspective of sixteen-year-old Regan who keeps the secret of her older sister's identity.

By day, Luna is an average senior boy named Liam. At night, Luna becomes her true self, Lia Marie. As the story progresses, she changes her name to Luna, meaning moon because she can only be seen at night. Since then, particularly within the past seven or eight years, novels addressing this theme have grown in number and popularity. Kristin Elizabeth Clark's *Freak Boy* was published in 2013 and features Brendan Chase who appears on the surface to be a typical adolescent boy but who constantly fantasises about being a girl. *The Art of Being Normal* by Lisa Williamson, published in 2016 and depicts David Piper who fantasises about being a girl, and transsexual protagonist Leo who helps David in his quest for self-acceptance. *My Brother's Name is Jessica* by John Boyne was published in 2019 and is narrated by Sam, Jessica's younger brother who has to come to terms with his brother transitioning from male to female and the ensuing family dynamics and complications.

Critics' response to LGBTQ-themed books, although mostly positive, are varied in perspective. On the one hand, such narratives have been welcomed as they offer: 'more realistic and positive representations of LGBTQ teens than in past decades' (Lewis, 2015, p.53). On the other hand, some LGBTQ publications have received negative responses due to their reductionist representations and one-sidedness of the protagonists: '[…] that the experiences of being queer are only about these personal conflicts, not about larger issues or more complex experiences with the world' (Banks, 2009, p.35). This notion is further explored by Epstein (2013) in her book *Are the Kids alright?* who maintains that not only is sexuality the only identifying factor of the characters in these books but it is also the only way in which they are marginalised:

> […] one cannot be LGBTQ and another sort of minority […] that to have a character who is both queer and something else is too much for YA (sic) and children's literature to handle at this time. (Epstein, 2013, p.189)

For example, at the time this book was published, there were few stories which covered themes of body image within the queer community. Eating disorders amongst this demographic are common, especially concerning men (Parker, 2020). Furthermore, it has been recognised that people from the queer community are doubly under pressure to adhere to certain physical standards. For example: 'lesbians are socialised to conform to the same societal standards as heterosexual women […] plus must also comply with the standards within the lesbian community' (Grogan, 1999, in Epstein, 2013, p.187). Since this book was published there have been narratives which address LGBTQ themes and other marginalised topics. The aforementioned *Leah on the Offbeat* by Becky Albertalli (2018) features a female protagonist who is both bisexual and overweight. Publications portraying male protagonists include *Felix Ever After* by Kacen Callender (2020) tells the story of Felix who is black, transgender, and queer and *Here the Whole Time* (2021), features Felipe who is gay and overweight. Therefore, books presenting LGBTQ characters have developed significantly over the past two decades. Up until the late 1990s, queer characters played minor parts in stories or were often killed off before the story concluded (Banks, 2009). Contemporary narratives allow LGBTQ characters to have a more meaningful existence and:

> Because these characters are often the protagonist of the stories, readers are challenged to understand them as fuller human beings with thoughts, desires and interests that may mirror their own. (Banks, 2009, p.35)

Regarding transgender protagonists, since 2015, over one hundred young adult novels featuring transgender characters have appeared in Britain and the United States (Corbett, 2020). In 2014, *Time* magazine stated that there had been a 'transgender tipping point', referring to the increased presence of transgender celebrities in mainstream culture. Such changes led to the 'gradual increase in the spectrum of transgender identities being represented in young adult literature published by mainstream publishers' (Corbett, 2020, p.9). One significant criticism, of these narratives, however, is the protagonists' need to justify their choice to transition: '

> These rigorous efforts to prove the validity of characters' desired genders indicate that it is not enough to simply *want* to transition. Rather, these books must prove that changing genders is the *only* thing that will keep these characters alive' (Orsi, 2019, n.p.).

Orsi also claims that such clichés also extend to the characters being 'bad at performing their birth genders' (Orsi, 2019, n.p.). Perhaps due to the newness of this genre, literature provides a means to educate as well as to entertain. More importantly, novels featuring transgender protagonists 'have made - and will continue to make – young trans people feel less lonely; (Orsi, 2019, n.p.). Orsi continues this argument by stating that in the future:

> 'I'll be looking for books that take for granted knowledge of the basic vocabulary of gender difference. Books where the cultural backdrop is not 'neutral' (middle class white) […] books where the kid is transgender, but the main source of conflict lies elsewhere. Books where the kid decides not to transition after all' (Orsi, 2019, n.p.).

1.10: Gothic Fiction and Dark Romance

A section focusing on the gothic in literature has been included in this chapter due to its link to the fantasy and tattoo magic genres. The overall theme is far too vast to do it justice, however, it seemed important to outline some key issues. Arguably the gothic focuses on and relies upon: 'uncanny disturbances, dismembered remains and improper forms, deferrals and differences' (Wolfreys and Robbins, 2000, p. xv) which elicit in the reader feelings of horror, uncertainty and emotional disturbance. According to Sedgwick (1986), the purpose of the gothic was to 'open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions […] through its acknowledgement of the non-rational' (Sedgwick, 1986, p.xvii). The gothic in its literary form began its life in 1764 with the publication of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole and concluded with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818. It re-emerged in the Victorian era, although arguably, in a different form, the gothic romance, although *The Romance of the Forest* by Ann Radcliffe was published in 1791. This nineteenth century genre potentially questioned the existing norms and ideologies of a repressed patriarchal society and posed a threat to 'paternal authority, familial and social order' (Botting, 2008, p.11). The standard gothic romance consisted of a woman on the brink of adulthood, gaining independence for the first time and becoming infatuated by a dark, handsome but troubled man (Pagan, 2018). An example of such a heroine is Catherine Morland in Jane Austen's satire *Northanger Abbey* (1817). In the gothic romance of the Victorian era, the female lead dominated, most conspicuously after the publication of Charlotte Bronté's *Jane Eyre* in 1847 in which Bertha Rochester is

portrayed not as a vulnerable, mentally ill woman but as a grotesque monster. Subsequent publications which may be considered gothic but which do not centre around the theme of the grotesque feminine include *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, published in 1859 and Anya Seton's *Dragonwyk* (1944). A gothic novel would often combine terror and romance with the fear of and attraction to the forbidden together with the concept of the anti-hero. Book jackets would typically feature the image of a young woman making a frantic escape from a castle that loomed forebodingly in the background (Pagan, 2018). Arguably, the gothic romance also challenged the predominant existing belief in convention, the ordinary and the foremost themes of Enlightenment thinking:

> The sublime - its passions arousing a disturbing combination of dangers, excitements, thrills and imaginative freedoms – enabled links to be made, through gothic forms, to a range of excesses threatening propriety and normalcy. (Botting, 2008, p.13)

The modern-day equivalent to a traditional gothic novel may be considered the contemporary dark romance, similar to the above with its emphasis on the uncanny with controversial themes and characters with dubious pasts and moral countenance who dwell on the fringes of society. Examples of dark romance novels include *The Wicked King* by Holly Black (2019), *The House of Earth and Blood* by Sarah J. Maas (2020) and *Lord of Shadows* by Cassandra Clare (2017). Each of these stories contains a dubious male character who is both repellent and fascinating to the female protagonist. Dark romance narratives are typically set in alternate universes populated with

otherworldly creatures and usually feature a heroine in danger with the dark, brooding male protagonist aiding her in a quest to eliminate any threat.

One example of a critical approach to the uncanny in children's literature is David Rudd's critique of *Coraline* (2013) by Neil Gaiman. Rudd refers to Freud's perceptions of the uncanny and makes the observation that frequently, it is not the ogres, monsters and dragons that are the most fearsome. Often, what generates fear in us are things which are familiar (Rudd, 2008). Feeling dissatisfied with the relationship between herself and her parents, Coraline discovers a new and 'better' set of parents who look remarkably similar to her 'real' parents and inhabit a realm which looks he same as her own: 'It was so familiar – that was what made it truly strange. Everything was exactly the same as she remembered…' (*Coraline*, 2002, p.84). Her new, 'perfect' parents, however, although appear more attentive and loving, are in actual fact, wanting to trap and possess her. For Rudd, then, the uncanny 'is not concerned with such things as bug-eyed monsters or little green men but things far closer to home, which as a consequence, are the more disturbing' (Rudd, 2008, p.4).

The newly-emerged tattoo magic genre which features heavily in this study is an offshoot of the dark romance, consisting of elements present in the classic dark romance – characters who dwell on the edge of society, mythical beings and the threat of danger at every twist and turn of the story. What separates the protagonists in this genre from other contemporary dark romance narratives is the fact that they are tattooed. The tattoos are usually magical in some way. That is, either the wearer possesses magical abilities or the act of tattooing another person's skin yields an element of power. In the *Shadowhunter Chronicles* by Casandra Clare (2016-2019), the

half human-half angel shadowhunters have runes burned into their skin as a talisman in their fight against demons. In *Angel's Ink* by Jocelyn Drake (2012), male protagonist Gage, is able to use tattoos to make wishes come true. The female protagonist Isa in *Nightmare Ink* by Marcella Burnard (2014) is able to ink tattoos which have the power to either improve a person's life or end it. In each story tattoos are a defining aspect of the characters' identities and in common with real world their magical properties are indicative that tattoos are not mere decorations.

The previous sections of this chapter introduced young adult literature and examined its many definitions. Issues of body diversity in terms of weight and disability have been examined as well as the portrayal of protagonists whose bodies could be considered diverse or deviant in some way. The final section of this chapter explores tattooed protagonists and their portrayal in both fantasy narratives and 'real life' scenarios. The textual analysis of nine texts featuring tattooed characters in chapters five, six, and seven will endeavour to ascertain whether tattooed protagonists reinforce existing stereotypes or question them. It will also explore whether tattooed characters are more likely to experience discrimination in 'real world' scenarios or in the magical realms where otherness may be more readily accepted. This will be undertaken by close examination of the tattooed protagonist's relationships with others, physical descriptions, and dialogue.

1.11: Young Adult Literature and Tattooing

Young adult literature dealing with themes of body deviance in terms of tattooing appears to be relatively uncommon until recently with the newly emerged tattoo magic genre. Arguably this genre may have developed as a result of the growing popularity of tattooing. However, these stories are in the style of fantasy as opposed to 'real world' scenarios such as Jacqueline Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* which wasn't published until 1999, and the lesser-known *Green Angel* by Alice Hoffman in 2003 which will be discussed further in chapter six. In both stories, the tattoos of the female protagonists are linked to mental illness and social problems, which backs up observations made by Callendo et al (2005). Certainly, in Jacqueline Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum,* Marigold's tattoos are almost a representation of her precarious mental state and mark her out as different (Pearson, 2011). Indeed, her most recent tattoo marks the onset of a bipolar episode. In *Green Angel* by Alice Hoffman, the protagonist, Green, begins to tattoo her skin as a means by which she copes with the loss of her family (Hoffman, 2003).

> That was when I took a pin and some black ink. I began to mark my arm. I outlined a raven, and then a bat […]That's who I was without my mother, my father and my moonlit sister. Blood and ink. Darkness where before there had been patience, black where there had once been green. (Hoffman, 2003, p. 30)

In both stories, the act of tattooing can be linked to some kind of mental anguish – Marigold gets a tattoo just before a manic episode and Green tattoos herself as a way of coping with grief.

The theme of getting tattooed as a way of reclaiming the body after a trauma is an important one and is addressed in *Ink Exchange* by Melissa Marr (2008) when the female protagonist, Leslie gets a tattoo following the trauma of being raped by her brother's friends. Consequently, the chosen tattoo brings about life changes that she didn't anticipate, drawing her into a world of magic and faery. This story has the theme of choosing to be tattooed after a trauma as a method of symbolically reclaiming the body but, at the same time, backs up the observations made by Beeler (2006), that tattooed protagonists reside in the realms of fantasy. This narrative along with *Green Angel* will be examined in more detail in chapters six and seven. *Ink in the Blood* (2020) by Kim Smejkal is a further example of this genre where tattooing is linked to magic and conspiracy. In *Clipped Wings* (2014) by Helena Hunting, Hayden Stryker, a male tattoo artist with a difficult past, hides behind his tattoos as a form of protection. In these stories, the tattoos of the protagonists also symbolise emotional pain and unrest.

In conclusion to the above, it is apparent that young adult literature has changed and developed significantly since the early 1950s with themes of sexuality and mental health becoming far more commonplace in contemporary society than they were seven decades ago. Furthermore, tattooed protagonists are a relatively new phenomenon, only appearing in the last decade, possibly as a result of tattooing moving from working class underground culture into the mainstream (Pitts-Taylor, 2007) having been popularised through greater visibility in the media. However, the fact that books with a tattoo theme remain predominantly in the realms of magic and fantasy may indicate that there is still in existence an element of stigma and myth associated with the practice. Of the nine books chosen for analysis, only three relate to real world

scenarios. The remaining six are narratives which are firmly fixed in alternative universes. They contain magic, incantations, hexes and spells and the tattoos worn by the protagonists possess their own power. Protagonists often appear clichéd and predictable with the ability to fight evil, control magic and yet still look gorgeous while doing so. In this, their bodies are unobtainable, a beautiful illusion which will never exist in our mundane world. Arguably, however, books containing stories with protagonists who are sexually diverse, overweight, diseased, or deformed have helped to educate and inform readers by creating protagonists who can be respected, related to, and understood. Their physical 'abnormality', therefore, becomes less taboo and more socially acceptable, less stigmatized, and more tolerable. In short, if there were more tattooed protagonists living fulfilling lives featured in 'real' world' narratives, this may go some way to lifting the remaining negative attitudes associated with tattooing and could potentially help to reduce prejudice thus resulting in the decrease of social discrimination.

The following chapter examines theories of the body and looks at body deviance and its meaning in Western culture. It focuses on the social implications of appearing different and the prejudices and negative attitudes that are still apparent in contemporary culture.

Chapter 2

Deviance and the Body

2.1: Introduction

The function of this chapter is to explore the notion of deviance and its meaning in Western culture. It will begin by examining the cultural and sociological implications of deviance outlined in secondary research. This is a feminist study which explores and highlights feminist research and theories of authors such as Naomi Wolf, Susie Orbach and Susan Bordo. It takes an intersectional approach and also explores theories put forward by Patricia Hill Collins and Shirley-Anne Tate. The impact of social media on adolescents in terms of body image and societal pressure will also be examined. The chapter will identify the theories which will aid me in my analysis and guide my research. Although these theories focus largely on adult women, they are also applicable to adolescent females and the social construction of femininities. Feminist theories are relevant to this study as they maintain that in television, film, and magazines, traditionally only one type of body is prevalent: thin and white. This is, however, slowly changing with a more diverse range of bodies being featured within the media. The impact of the Body Positivity movement and the increasing popularity of plus-size models such as Ashley Graham and Precious Lee have created shifts in the advertising and fashion industries. This chapter also explores the fact that while mental illness and low self-esteem relating to body image is well documented in females, insecurities relating to body image also affect men.

The second part of this chapter examines the history of tattooing. The cultural significance of tattooing, the changing perceptions of tattooing within the Western world, and the stigma surrounding the practice will be discussed. The significance of tattooing for women including a brief history of woman and tattooing will also be outlined in this section. Also examined is a brief history of the women in the circus sideshows and an exploration of the importance and meaning of tattoos within marginalised groups such as the LGBTQ community. To guide me in my analysis, I shall be focussing on theories relating to the presentation of females in media and literature put forward by authors such as Orbach (2009), Younger (2009), and Peterson (1996). Critical approaches regarding the portrayal of tattooed protagonists are those of Beeler (2005) and Osterud (2009). The work of Hill-Collins (1990) and Tate (2007) will help me to gain insight into issues relating to race, prejudice, and marginalisation. Research on women and tattooing conducted by De Mello (2000) and Yuen Thompson (2015) will also assist me in my analysis.

Body deviance is a vast subject which encompasses a whole range of topics including weight, disability and deformity and transsexuality: 'Alternative body projects that do not pursue beauty are considered deviant: female bodybuilding, gender reassignment, butch lesbians and heavily tattooed women' (Yuen Thompson, 2015, p.36). The primary focus of this thesis, however, will be on tattooed bodies, their portrayal in young adult literature, and the ways in which society at large responds to such differences.

2.2: Defining Deviance and Diversity

Deviance can be defined as 'a stigmatizing attitude that identifies people as less desirable and unworthy of full social acceptance' (Thompson et al, 2016, p. 37). What constitutes deviance is up to the judgement and ensuing responses of others (Becker, 1963, in Adams, 2009). Naturally, society's interpretation of conduct as deviant shifts and changes as its dominant attitudes evolve (Adams, 2009). Of course, the media plays a significant role in defining and perpetuating what or who may be described as deviant (Thompson et al., 2016). For example, regarding the appearance and behaviour of women: 'The media present women either in a sexual context or within the family, reflecting a woman's two prescribed roles, first as a sex object, and then as a mother' (Orbach, 1978, p.20). The media, therefore, reinforces social expectations by promoting a certain image or behaviour. Arguably, any individual or group who diverts from this social construct could potentially be perceived as abnormal or deviant.

What is described as deviant changes according to the fashions and trends which mark an era. This refers to physical appearance and abnormalities and extends to clothing, hairstyles, and bodily adornment. It also includes certain behaviours. The word 'deviant' can relate to behaviour or physical appearance - for example, bodies that are physically different from the norm either by choice or due to birth defects, deformities, or disabilities. This could mean bodies that have been changed or modified by tattooing or piercing, or that have been disfigured due to an injury or disability. It is worth acknowledging here that what is perceived by mainstream society to be deviant, abnormal, or grotesque is another person's normal, everyday experience. Deviance, or the perception of deviance is a concept which is culturally constructed. Moreover, the

reactions we have to diversity or deviance in its many forms may cause confusion (Miller and Sammons, 1999) – on the one hand, we want to feel compassion, yet on the other, there may be feelings of shock and disgust: 'We often see our own differences as 'right' or 'normal' and define differences in others as 'wrong' or 'deviant' (Miller and Sammons, 1999, p.2). Furthermore, according to Thomson: 'Mirth at something which fails to conform to accepted standards and norms gives way to anger when these norms are being seriously threatened or attacked' (Thomson, 1972, p. 24).

So far, this chapter has identified a number of ways in which the body can be defined as different, diverse or socially unacceptable in general terms. The following section moves on to explore body diversity and weight in relation to the female body and the ways in which the media creates pressure to conform to a specific set of ideals in terms of body size and shape.

2.3: Body Diversity and Weight

Although the focus of this thesis is mainly on tattooing as a form of body diversity, it is important to recognise that there are other ways in which the human body may be considered diverse or deviant. This section focuses on body image regarding cultural ideals in Western society examining how messages regarding body weight and appearance are communicated in the media through advertising, film, television and magazines. According to Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth*, 'Women's magazines accompanied women's advances and the simultaneous evolution of the beauty myth' (Wolf, 2002, p.62) and went hand-in-hand, with women's emancipation and their

enhanced role in wider society, for example, in the workplace: 'Women's magazines for over a century have been one of the most powerful agents for changing women's roles' (Wolf, 2002, p.64). One of the most popular topics in these publications was diet. In fact, between the years 1968-1972, articles focusing on diet and body weight rose by seventy per cent (Wolf, 2002). For five decades, therefore, one of the core messages to women conveyed through magazines and other media, is the need to be thin: This is backed up by Cash and Henry who claim that: 'The ideal image of feminine attractiveness currently presented in the media is rigid, with a particular emphasis on thinness' (Cash and Henry, 1995, in Posavac, 1998). Bartky (2003) refers to this focus on thinness as the 'tyranny of slenderness' in which women are prohibited from becoming large and where 'fuller breasts and larger hips have become distasteful' (Bartky, 2003, p.35). *The Whole Woman* by Germaine Greer, published in 1999, focuses on several aspects of the female body: menstruation, cosmetic surgery and the relationship women have with food. Greer also maintains that the indoctrination to conform to a physical cultural ideal begins at a very young age with magazines for little girls containing make-up tips and offering lip gloss and nail varnish as free gifts: 'Magazines financed by the beauty industry teach little girls that they need make-up and train them to use foundations, powders, concealers, blushers, eye-shadows, eye-liners, lip-stick […]' (Greer, 1999, p.23). Almost fifteen years later, Holly Baxter and Rhiannon Cosslett produced an expose' of women's magazines entitled *The Vagenda* (2014), backing up this observation and advocating that very little has changed regarding Western culture and its manipulation of women to look and act in certain ways, also stating that pressure relating to appearance begins when the young female is still at primary age:

> In November 2013, the free gift in bright pink girlie mag (sic) *Animal Friends* (aimed at young girls between 3-10) was a ''sparkle set'' of ''funky bracelets'', ''cool tattoos'' and ''lush lipshine'', despite the fact that the magazines content revolves around a love of animals. (Baxter and Cosslett, 2018, p.54)

They also observe that 'little girls are encouraged to play hairdressers in the same way that boys are encouraged to play pirates' (Baxter and Cosslett, 2018, p.54). Persistent exposure to a thin ideal may result in an unhealthy obsession with weight and size especially in today's society where images are airbrushed or Photoshopped to make them appear flawless – free from stretch marks, scarring and wrinkles – thus rendering them even more unobtainable. In response to this Baxter and Coslett maintain that:

> The UK government has had to resort to sending out leaflets to parents to advise them on how to talk to their children about body image, because young children cannot differentiate between bodies that are Photoshopped and ones that aren't. (Baxter and Cosslett, 2015, p.32)

Along with the pressure to be thin, there is a plethora of other requirements:

> A woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless, and smooth; ideally, it should betray no sign of wear, experience, age or deep thought. Hair must be removed, not only from the face but from large surfaces of the body as well' (Bartky, 1998, in Weitz, 2003, p. 83).

The premise of the beauty industry, then, is that unless a woman conforms to the above criteria, she is perceived to be somehow lacking. Yet the burden of maintaining a

low weight and conforming to a specific image or certain body type does not manifest solely from the media. It is further reinforced by familial influence with parents and teachers readily putting pressure on their daughters and female pupils to look and act in a certain way (Bartky, 1998, in Weitz, 2003). Indeed, in Laura Dockrill's *Big Bones* (2018), the protagonist, Bluebell is advised by the school nurse to lose weight and keep a food diary, even though Bluebell has no personal issues with her weight.

While thin female bodies are featured in every aspect of media, larger bodies are considered unhealthy, undisciplined, unfit, and are held up as the 'before' image in advertisements for dieting products (Schandler, 1999). Moreover, it would appear that females *and* males are expected to strive for this perceived perfection. It is as if, as a society, we have become removed from our bodies in so much as to consider them a separate commodity requiring constant attention and amendments in order to meet society's standards of attractiveness. Frost argues that: 'The level of agreed standardization is high, the appraisal is constant, and the categorization is applied to boys and girls but seemingly not equally of boys and girls (Frost, 2001, p.132-133). Due to the fact that images of women in advertising and television have been altered with the use of technology, these social ideals are impossible to achieve, yet failing to do so potentially generates self-criticism, low self-esteem and in extreme cases, depression, anxiety and eating disorders. Furthermore, studies by Spitzer et al in 1999 revealed the fact that many females in the media are 20% under the body weight which would be considered healthy by a medical professional (Spitzer, Henderson and Zivian, 1999, in Clay, Vignoles and Dittmar, 2005). These images influence our perception in terms of what can be considered a defect and what can be perceived as normal (Bordo, 2003, p.xviii). Historically, these attitudes have remained prevalent for decades. Social

institutions such as churches, schools, and medicine have contrived to control the behaviour of women: 'rewarding girls and women who conformed to social expectations and punishing those who did not' (Weitz, 2003, p. 76). Arguably, the terminology used to refer to diet and exercise is aggressive and is, in itself, linked to punishment: 'A violent assault on the enemy is usually required; bulges must be 'attacked' and 'destroyed'; fat 'burned', and stomachs must be 'busted' and 'eliminated' (Bordo, 2003, p. 189). It is of little surprise, therefore, that such hostility towards our bodies can result in depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

The following section examines the impact of social media on young adults and the ways in which they perceive their bodies.

2.4: Social Media and the 'Selfie'

Over the past decade, with the introduction and the increase in popularity of social media, the pressure to maintain a 'perfect' body shape has increased with the constant bombardment of physical perfection and the prevalence of the 'selfie'. Such bombardment may result in negative comparisons and 'significantly influence body image concerns' (Perloff, 2014, p.1). According to Fioravanti et al: 'Body dissatisfaction occurs when the elevation of personal body image is negative and when a perceived discrepancy between real and ideal body occurs.' (Fioravanti et al, 2022, p.419). Studies show that women's displeasure and insecurities surrounding body image are frequently linked with exposure to media images of the 'thin ideal' and this constant exposure results in the image becoming internalised – the desire to be thin becomes an

accepted social norm (Grabe et al, 2008, in Perloff, 2014; Schmuck et al 2019, in Engel et al 2024). Research suggests that younger women are more susceptible to negative social media influences (Papageorgiou, Fisher and Cross, 2022; Jaiswal and Kumar, 2023) than boys and older women. It also implies that women on the whole are more likely to desire a thinner body than men along with the tendency to be more profoundly affected by media influence (Fernandez and Pritchard, 2012, in Westenburg and Oberle, 2023). Research conducted by Fatima, Shahzad and Zeib (2024) has focused on the high levels of body shaming experienced by TikTok users and the detrimental effects this has on self-esteem and body confidence. This research advocates for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on mental health.

Although insecurities around body size and weight alone do not necessarily result in eating disorders since eating disorders are extremely complex and are manifestations of emotional and mental health issues (Arroyo and Segrin, 2013, in Perloff, 2014), frequent exposure to media images which reinforce social stereotypes may lead to an increased preoccupation with body image. Exposure to the 'thin ideal' may result in girls and women making negative comparisons between their own bodies and the airbrushed, Photoshopped bodies they see on social media platforms (Alamyar and Khotimah, 2023). This may be due to the fact that social media provides a mechanism by which women can compare their own appearance to that of others (Fardouly et al, 2014). Furthermore, social media not only allows people to post images of themselves for public viewing, it also provides the opportunity for feedback from others which can potentially be cruel and unkind. On the other hand, it provides instant gratification – the more 'likes' a person receives, the better he or she will feel. Not surprisingly,

research suggests that time spent on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Tik Tok can have a negative impact upon mood. Their addictive quality results in its users seeking more confidence-inducing 'likes' yet negative, unkind feedback may leave users with feelings of insecurity relating to body size, weight, and other aspects of their lives. Arguably, social media reinforces existing social expectations: '[…] the processes underlying how the social media promote body image concerns appear to be no different from other media forms' (Williams and Ricciardelli, 2014, p.390).

One study by Tiggemann and Slater in 2014 involving preadolescent girls, however, found that anxieties relating to body image were greater when linked to time spent on the internet than time spent reading magazines or watching television (Tiggemann and Slater, 2014, in Williams and Ricciardelli, 2014). Arguably, this may be due to two factors. Firstly, actresses and models seen on television have spent a significant amount of time having makeup applied by professionals. Clever filming techniques, lighting and camera work can eliminate blemishes and uneven skin tones. Therefore, we *expect* celebrities to present themselves in certain ways – to look polished and glamorous. People viewed on social media platforms, however, are often friends, peers, and acquaintances. Even though it is possible to modify and enhance computer images (Fardouly et al, 2014), perhaps it is more anxiety-provoking to see images of people with whom we are familiar looking professionally airbrushed, devoid of stretch marks, scars, and excess flesh. For example, social media influencers may become more connected to their followers by sharing life events and personal content than conventional celebrities (Abidin, 2016, in Bauer, 2020). This may instil in young followers the idea that the influencer is a friend or personal acquaintance. Arguably, it may be more realistic to compare oneself to a peer than to a celebrity. Secondly, television shows

and films appear for an allotted duration of time whereas the internet is available for hours at a time if a person chooses. Unless this time is carefully monitored by a parent or guardian, in the case of an adolescent or child, there is potential for exposure for hours without reprieve. Since adolescent girls are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction than boys (Tiggemann and Slater, 2013), it is of no surprise that they are also more likely to self-objectify, internalize these images and place far more importance on physical appearance than boys (Perloff, 2014).

Despite the above, however, social media can be utilised in a positive way – it has provided an effective platform for the Body Positive movement, influencing girls and women in constructive and informative ways regarding their body image concerns (Alleva, 2021, Jaiswal and Khumar, 2023). Furthermore, for example, in a study conducted by Pila et al, young women who engaged with feminist social media content experienced increased levels of body confidence (Fernandez and Pritchard, 2012, in Westenburg and Oberle, 2023). Social media has contributed widely to the cultural shift towards the acceptance and inclusion of diverse bodies including tattooed bodies and when utilised responsibly can help to promote positive attitudes regarding body image.

To conclude, therefore, it can be maintained that social media can make a positive contribution and have a positive effect on the mental wellbeing of its users (Jaiswal and Kumar, 2023), however, it is also crucial that '[…]those who wield influence on social media acknowledge the possible adverse effects their content may have on the psychological wellbeing of young women' (Jaiswal and Kumar, 2023, p.597). Whether social media platforms have a positive or a negative effect depends largely upon factors such as platform, content, target audience and the perspective of the users themselves.

Arguably, it is also necessary to stress the importance of owners of social media platforms taking responsibility for the content that is broadcast.

The following section of this chapter focuses on how the female body has traditionally been portrayed with particular emphasis on cosmetic surgery procedures.

2.5: The Traditional Female Body

Throughout history, at least in Western civilisation, the female body has been seen as an object of beauty and has been used as a symbol of culturally accepted standards of beauty (Orbach, 2001). Bodies, especially women's, have been portrayed according to a fashionable ideal (Orbach, 2009). The depiction of women's bodies, however, has changed over the years, depending upon the current trend:

> […] looking around the world at the many varieties of bodily gestures and decoration, it is easy to see the ways in which bodies have always been an expression of a specific period, geography, sexual, religious, and cultural place. (Orbach, 2009, p.7)

For example, paintings of women between 1700-1900 showed them to be larger than current trends. Baroque artists such as Rubens painted images of larger women. Arguably, this may be due to the fact that being larger was a sign of affluence whereas being thin was linked to poverty and was therefore not considered fashionable.

Greer (1999) argues that women's obsession with and hatred of their bodies is tantamount to body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) while stating also that this is indirectly encouraged and reinforced by social pressures put on women to be thin. She further observes that it is in the best interest of the beauty industry to ensure that women remain paranoid and unhappy with their appearance. According to Victoria Pitts-Taylor in *Surgery Junkies* (2007), BDD has been linked to severe cosmetic surgery addiction although unlike tattooing as a method of body modification, cosmetic surgery has typically been used as a means by which the body conforms to an ideal thus rendering it more socially acceptable. Radical feminists, however, have largely associated cosmetic surgery with self-mutilation and addiction:

> […] some feminists have applied the psychiatric language of self-mutilation and addiction to women who choose cosmetic surgery. They have described female cosmetic surgery patients as sick women whose psyches have been rendered pathological by patriarchy. (Pitts-Taylor, 2007, p.20)

This attitude has, however, been challenged by other, more liberal feminists who maintain that cosmetic surgery is a form of empowerment (Waheed, 2020), especially when a woman has undergone a mastectomy or other disfiguring surgeries. This can be considered the case if individuals opting for cosmetic surgery have not been coerced into doing so by peer groups, partners, or family members. In recent years, cosmetic surgery has also been linked to issues surrounding gender identity and body dysphoria in adolescents (and adults) opting for gender reassignment surgery (van de grift et al, 2017), for example, double mastectomies in trans men. Arguably, television programmes such as *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan* have contributed to the

normalization of cosmetic surgery where the risks and subsequent pain are significantly downplayed or are simply not mentioned at all (Pitts-Taylor, 2007):

> The pain and recovery processes are given limited airing, yet because cosmetic surgery is presented as a personal accomplishment and a form of self-care, the physical downsides of cosmetic surgery are framed primarily as obstacles to be overcome. (Pitts-Taylor, 2007, p.55)

Although the subject of tattooing will be discussed further on in this chapter, it is important to draw a distinction between tattooing and cosmetic surgery. In one sense they are similar in that the physical changes they create are permanent (DeMello, 2000; Pitts, 2003; Waheed, 2020). Both tattooing and cosmetic surgery can be perceived as being an enhancement of beauty. Tattooing, however, can arguably be associated more with non-conformity and creativity whereas cosmetic surgery is largely linked to modifying the body in order to conform to social ideals. There are, of course, exceptions to this. For example, French multi-media artist Orlan has undergone multiple cosmetic surgeries as a form of creative expression.

It has already been stipulated that for girls, the pressure to be a certain weight and size begins at an increasingly early age – in some cases in children as young as five years old (Hartley in Weitz, 2016), exacerbated by the fact that photographs of children can now be digitally enhanced to eradicate any perceived flaws in order to produce a 'perfect' image. The number of adolescent girls opting for cosmetic surgery that are not related to specific health conditions has increased. Teenagers as young as thirteen are requesting cosmetic surgery for perceived physical defects. According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, over a twenty-year period, cosmetic surgery procedures in adolescents have

increased from 14,000 in 1996 to 229,000 in 2017 (Khunger, 2021), indicating that the pressure on young people regarding their physical appearance not only remains but is more apparent than ever before. Body insecurity and body perfection are, however, not confined specifically to women. The following section moves on to explore how men have become a marketing opportunity for the beauty and diet industries. The fact that this has created an increase in low self-esteem related to body image in males is explored below.

2.6: The Traditional Body and Men

While it is documented that females are three times more likely than males to struggle with mental illness and low self-esteem relating to insecurities around body image (Bordo, 2003, Drexler, 2013), there is also pressure on boys and men to conform to a 'traditional notion of masculinity', and the number of males with eating disorders is rising (Pope and Phillips, 2002, Drexler, 2013). Furthermore, although more women than men experience difficulties relating to negative body image, in men, the side-effects of performance-enhancing drugs such as anabolic steroids are potentially physically and emotionally damaging. Physical complications may manifest in the form of acne, testicular atrophy, and cardiovascular problems (Schnackenburg, 2016). Emotional difficulties resulting in the regular intake of steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs include depression, anxiety, and aggressive behaviour (Schnackenburg, 2016). Cultural expectations for men and women, then, vary greatly yet result in similar outcomes when the messages communicated succeed in promoting feelings of insecurity and self-abasement. However, an earlier study by Grogan found that,

generally, men feel greater satisfaction with their bodies than women and experience a reduced inclination to make lifestyle changes should they feel that their bodies do not conform to society's ideals (Grogan, 1999). On the other hand, compared with research focusing on women's difficulties relating to body image, there is relatively little research aimed at body dissatisfaction in men (Schnackenberg, 2016). McCreary and Sasse (2000) argue that although women are under pressure to simply remain thin, the ideal for men is lean, athletic, and muscular (McCreary and Sasse, 2000, in Carper et al, 2010). Whereas being thin is equated to physical attractiveness and success for women, social success relating to career prosperity and relationships for males has been associated with being fit and athletic (Ricciardelli, Mc Cabe and Banfield, 2000). Male bodies that deviate from this may be seen as puny and lacking in stamina: 'Terminology such as *weakling, weed, nerd, geek* – a whole range of powerful insults alluding to lack of physical strength' (Frost, 2001, p.177). It is important to acknowledge here, however, that concepts of masculinity have evolved when taking into consideration the experiences of trans and gay men. In these cases, conventional notions of masculinity have been challenged: 'masculinity does not exclusively belong to (cis)male bodies and masculine embodiments are […] enacted by different subjects through a variety of bodily practices' (Aboim and Vasconcelos, 2021, p.3). Nevertheless, whether a male identifies as cis, queer, or trans, the male body has now become as much of a 'profit-generating commodity' as the female one (Bordo, 1999). The male body, therefore, has also become a problem that needs to be fixed (Bordo, 1999, in Shandler, 1999). Shandler writes the following: 'Each person is now called upon in consumer culture to work assiduously to minimize the ever-increasing set of flaws to which his or her body is subject' (Shandler, 1999, p. 70).

Both women and men, therefore, are exposed to idealized images of masculinity and femininity that are rigid and uncompromising. Furthermore, those who do not feel their bodies compare favourably with society's prescribed version of beauty often experience shame and self-loathing regarding their physical appearance (Bordo, 2003). Insecurities relating to body image may have a negative impact on mental health in the form of eating disorders, depression, extreme exercising, and extreme dieting (Kleinwort, 2011). Bordo also maintains that advertising conveys messages to younger people telling them not just how to be beautiful, but how to do so in the way that is expected and revered by the dominant culture, that is, thin, light-skinned and dressed in clothing that is considered fashionable (Bordo, 2003). In Western society, we are thus constantly bombarded with images of women and men whose bodies conform to a certain type – young, slender women and athletic, ultramasculine men.

This section has set out to explore the key concepts related to body deviance as presented in secondary literature and has set out to explore how social pressures to conform to a specific set of social ideals affects women and to a lesser degree, men. In conclusion to the above, therefore, it is apparent that often, individuals whose bodies do not conform to societal norms are viewed unfavourably (Bordo, 2003, Orbach, 2009). Arguably, negative attitudes from the media, family, and peers towards those who fail to conform can result in many physical and emotional problems. Messages are all around us regarding how we should look alongside products which promise to change our lives for the better. According to Frances-White:

> While our adult minds might be far beyond thinking our worth lies in having Jennifer Anniston's hair, Jennifer Lopez's arse and being liked by everyone,

> everywhere, all the time, deep down inside it's easy to feel that things will be better if we only live up to what the billboards want for us (Frances-White, 2018, p.xv).

Our bombardment by images, on our screens and in magazines, of men and women whose bodies conform to a certain type, substantiates the message that our appearance is linked to social and career success (Thomas, 2012). Clearly, society has a long way to go before body diversity is fully accepted and embraced.

While the previous section of this chapter explored theories of the body and examined the ways in which society influences how we perceive and react to our bodies, the following section focuses on tattooing and presents a history of tattooing, the social stigma associated with it, the reasons people choose to become tattooed, and the social and cultural influences which surround the practice.

2.7: Tattooing

The scrutiny and subsequent negativity relating to physical appearance is more often aimed at the female form. In Western society tattooed bodies have received negative reactions and have carried a stigma in the same way that other diverse bodies have experienced: the overweight, disabled, deformed or dark-skinned body. The aim of this study, however, is to investigate tattooing as a form of body diversity and to examine how *tattooed* protagonists are portrayed in young adult literature. It will begin by exploring tattooing as a form of body modification – its history, stigma and its place in contemporary Western culture. The diverse reasons for choosing to be tattooed will be

investigated along with the history of tattooing and women. Latter subsections of this chapter explore the racial and cultural diversity of tattooing, the history of tattooing and tattooing and sexual diversity. It will conclude by considering the discrimination of tattooed individuals in the work-place as well as in wider society examining whether stigma still remains in contemporary society or whether it is not as prevalent as the popularity of tattooing increases in mainstream society.

2.8: Body Modification, Tattooing and Culture

Body modification can be defined as the deliberate alteration of the body, and this includes piercing, scarification, branding, and subdermal implanting (Pitts, 2003). This study, however, will focus only upon tattooing as a method of modifying the body due to the fact that it seemed more appropriate to examine one aspect of body modification in detail as opposed to merely scratching the surface of many.

The methods of body modification discussed in the previous section that are considered socially acceptable include breast augmentation, face lifts and enhancing the body by implanting silicone into parts of it which are considered by their owners to be unsatisfactory (Thomas, 2012). Arguably, these practices are undertaken to ensure that the body conforms to an accepted social standard although arguably they are artificial behaviours considered to be acceptable due to societal influences and pressures. Perhaps this explains why these forms of body modification are often perceived as being more socially acceptable while tattooing, piercing, branding and scarification are not – one practice ensures an individual conforms to social standards whereas the other

practice does not. Some methods of body modification have cultural roots which are centuries old and have their roots in non-Western societies. For example, tattooing can be traced back to the fourth millennium B.C. in Europe and to circa 2000 B.C. in Egypt (Beeler, 2006). Many of these practices were ritualistic – for example, earlobe-stretching in the Maasai tribe in Kenya, Burmese neck rings, head-shaping, and the lip-stretching of the Ethiopian Mursi tribe (Pitts, 2003) - and often marked a specific milestone in a person's life. In many cultures, for example, tattooing symbolises a rite of passage (Beeler, 2006) and in some tribes, body adornment and decoration have been symbols of social role and position (Nowosielski et al., 2012). That said, during the Byzantine period, the Romans marked their prisoners with tattoos as a way of generating shame and to exert control (Osterud, 2009) as did the Nazis in Auschwitz who tattooed their prisoners with the prisoner's entry number. It is interesting that what was once a means of control is now used as a way in which to rebel against social convention although as the practice grows in popularity it ceases to become the rebellious act it once was. Furthermore, the tattoos of the prisoners themselves changed their meaning: 'What started as marks of persecution by the Romans against Christians morphed into public symbols of religious devotion' (Osterud, 2009, p.11).

During the eighteenth century, tattooing in the West was considered by some to be fashionable and exotic (Bradley, 2000, in Braunberger, 2000), although it was largely associated with deviant and unsociable behaviour (Adams, 2009) and with those who were considered culturally undesirable such as criminals, 'savage' races, and circus entertainers (Oetterman in Caplan, 2000, Van Dinter, 2005, Miflin, 1997 in Adams, 2009). During the late 1870s, the act of tattooing raised concerns regarding disease and

other medical problems. In fact, in the United States, as recently as the 1940s and 50s, patients with tattoos were isolated from the others due to the fear of disease and contamination. Tattooing became less popular in the United States with the introduction of The American Return to Normalcy Movement of the 1950s (Fisher, 2002). The tattoos which had been popular among the military during World War Two were new symbols of 'the breach that the second world war had caused in society' (Fisher, 2002, p.97). Arguably, it was at this point in time that tattooing in the West became marginalized associated as it was with the 'working class, gangs and drunks' (Fisher, 2002, p.97). Even as late as the 1990s, tattoos were associated with diseases such as lockjaw, shingles, and syphilis (Osterud, 2009) and the act of tattooing was linked to the working class, bikers, 'loose' women and other 'social undesirables' (Madfiss and Arford, 2013) and furthermore, some individuals with tattoos have faced discrimination in the workplace as well as in wider society.

In Western culture in the early 1990s, there was a rise in the popularity of tattoos amongst the middle classes and adolescents - an era which was dubbed by journalists and sociologists 'a tattoo renaissance' (Pitts, 2003). The association of tattooing with the working classes has, over the past three decades, been slowly changing. A number of factors have influenced middle class interest in tattooing in the form of television shows, celebrity culture and publications. Tattoos amongst diverse social groups have become more visible and therefore more fashionable, for example, within celebrity culture which is active in introducing and constructing social and cultural norms through media presence (Pitts-Taylor, 2007, Shilling, 2012, in Rees, 2016). Furthermore, television shows such as *Miami Ink* and *Tattoo Fixers* have drawn significant attention to

the practice which may potentially move it into the mainstream. Arguably, increased exposure to the activity through the media removes any mystery and stigma so that it becomes normalized and more acceptable (Rees, 2016). One way in which tattooing has moved from a working-class identity to one practised by the middle classes is through the power of the mainstream press. Magazine articles featuring tattooed individuals typically focus on members of society who are considered 'respectable' such as teachers, students and secretaries (DeMello, 2000). Those who are perceived as working class, for example, bikers, are not chosen to be interviewed. Tattoo magazines such as *Skin Deep* and *Tattoo Life* aimed at the middle classes promote a different type of tattoo – prior to the tattoo renaissance, working class tattoos were not only significantly different from the images available today, they also had different meanings (DeMello, 2000). These differences in motivation may be what led to social disapproval. Since tattooing for some was (and in some cases, still is) a means by which an individual could symbolically remove themselves from mainstream society, and therefore an act of rebellion, it is of no surprise that tattooing was an activity which was viewed negatively. Through media discourse and regular exposure to the practice, public opinion has shifted: 'The body is now seen as a temple and tattoos are a way of decorating that temple' (DeMello, 2000, p.140). This attitude has further been compounded by middle class pursuits such as the introduction of self-help culture, New Age and women's spirituality and ecology movements (DeMello, 2000). The process of being tattooed, therefore is slowly transforming from something which was once considered self-harm and a debasement of the body to a spiritual act, a rite of passage or a talisman (DeMello, 2000) which certainly supports the concept of body positivity and its notion that *every* body is beautiful in its own way regardless of whether or not it conforms to a

set of ideals prescribed by a patriarchal society. Interestingly, from a radical feminist perspective there is a degree of negative criticism associated with tattooing. Body art, it seems, 'needs to be understood […] as being the result of, rather than resistance to, the occupation of a despised social status under male dominance' (Jeffries, 2000, p.410). Deemed to be a method of self-mutilation, some feminists along with certain members of the medical profession, link tattooing with mental illnesses such as anorexia and bulimia, considering tattooing to be a form of self-harm and stating that what some would label body enhancement is, in fact, body dissatisfaction (MacCormack, 2006). MacCormack also argues that tattooing is used to 'attain a certain image as a result of social pressure to appear attractive' (MacCormack, 2006, p.67). However, since tattooed women, or at least heavily tattooed women have at certain points in history, been considered unattractive and unfeminine, this point may be rendered moot. Jeffries maintains that: 'Reclaiming women's bodies needs to be based, as it was in the 1970s, on a tender recognition that our bodies are not the problem […] It is the hatred and discrimination that need to be attacked and not our bodies/ourselves' (Jeffries, 2000, p.427). While this perspective is a valid one, it fails to take into consideration the varying reasons women choose to become tattooed. If a woman feels social pressure to become tattooed, then the above argument is valid. As a tattooed woman myself, I would argue that referring to tattooing as a method of self-mutilation is a sweeping statement which fails to respect the individual choices made by many women of varying ages and backgrounds who choose to be inked.

There has also, since the 1970s, been an increase in tattoo artists with a university background. Many of these artists have received traditional art school training. Taking

this one step further, tattooing has been accepted as an art form through displays in art galleries and museums (Sanders, 2008, in Rees, 2016). Arguably, since the 1970s also, there has been an increase in the number of people who have tattoos. This increased popularity has led to an academic interest although there is a deficit in research which aims to ascertain why the practice has become so popular (Sweetman, 1999, DeMello, 2000, in Rees, 2016). However, Rees maintains that the heightened popularity of tattooing may be due to three social developments. These are 'the increasing importance of the body as a site for constructing identity, processes of cultural diversity and globalisation, and attempts to legitimize the practice as an acceptable art form' (Rees, 2016, p.158). Research by Sweetman backs up the first statement which claims that the body is central to the formation of identity (Sweetman, 1999). In *Bodies of Inscription* Margo DeMello reveals how working-class associations with tattooing have been devalued by elite tattooists, tattoo organizations and the editors of exclusive tattoo periodicals in order to promote the practice to the middle classes (DeMello, 2000). One aspect of the increase in popularity may be a cultural desire to connect with ancient customs and traditions. Indeed, this was made apparent during the 1980s and 1990s with the increase in the popularity of the tribal tattoo (Buss and Hodges, 2017). The stigma and negative attitude towards tattooing amongst younger generations is less prevalent as adolescents are more likely to view tattooing as a form of self-expression and identity as opposed to an act of rebellion or a sign of deviant behaviour (Armstrong and Murphy, 1997, in Blair, 2007). Despite the fact that society's perception of tattooing is slowly changing, the association of tattooing with mental ill health still exists and the notion that tattooing is the antithesis and rejection of the cultural ideal of beauty is still apparent:

> […] long-held associations between tattooing and psychopathy do still remain, and as a practice that moves the body further away from […] the cultural ideal of the young, slim attractive body, its acceptability is more contested than cosmetic surgery. (Armstrong and Murphy, 1997, in Blair, 2007)

Moreover, although tattooing is becoming a more mainstream practice, and therefore more prevalent in modern culture, there are still entrenched negative and discriminatory attitudes amongst more traditionally minded members of society. For example, the working class tattooed body has traditionally been perceived as less socially acceptable as opposed to the cute subtle tattoo on the body of a middle-class businesswoman (Yuen Thompson, 2015). Furthermore, regarding workplace practice, people with tattoos may still experience discrimination professionally in terms of employment and promotion (Buss and Hodges, 2017). Statistics indicate that only twenty-three per cent of employers will not be negatively influenced by a visibly tattooed candidate and a survey carried out by Salary.com in 2013 indicated that forty-two percent of people agreed that visible tattoos in the workplace are inappropriate (Kovachevska, 2021). The negative judgement that perceives tattoos as tribal and primitive and therefore linked to savage races remains in some areas of society. Tattooing by tribal people, however, was a method by which they affiliated themselves with their tribe as a means of aligning themselves against the people who conquered them. This permanent mark may have been perceived by their conquerors as a mark of subversion and rebellion (Buss and Hodges, 2017). Non-conformity, therefore, presented a threat and arguably, it still does in the present: body markings are, by some, perceived as savage and something to look down upon: 'Those who choose to

modify their bodies in ways that violate appearance norms – or reject culturally prescribed alterations – risk being defined as socially or morally inferior' (Sanders and Vail, 2008, p.2).

In a study conducted by Broussard and Harton in 2017, participants were asked to view two sets of images of men and women, one set with tattoos and the other featuring identical images but with the tattoos digitally removed. Although the tattooed images were perceived as being stronger and more independent, they were also rated more negatively on other characteristics than the same images where the tattoos were not visible. Tattooed women were also rated more negatively than tattooed men (Broussard and Harton, 2017). Unlike the tattoos of ancient tribes, tattoos in the West had become symbols of 'Otherness' in wider society as well as in literature, film, and television, being considered a violation of social norms (Beeler, 2006). Until the tattoo renaissance, other forms of body modification in Western society had largely been perceived in a negative way. The media, along with medical and mental health professionals, linked body modification with mental illness and pathology and condemned acts of piercing, branding, and tattooing. (Pitts, 2003). In particular, tattooed women challenged society's traditional notion that they were weak and passive (Atkinson, 2002, in Strubel and Jones, 2017).

Both tattooing and body piercing have been associated with risk-taking behaviours – along with prostitution, eating disorders, depression and social alienation (Rubin, 2009), and – at least in women - promiscuity (Nowoslielski et al, 2012). Body modifiers are often depicted not only as members of a deviant subculture but also as self-harmers and body-mutilators who are mentally ill, unruly and out of control. The link between

tattooing and mental ill-health has been substantiated by studies conducted by Carroll and Anderson in 2002 who found that a group of adolescent females aged between fifteen and eighteen showing signs of depression and who displayed aggressive personality traits also had a significant amount of body modification. Their research also established a link between violence and tattoos in boys (Carroll and Anderson, 2002). Further studies have ascertained that tattoos have been associated with substance abuse in the few studies involving a general adolescent population (Armstrong and Pace Murphy, 1997; Roberts, 2002). However, alternative research indicates that body modifiers are at no greater risk of mental ill health than members of the population who do not engage in such practices (Thomas, 2012). Furthermore, neither of these studies focuses on an older demographic, concentrating primarily on the adolescent population, and as tattooing becomes more normalized amongst adolescents, it may become difficult to marginalise this sector of the population (Descesnes, Fines and Demers, 2006). The fact that body modification *has* been heavily linked to mental illness and distress may one of the reasons why tattooed or pierced protagonists are scarce in young adult literature (another reason, of course, for the paucity of tattooed young adult protagonists is simple legality, as it is unlawful to tattoo anyone under the age of 18 in the UK). There may be an element of institutional pressure in social discourse - messages communicated via television, film, and literature promote and reinforce social conventions. Adolescent literature is no exception to this rule, providing as it does, an insight into cultural and institutional norms and expectations and how they influence adolescent behaviour (Seelinger-Trites, 2000). Tattoos have a demeaned status in literature and the visual arts, and tattoo narratives can typically be found in science fiction and in stories focussing on gender ambiguity

and racial identity (Beeler, 2006): 'Because the tattoo […] has often signalled difference, distinguishing the marked body from the unmarked, tattooed bodies are constructed as Other' (Beeler, 2006, pp. 168-169). Tattooed individuals, then, make up a sub-group in common with other minority groups in Western society such as individuals with disabilities, groups from diverse ethnic backgrounds and members of the LGBTQ community, all of whom have experienced some form of prejudice and negative misconceptions.

While this subsection has focused on the cultural history of tattooing and the stigma associated with the practice, the following section examines the racial and cultural differences in tattoo practices and how the tattoo has developed in terms of significance and popularity. It moves on further to examine the racism that is present within Western tattoo culture.

2.9: Racial and Cultural Differences in Tattoo Culture

2.9.1: Body Image and Race

So far, this chapter has focussed upon the fact that traditional beauty norms centre largely upon body size and shape. That skin colour also plays an important role in what has been considered classically beautiful has not, as yet, been explored. From an intersectional viewpoint, it is essential to acknowledge the fact that numerous forms of inequality create multiple obstacles for marginalised groups through an imbalance of power and an acceptance of social norms (Crenshaw, 2017). It is necessary, therefore, to examine how conventional standards of beauty have impacted upon women of

colour. According to Shirley Anne Tate: '[…] it is the continuing ability of the white body to mark itself as racially unmarked while racializing othered beauty as 'exotic', 'different', or 'not quite right' (Tate, 2009, p.6). When relating to beauty traditions, therefore, black women have been denigrated and marginalised. Historically they have been subjected to a variety of negative portrayals: 'stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas' (Hill-Collins, 1990, p.67).

Furthermore, within black communities themselves, there is a marked difference in the treatment of women with lighter skin compared with darker-skinned women (Hill-Collins, 1990). Exposure to specific beauty ideals and the focus on whiteness in the mainstream media has resulted in black women being cast aside and being considered less beautiful (Banks, 2000, Collins, 2004, in Tate, 2007). Since the mid-2010s there have been more positive portrayals of black women in the media, for example in advertising and in the film industry, and greater representation of black and mixed-race people in general. However, it can be argued that careless portrayals of black women and decades of marginalisation have resulted in a negative body image in some black women who: 'experience the pain of never being able to live up to externally defined standards of beauty' (Hill-Collins, 1990, p.80).

These negative attitudes not only result in poor body image and the subsequent arising issues: they determine how an individual perceives her overall place in society in terms of relationships, employment, and education. This is the case more so for black women than black men who are less defined by their physical appearance and attractiveness than women (Hill-Collins, 1990). According to bell hooks: As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at

the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall status is lower than that of any other group (hooks, 1984, p.14). From a feminist perspective, then, it can be said that images which are used to assert a controlling influence over women in general succeed in having an even greater impact on the ways in which black women perceive their bodies and their overall worth within society.

2.9.2: Tattooing and Cultural Practices

The fact that tattooing is a centuries-old practice that has taken place across the globe has already been mentioned earlier in the chapter. Contemporary tattooing practices, therefore, are not limited to Western cultures. In Japan, for example, the popularity of tattooing amongst the younger generations is growing, possibly due to overseas influences experienced through travel and exposure to Western culture (Yamada, 2009). Its stigma still remains, however, due to of its association with criminality since tattooing in Japan was once a custom amongst gangsters (Yamada, 2009). However, tattooing conventions are taking place in Japan resulting in the practice 'gaining the status of a subculture and popular culture' (Yamada, 2009, p.320).

In comparison, in Thailand where tattooing was once a commonplace activity, tattooing is now shrouded in stigma as government jobs are now no longer available to anyone with a tattoo (Camphausen, 1997). Furthermore, some societies are attempting to put a stop to ancient traditions, practices, and rituals, for example, earlobe stretching in Malaysia and scarification in many African countries (Camphausen, 1997). Tattooing as a link to racial and cultural identity, however, is still apparent across the globe. For

Mexican women, tattooing is an important way in which their femininity is defined within their community (Sims, 2018) although conservative attitudes towards the body in Latin American societies due to the influences of Catholicism have resulted in some intolerance towards the practice (Friedman, 2015). Popular Mexican tattoos are heavily bound in in indigenous racial and sociopolitical symbolism and represent a rich cultural heritage (Sims, 2018). Similarly, Native American tattoos tend towards animals such as bears, wolves and snakes, and tribal symbols which represent cultural pride and identity (Schwarz, 2006, in Sims, 2018).

Research into mixed race and black contemporary tattooing is limited (Sims, 2018) although in Western society, tattoo culture is very much white-dominated with a marked lack of representation for black or brown skin (Ruiz, 2020). This under-representation extends, not only to tattooed individuals but also to the tattooists themselves. There exists a preconceived myth that tattoo ink will fail to 'show up' on black skin due to certain pigments being too pale or not vibrant enough. Other myths regarding black skin being 'tougher' or 'thicker' also result in some tattoo artists being reluctant to tattoo darker skin (Munce, 2021). Since tattooing has its origins in the cultures of dark-skinned people – tattooing in parts of Africa can be dated as far back as 84,000 years (Friedman, 2015) - this form of exclusion is rendered redundant and steeped in ignorance. In African countries, however, globalisation has had a significant influence on tattooing in Africa and the Middle East with tattooists practising in urban areas largely working with imported styles and imagery (Friedman, 2015). There is also a significant number of practitioners who adhere to ancient tattooing customs and

methods although these marks can be seen mainly on village elders as opposed to the younger generations (Friedman, 2015).

2.9.3: Henna Tattooing

Although not a method of permanent tattooing or a means by which the body can be permanently altered, henna tattooing is rich in cultural symbolism and in common with permanent tattoos, is often not merely a decoration or personal adornment – henna tattoos have a plethora of meanings bound up with tradition and ritual. Henna tattooing is an ancient practice and is often used to mark important occasions such as weddings, Eids, and graduations (Pardar, 2021). Henna comes from a plant that was originally cultivated in the Middle East and North Africa and the people from these regions have been using it for spiritual practices for centuries (Pardar, 2021). The designs themselves also have symbolic meaning, for example, dragonflies and butterflies represent transformation, birth, and new beginnings and the lotus symbol represents unity (Rostamian and Michalak, 2020). Significant also is the placing of the henna tattoos: 'when henna is placed at the top of the hands, it suggests protection, henna placed on the palms allows the person to receive and offer blessings' (Rostamian and Michalak, 2020, n.p.). A section on henna tattooing has been included in this chapter due to the fact that *The Henna Wars* by Adiba Jaigirdar (2020) is one of the young adult social realism novels chosen for analysis. My reasons for choosing this particular publication are discussed further in chapter five.

Although this section explores tattooing from a variety of cultural perspectives, the books chosen for analysis which feature protagonists from diverse ethnicities focus on tattooing within the context of South Asian and African cultures. The following section examines the diverse reasons why people choose to be tattooed. It includes themes of body reclamation after sexual abuse or trauma, body enhancement, and tattooing as a rite of passage.

2.10: Reasons for Being Tattooed

The reasons for being tattooed are as varied as the many styles and images available and despite the negativity surrounding the practice that have been referred to above, there are aspects of tattooing that can have positive implications. For example, some women who have been victimized or who have experienced sexual or physical abuse choose tattooing as a way to reclaim their bodies (Kang and Jones, 2007, in Strubel and Jones, 2017). Furthermore, tattooing has been undertaken in order to reclaim the body after a surgical procedure. Moreover, this is not simply a case of a decorative adornment. For example, after breast reconstruction surgery, nipples have been tattooed to give the breasts a more realistic appearance. Scars from other surgeries or wounds can also be tattooed over where the scar causes distress, unpleasant memories, or embarrassment. In this sense, tattooing is seen as a way in which connection to and control over the body can be gained. A common response to sexual assault, for example, is a loss of the sense of self (van der Kolk, 2014), a feeling of depersonalization or dissociation in the form of

> […] enhanced perception of imagery, altered sensation, including numbness and analgesia, and distortion of reality, including depersonalization, derealization, and change in the sense of time. (Lewis-Herman, 1992, p.43)

For women who have been abused, tattooing can be a catalyst for confronting the trauma, reconnecting with their body, and moving forward. Far from being a means of damaging the body, therefore, tattooing can be seen as a way of healing the body, thereby transformative in its very nature. For some individuals, this perceived transformative essence of tattooing has enabled them to move away from being a victim and hating their body to perceiving it as something beautiful through its images and decoration (DeMello, 2000). Furthermore, the healing of the skin after the tattooing process can be viewed as being symbolic of the emotional healing that is taking place alongside it, making the act more meaningful and cathartic. For some individuals tattooing and other forms of body modification are ways in which to redirect pain, both physical and emotional. Tattooing, therefore, becomes a way of creating something beautiful in order to transcend pain (DeMello, 2000). Tattooing for women has further been a way to make peace with a body which does not conform to traditional cultural ideals and to reject the expectations of a patriarchal society (DeMello, 2000). In the words of a female with body anxiety:

> Tattooing […] became a compromise with my body hatred. I have long been critical of my appearance and have mostly accepted that I will not be thin. By decorating my body with images that I love, I'm happier with myself and I'm proud of my abilities to endure pain (DeMello, 2000, p.56).

The theme of body reclamation after trauma, however, is not limited to women. It applies to men and women alike, especially where ownership of the body is a key theme. One heavily tattooed male claimed that being tattooed enabled him to take ownership of his body after undergoing multiple surgeries. Yuen Thompson (2015) argues that for some women, it is about rejecting conventional standards of beauty, exerting identity, and gaining control over the body:

> Women express that they are reclaiming their bodies and developing a heightened self-confidence […] Collecting beautiful tattoos on body parts that one is critical of also creates a sense of reclamation. (Yuen Thompson, 2015, p.51)

In the Flesh by Victoria Pitts (2003) explores contemporary methods of body modification including tattooing, piercing and scarification. It focuses primarily on the varying reasons why women choose to be tattooed. According to Pitts, female body modifiers claim that modifying themselves is a method of rebelling against and challenging the objectification of the female body in a patriarchal society (Pitts, 2003). Far from self-mutilation, the act of tattooing, therefore, becomes a way in which greater control over the body can be exerted (Strubel and Jones, 2017). The depiction of body modifiers as victims of mental illness, governed by the urge to self-harm (Pitts, 2003) can also be disputed. Critics of body modification are more inclined to focus on reports made by mental health practitioners who work with clients who have anorexia and bulimia, and who engage in addictive activities such as self-harming by cutting the skin. They are less likely to consult a tattoo magazine or speak to those whose reasons for, and experiences of, body modification are positive (Pitts, 2003).

As the popularity of tattooing increases in the West, however (at least in younger generations), the act of tattooing may in time lose its stigma and no longer be considered deviant. However, this point is countered by Yuen Thompson (2015) who argues the following: while tattoos are becoming increasingly visible in the media, they remain marginal (Yuen Thompson, 2015, p.37). Perhaps it is the permanence of a tattoo that society feels uncomfortable with. A piercing can be removed, but a tattoo, even when eradicated by laser treatment, will leave a scar as a reminder of its former presence. Yet there are many reasons why people choose to be pierced or tattooed. As well as being a means by which an individual may reconnect with the body after a traumatic event, tattooing may be a form of creativity and self-expression (Vail, 1999, in Adams, 2009). For some it is used as a way to resolve crises of identity (Martin, 2000). For others, in common with tribal rites of passage, tattoos symbolise an important person or event in their lives (Beeler, 2006). Tattooed bodies provide a visual narrative of a person's life in the same way as an author uses the written word:

> Some people keep a diary. Some people keep a blog, a scrapbook, they knit, or cross-stitch. I just wear it all on me. I can tell you what I was doing in my life…I can tell you that this one took three sittings, and two of them occurred right before my brother's wedding (Yuen Thompson, 2015, p. 370).

Furthermore, tattooing has recently moved away from being an activity associated with 'undesirable' individuals to one which now appeals to the middle classes and the wider population as an acceptable method of self-expression (Madfis and Arford, 2013), especially when the tattoos have personal and symbolic significance. There does, however, appear to be a distinct gender difference in the ways in which tattooed men

and women are perceived: attitudes towards women who are heavily tattooed tend to be more negative compared to heavily tattooed men: 'Tattoos are feminine so long as they are small, cute and hidden.' (Yuen Thompson, 2015, p.44). Therefore, although tattooing is becoming more widely acceptable among younger generations, stigma still exists regarding the type of tattoo chosen. Regardless of this, despite their negative association, tattoos and piercings are slowly becoming more socially acceptable and are gaining popularity with a growing number of teenagers and young adults (Nowosielski, 2012). In fact, within young adult literature it is predominantly young people who are tattooed although there are of course exceptions to this rule. For example, in *Ink is Thicker Than Water*, one of the social realism novels chosen for analysis, it is the parents of the adolescent protagonist who own a tattoo shop and who are heavily tattooed.

One aspect of body modification, at least from the perspective of individuals who engage in the practice, is that it is an external expression of self – an artistic representation of who they are. One body modifier says the following: 'Body modification enables me to express the person who I truly am. I feel it is a form of art and flesh is my medium'. Another remarked that: 'It is an exciting experience and makes me someone of my own making' (Thomas, 2012, p.10). The link between tattooing and personal identity will be explored more closely through the textual analysis of literary tattooed protagonists and their portrayal. In recent years, tattooing has become increasingly popular with women. In fact, the number of women choosing to be tattooed currently outnumbers the number of men who choose to mark their bodies in this way. The following section focuses on the pioneers of tattooing for women in Western society – the tattooed ladies of the circus sideshow.

2.11: Tattoos and Women

Women with tattoos have generated a considerable amount of social disapproval, curiosity and speculation. This section explores tattooed women in society: their role in the circus sideshow of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the way in which this paved the way for other women. Due to the fact that in Western society, tattooing has been considered a masculine activity (Yuen Thompson, 2015), little research exists regarding women and tattooing in terms of self-expression and cultural norms (Atkinson, 2002). Along with experiencing constant scrutiny regarding body shape and type, tattooed women also face more severe social criticism than men with tattoos. Tattooing has, for many years, been considered a masculine act, associated as it has been with the armed forces, convicts and labourers (Benson, 2000, in Caplani, 2000). Yuen Thompson claims that: '[…] tattoos have historically been associated with masculine subcultures – gang members, bikers, merchant seamen and inmates.' (Yuen Thompson, 2015, P.37). In fact, it was the European mariners of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that bore witness to a variety of tattooing methods.

Overall, tattooed women are generally perceived to be less socially acceptable than tattooed men especially when the women are heavily tattooed or have tattoos that are considered unfeminine. Furthermore, for women, it may also be the type of tattoo that causes disapproval. Tattoos that are small, pretty and concealed are often considered more acceptable than larger, less feminine designs (Yuen Thompson, 2015, Dann, 2021) as these are considered to be a violation of gender norms. Such tattoos can also be

viewed as: ''ugly'', which is a common response that heavily tattooed women receive. Choosing to be ''ugly'' […] is one of the biggest gender crimes a woman can commit' (Yuen Thompson, 2015, p.158). Placement of the tattoo can also generate condemnation. The lower back tattoo, for example, has been derogatorily named 'the tramp stamp', or even worse, 'slag tag' and is linked with female promiscuity (Dann, 2021). In fact, the lower back is among the few areas of the body that doesn't change due to aging and fluctuations in weight. It can easily be hidden under items of clothing should the wearer choose to conceal it (Freshly Inked, 2019, n.a.). Tattooed women are considered to be less physically attractive (Swami and Furnham, 2007) and more promiscuous (Pitts, 1998 and Callendo et al., 2005) and are felt to be compromising their femininity (Atkinson, 2002). They have traditionally been associated with circus acts, prostitutes and 'biker chicks' (Braunberger, 2000), with a 'troublemaker' reputation, whereas males with tattoos are considered macho, courageous, and daring (Braunberger, 2000) although the association of tattoos with young, working-class men, is now an outdated concept (Kang and Jones, 2007, in Strubel and Jones, 2017). In fact, in contemporary society, sixty percent of tattoo clientele are now women (Miflin, 1997, in Fisher, 2002).

Perhaps the most detailed history of tattooed women has been documented by Amelia Osterud (2009). Her book *The Tattooed Lady: A History*, offers an historical overview of the tattooed ladies integral to the circus sideshows of the 1800s. The majority of these women came from the working classes, and becoming tattooed was a way in which a good income could be earned as a means to escape poverty (Osterud, 2009, p.99). Although at the time, women who appeared semi-clad in bathing suits or

short, sleeveless dresses with their arms and legs on show were considered by many to be scandalous, to others it was a symbol of freedom - especially to other women, as it represented the 'freedom to live an unusual life not limited to the narrow selection of choices that were presented to them' (Osterud, 2009, p.63). Among the most well-known tattooed ladies were Nora Hildebrandt, Irene Woodward and Betty Broadbent wo worked in the circus sideshows of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Thompson, 2015). Arguably, these women paved the way for others to experiment with alternative methods of self-expression and challenged negative opinions of women with tattoos.

Whereas the previous section focussed on tattooed women and tattooing, with particular focus on the tattooed ladies of the late nineteenth century circus sideshows. The following section explores tattooing and its associations with gay, lesbian, and transgender subgroups and the ways in which members of the LGBTQ community have adopted specific body modification practices in order to visibly set themselves apart from the traditional cultural norms of conventional society.

2.12: Sexual Diversity

The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s saw the rising up of alternative, fringe cultures such as punk rock, feminism and gay liberation who used tattooing as a way to mark themselves apart from traditional heterodominant society: 'Tattooing was used by these groups as an assertion of personal ownership of the body and a screen on which to protect their struggles, wishes and victories' (Buss and Hodges, 2017, p.5). For some

individuals, body modification in its varying forms was used as a way to deliberately cause offence in a society where sexual diversion led to persecution and ostracization and was used as a form of resistance' (Pitts, 2000,). Pitts also maintains that methods of body modification for queer individuals were ways in which they could create a sense of community, a feeling of belonging in a world where social acceptance was a long way off (Pitts, 2000). Public displays of body modification elicit new levels of intimacy, feelings of belonging, and methods by which the body is reconstructed, and a new sense of self created (Klesse, 2007). Body modification, then has been used by the LGBTQ community as a form of resistance: 'Body stories are articulated with an oppositional discourse that explicitly identifies body marking as a practice that politicizes and publicly queers the body' (Pitts, 2003, in Klesse, 2007, n.p.).

For some gay men, tattoos are thought to be a symbol of masculinity (Besanvalle, 2018). Specific tattoo designs worn by the gay and lesbian community are representative of gay liberation or are negative symbols which have been reclaimed by the gay community such as the pink triangle which was given to gay prisoners in Nazi Germany in the second world war concentration camps as an emblem of shame (Besanvalle, 2018). During the late 1940s and 1950s, some lesbians chose to be tattooed with a nautical star on their wrists in order to signal to other lesbians that: 'the cultural push to be identifies as lesbians…was so powerful that it generated a new form of identification…a star tattoo on the top of the wrist, which was usually covered by a watch' (Davis and Kennedy, 1993, in Besanvalle, 2018).

For transgender men and women, tattooing and other forms of body modification have potentially been viewed as a type of bodily evolution which mark the ways in

which their bodies have changed as their transition takes place. This perception of tattooing, however, could be applied to anybody who views their body as a canvas on which to symbolically display their life's history, rites of passage and personal relationships. It can be said, therefore, that sexually diverse individuals who do not conform to the hetero-dominant norms have used body modification techniques as a way of marking themselves apart from the mainstream and rejecting its limiting traditions. It can be argued that the social hostility, discrimination and persecution of gays, lesbians and transgendered people already marked them out to be monstrous, pathological, and abnormal. Perhaps it is of no surprise then that modifying the body was a way in which this group could openly reject and rebel against the mainstream society that had already rejected them. According to Pitts: 'Gay, lesbian, transgendered, and SM (sado-masochistic) body modifiers have used body marking as a way of 'queering' the body, rejecting mainstream culture, and creating sexually subversive ritual' (Pitts, 2003, p.15).

Many practices adopted by this group such as piercing, scarring, and branding arguably have their roots in tribal, non-Western cultures (Pitts, 2003). During the 1970s and 1980s a new movement adopting the body modification techniques and rituals of so-called 'primitive' societies arose. These 'modern primitives' appropriated ritualistic tribal methods of body modification in order to enhance spirituality, achieve sexual liberation and physically oppose prescribed cultural norms (Pitts, 2003, in Klesse, 2007). Through the adoption of ancient techniques, the aim of the modern primitives is to 'fill a void created by the disenchanting forces of Western rationalism and individualism'

(Klesse, 2007, p.279) and consequently adopt an adversarial attitude to mainstream society.

2.13: Conclusion

This chapter began by exploring notions of body deviance and diversity. It examined feminist theories of the body relating to traditional social conventions and how they impact upon women in Western society. The chapter moved on to explore tattooing as a form of body diversity and difference exploring its cultural roots, history, and the stigma associated with the practice. Tattooing in contemporary Western society relating to race and culture, sexual diversity and gender were also examined together with the diverse reasons people choose to be tattooed. Throughout the chapter there have been frequent references to the negative attitude and stigma surrounding tattoos: their association with criminality, mental ill health and promiscuity. Interestingly, it appears that the type of tattoo displayed plays a part in influencing social perception and attitudes. Contemporary tattoo images receive more positive reaction than more traditional 'tribal' tattoos and the individuals possessing them are generally perceived to be more appropriate candidates for employment (Atkinson, 2002, in Burgess and Clark, 2010). Attitudes to tattooing are slowly changing as the practice becomes more commonplace. Exposure via the media to programmes such as *Tattoo Fixers* and *Miami Ink* removes some of the mystery, myths and taboo associated with tattooing and sees the practice being brought within capitalist commodity culture. Images of celebrities with visible tattoos have also helped to increase their popularity. Furthermore, studies

such as this which present an overview of both the negative and positive aspects of tattooing may increase understanding, contribute to its acceptance and in time help to prevent and eliminate discrimination in the workplace, and in society at large.

This chapter has explored a variety of aspects relating to the body – cultural perspectives, feminist theory, and body diversity in its many forms. It has examined the concept of tattooed bodies as a form of diversity, analysing the social attitudes towards tattooing throughout history. It has concluded with the notion that the negative attitudes associated with the practice are no longer as severe as they were three decades ago but there remains a degree of stigma in some areas of society. We have seen that tattooing has multi-faceted cultural implications: race, class, sexuality, gender, and economic commodification are all factors to be considered in the analysis of narratives depicting tattooed protagonists. The following chapter discusses the methodological approaches to this study, outlining its overall aim and objectives. It addresses feminist perspectives on multi methods research design and explains the processes involved in the critical discourse analysis of questionnaire and interview responses and the textual analysis of nine young adult novels.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1: Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework for this multi methods feminist research project. It begins by outlining the overall research aim and objectives and continues with an overview of its theoretical framework relating to the aim of the study which is to ascertain whether tattooed literary protagonists are portrayed according to certain stereotypes and prejudices which conform to the findings in the secondary literature. It moves on to describe the research methods and explains the stages involved in carrying out the study. Feminist perspectives on a multi methods research design will also be addressed. The chapter proceeds with a detailed account of the research design in terms of data collection, participant selection and analysis of data. It concludes with an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the study and outlines how this study has contributed new knowledge.

3.1.1: Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this research is to explore the ways in which tattooed protagonists are represented in young adult literature. This aim has been broken down into the three objectives outlined below:

1. To find out how readers perceive literary characters whose bodies have been tattooed.
2. To identify whether literary characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative, positive, or ambiguous way.
3. To ascertain whether there are any differences in the portrayal of male and female characters with body modifications, specifically tattoos.

3.2: Feminist Methodologies

This study draws on feminist theory which highlights sex and gender issues and focuses on the objectification of the female form within a patriarchal society and the marginalisation of bodies which do not conform to the accepted and admired social ideal of thin and white (Bordo, 2003). It takes an intersectional approach, exploring the ways in which specific groups of people may be marginalised, oppressed, and subsequently disadvantaged (Crenshaw, 2017). At the centre of feminist research is the belief and understanding that 'the nature of reality in Western society is unequal and hierarchical' (Letherby, 2003, p.5). In an attempt to counter this, feminist research brings to the forefront women and members of previously marginalised subgroups – the disabled, ethnic minorities, and the sexually diverse. Limited representations of the female form in Western culture in film, television, and advertising led me to believe that a feminist approach to this study was the most relevant. Although representation is broadening and becoming more diverse, there are still bodies which remain largely underrepresented. This includes the tattooed female body. Research such as this is important as it gives voice to those groups who would otherwise remain marginalised

through lack of understanding and prejudice. From an intersectional perspective, feminist researchers aim to conduct inquiries into issues that directly affect marginalised groups in order to implement positive social change.

Feminist theory provides a valuable framework by which to explore my work in the following ways:

- By focusing on a marginalised subgroup – individuals with tattoos - and raising awareness of the opinions, experiences and perspectives of its members.
- By enabling myself as a researcher to conduct my analysis holistically in order 'to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study' (Cheswell and Poth, 2018, p.44).
- By providing an alternative perspective on the female form favoured by conventional, patriarchal society.
- Assessing the extent to which the patriarchal attitude towards the female form has a negative impact upon girls and young women.

3.2.1: What is Feminist Research?

Feminist research focuses on the experiences of marginalised groups who have experienced oppression. Intersectionality has become an important focus on feminist research (Zack, 2005, Nash, 2008) and can be defined as 'being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, or gender, or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other' (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016, p.11). Feminist research, then, does not focus on one aspect of women's lives but studies the ways in which sexuality, race, and class overlap to reinforce oppression and disadvantage. Tattooed individuals

have up until relatively recently been part of a marginalised sub-group and have historically faced much social criticism (Yuen Thompson, 2015). Traditional scientific method or positivism which relies upon an analysis of facts has been heavily criticised by feminists who claim that it focuses predominantly upon masculine values and is reductive in its emphasis on 'objectivity' (Hekman, 2007).

> What has passed for science is in fact the world represented by men from their perspectives, and what looks like objectivity is really sexism as the kinds of questions social science has traditional asked have systematically excluded women and their interests. (Smart, 1990, in Letherby, 2003, p.44)

Feminist methodology frequently favours an interpretivist approach which advocates that the social world 'is *not* straightforwardly perceivable because it is *constructed* by each of us in a different way' (Thomas, 2013, p.108). Interpretivism, then, acknowledges the subjective perspectives of human beings both as researchers and participants, stating that each person's take on the world will vary according to their background, values and experiences' (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011). It also places importance on respecting participants and acknowledging them as individual human beings as opposed to merely being a subject that takes part in an experiment (Letherby, 2003). Feminist researchers have maintained that an objective reality cannot exist independently from the perspective of the researcher (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004) and that placing value on objectivity at the expense of subjectivity is limiting regarding research in the social sciences (Letherby, 2003): 'Feminists place importance on the 'attachment' of the researcher to the research process […] which means they are similarly situated within the knowledge-building process' (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004,

p.4). Therefore, from a feminist perspective, the researcher is not apart *from* the research but a part *of* it. Furthermore, feminists maintain that topics relevant to women's experience such as domestic violence and sexual harassment were largely ignored in mainstream social science (Hekman, 2007).

Proponents of feminist methodology assert that it provides and promotes a more holistic overview of the human experience. It also acknowledges that women analysing the experiences of women present a more varied social world view than that which traditional male-orientated research can provide (Hekman, 2007). This is backed up by Denmark and Segovich: 'It is of concern to the feminist scholars that the accepted canon has largely been produced in an academy heretofore dominated by men and by masculinist ideologies about what is of importance' (Denmark and Segovich, 2012, p.1103). Feminist methodology has therefore tended to focus on qualitative research in order to provide a more varied perspective on social issues and concerns. Using a multi methods approach, however, enables the researcher to gain a deeper insight into a topic and add dimension to a study: 'Qualitative data may assist in providing the big picture, but it is the personal story, accompanied by thoughts and feelings that bring depth and texture to the research study' (Hodgkin, 2008, p.296). It is for the above reason that a multi methods approach was chosen for this study. This approach will be discussed in more detail at a later point in the chapter.

3.2.2: Reflexivity

Reflexivity in research can be defined as '[…] self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher' (England, 1994,

p.244) and in order to generate high quality qualitative analysis, the perspective of the researcher is essential (Braun and Clarke, 2022). As a feminist researcher and a heavily tattooed woman I have experienced prejudice relating to my tattoos both in the workplace and in wider society. There has also, for decades, been a significant feeling of irritation on my part regarding the representation of only one body type in film, television, and in advertising, especially regarding the female body. This relates not only to body shape and size but also to clothing, hair colour, hair style, skin colour and body modification in its varying forms. In some areas of society, this is slowly changing, for example, the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004. Other companies such as Primark and Ann Summers have begun to use a range of more diverse models in their advertising campaigns and more black and disabled actors have started to appear in television advertising. Social messages which discriminate against difference inhibit choice, personal freedom and reinforce bigotry. Research such as this may help to strengthen knowledge and help to assuage the discrimination that accompanies ignorance.

Throughout the analysis, I was also able to utilise the skills and experience I obtained when I worked as a psychodynamic counsellor. At the core of psychodynamic counselling is the belief that events from the past may significantly affect a person's behaviour and responses to specific stimuli in the present (Jacobs, 2004). In this role I was encouraged to 'listen to the baseline'. More precisely, to access and acknowledge the deeper feelings which arose from the client's communication in order to make meaningful connections between what was being openly verbalised and the deeper feelings and emotions which were less visible and more difficult to access. In this sense, I was able to 'read between the lines' when analysing my data. This enabled me to

generate significant in-depth analysis of both the questionnaire and interview responses and the nine young adult novels.

3.2.3: Rationale for Feminist Multi Methods Research

The aim of this study is to ascertain whether literary tattooed protagonists conformed to stereotypical assumptions or questioned them. The rationale and assumptions underpinning this methodology are that tattooed protagonists in young adult literature would be portrayed in negative ways in terms of stereotyping and prejudice. This is in accordance with research outlined in the review of literature which found that tattooed individuals often face discrimination and negativity in the workplace, from peers and in wider society. Tattooed women themselves have traditionally been viewed more negatively than men and have been associated with prostitution and promiscuity (Pitts, 1998). They have also been perceived as being more masculine and less physically attractive than women whose bodies have not been tattooed. There has however, over the past three decades, been an increase in the popularity of tattooing amongst women (Miflin, 1997, in Fisher, 2002). Using a multi methods approach involving the analysis of three separate sources enabled me to gain a valuable insight not only into the portrayal of tattooed characters in literature but also the attitudes of readers towards these characters. This gave me a richer set of data than if I had focussed on one source alone.

3.3: Research Methods

This study has three research objectives which required different approaches, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of questionnaire and interview responses and the textual analysis of nine young adult novels. My first research objective related to the responses from groups of readers which were explored through interviews and questionnaires. Due to the fact this study involves literature written for young adults it seemed important that I ascertain the opinions of this demographic relating to reading choices. Added to this was the desire to give them a voice, to record and analyse their responses in order to enhance the richness of the data. This objective is as follows: **1. To find out how readers perceive literary characters whose bodies have been tattooed**. This stage of the research was conducted in order to generate ideas regarding the assumptions and perceptions surrounding heroes and heroines and their portrayal in literature. It served as a 'stepping stone' to the second part of the research which involved analysing texts to test out these assumptions and related to the following two objectives: **2. To identify whether literary characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative, positive, or ambiguous way; 3. To ascertain whether there are any differences in the portrayal of male and female characters with body modifications, specifically tattoos.** The chosen approach for the analysis of these texts was a textual analysis. My aim was to analyse the texts according to the following themes: stereotyping, lifestyle choices of the characters, relationships, physical appearance (not relating to tattoos), and the characters' role in the story – whether they are central to the story or side-lined.

3.4: Research Design

This is a qualitative study involving questionnaires, interviews, and the textual analysis of nine young adult novels that aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How do readers perceive the bodies of literary characters who have been tattooed?
2. Are literary characters with tattoos portrayed in negative, positive, or ambiguous ways?
3. Are there any differences in the portrayal of tattooed male and female characters?

3.4.1: Design

Initially, my plan was to conduct a focus group in an educational setting such as a school or college. I felt this method would yield some rich data and bring up some interesting points for discussion. My previous experience working in a further education setting would have been valuable in hosting and managing a discussion such as this. Due to the COVID-19 situation, however, I was unable to access any educational establishments so therefore it was necessary to make some adjustments to the original plan. I therefore made the decision to generate a questionnaire and recruit young adults between the ages of eleven and fourteen to give their responses. For readers of eighteen and over, I decided to conduct interviews online. These took place on a one-to-one basis and were recorded. Details regarding data collection and participant recruitment are outlined in the following sections.

3.4.2: Data Collection

The first stage of this research project involved two methods of data collection – questionnaires given to school-age children and interviewing university students on their choice of reading. Working with both older and younger readers ensured that I would be exploring the views of the whole young adult age range. To begin with, my aim was to ask school-age children about their reading choices as well as university students. However, the situation with COVID-19 delayed any correspondence with schools in the East Midlands area and although several attempts to contact local schools were made, no replies were forthcoming. For a more detailed account of the issues which arose during the epidemic, see appendix three. As an alternative method of gaining participants from a younger demographic, I approached a local Girl Guide company. Questionnaires were given to eight participants and since they were under the age of eighteen, parental consent forms were issued to each child. The questionnaires were completed in the local church hall where the Guide meetings are held, and an adult was present at all times. An example of the parental consent form can be found in Appendix four.

The second stage of the data collection process involved interviews with university students. The interviews took place with twelve students studying at a university in the East Midlands and were undertaken online. They took place on a one-to-one basis and were a more in-depth exploration of literary protagonists and their characteristics than the questions listed on the questionnaire. They consisted of a total of sixteen open questions regarding reading choices and the types of heroes and heroines the participants admired the most, and their perceptions relating to tattooed protagonists.

A sample of the interview questions can be viewed in Appendix five. This stage of the study relates to the first research objective: **to find out how young adults perceive literary characters whose bodies have been tattooed.** Once this data had been collected, collated, and coded, a critical discourse analysis of the responses was undertaken.

The sections below give detailed accounts of the interviewing and questionnaire process.

3.4.3: Questionnaires and Interviews

This section provides an overview of details of the questionnaire and interview process. It outlines some of the obstacles that were presented as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the challenges which occurred in terms of recruiting participants.

3.4.4: Questionnaires

The first stage of my research involved asking young adults about their reading choices relating to heroes and heroines. Initially, a letter was sent to the headteacher or principal of the chosen educational establishment. This letter contained the details, intentions and aims of the research. An information sheet was provided outlining the importance of the research, the role of the participants and what would take place during the process. A sample of the consent form was also provided. Samples of the letter and the information sheet can be found in Appendices one and two respectively. A sample of the consent form can be found in Appendix four. Unfortunately, although

several attempts were made to enlist help from local schools, no replies were forthcoming, so this aspect of the study was abandoned.

At this stage of the research, my main concern was finding more participants. I approached a local Guide company and asked the Guides whether they would be prepared to take part in the study. In terms of recruitment the above procedure was adhered to in that a participant information sheet and a parental consent form was distributed prior to the questionnaires being answered. These activities took place a week apart from each other. Participants were aged between eleven and fourteen years, were from middle class families and were eight in total. Due to the fact that the questionnaires were aimed at a younger age group, the questions asked were slightly different - more age-appropriate and requiring shorter responses. My aim was to keep the length of the questionnaire relatively short as I did not want the activity to feel like homework. I ensured that each participant understood the questions by asking them to read through the questions prior to answering them. I encouraged them to ask any questions and to point out anything they didn't understand. They were a series of open questions which allowed participants the opportunity to give detailed responses. The questionnaires were completed in person while I was present in the room. I am aware of the fact that my presence may have influenced the girls' responses, however, the Girl Guide Association requires that there must be an adult present during any activity taking place. A table detailing the purpose of each question can be found in Appendix thirteen.

3.4.5: Interviews

One-to-one online interviews were chosen as a method of enquiry as opposed to postal responses as a means to 'offer the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and underlying motives' (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p.285). Altogether there were twelve students participating in the study and they were recruited in the following ways: Firstly, a flyer was designed (see Appendix twelve) and emailed to students studying English at a university in the East Midlands asking potential participants if they would like to take part in a PhD research project featuring heroes and heroines in young adult literature. Secondly, I approached groups of Year One students in a classroom situation and gave a brief introduction to my research. The duration of the interviews was no longer than forty-five minutes and the questions were semi-structured – each participant was asked the same questions in the same order relating to their reading choices, for example, the types of books they enjoyed, the type of hero/heroine they could relate to the most, and their perceptions of tattooed protagonists. There was, however, room to deviate from the question if the topic was relevant to the discussion. The questions were kept general and did not relate to a specific book or indeed any of the books in my study. It felt that asking participants to read nine books prior to taking part in the study was an unrealistic demand, guaranteed to generate few responses. The time of the interviews was arranged via email and the interview questions, and the participant information sheets were emailed to the participants prior to the interview taking place.

3.4.6: Feminist Qualitative Interviewing

In feminist qualitative interviewing a non-hierarchical stance is crucial in order to establish 'collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification and to conduct research that is transformative' (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.28). My aim, therefore, was to create a relaxed atmosphere and not to appear too officious, so the interviews were informal. The participants were given the opportunity to talk openly about their reading choices without being interrupted and were listened to in a non-judgemental way. This helped the interview to flow in a natural way and not appear too stilted. The questions were open questions selected to allow participants to elaborate on their responses and 'encourage cooperation and rapport' (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p.289). The interviews took place between August 2021 and January 2023. Each interview was recorded onto my own password-protected laptop and to ensure anonymity, the recordings were destroyed once the data had been transcribed. Participants were asked if they minded being recorded and were informed when the recording commenced. Further details relating to the interview questions can be found in Appendix fourteen.

3.4.7: Sampling and Recruiting Participants

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is undertaken when the sample is 'relevant to the research questions that are posed' (Bryman, 2016, p.408). Participants taking part in the study were selected due to the fact they were young adults who enjoyed reading and therefore adhered to the requirements of this study.

3.4.8: Informed consent of participants

Information sheets were available to all participants via email outlining the aims and intentions of the research. These were personally handed to the Guides and emailed to the participants a week prior to the date each activity took place. A letter of consent was given to all participants that they and their parent or guardian were required to sign before they took part in the study. It was made clear on the participation information sheet that any information given would remain anonymous and interviews were referred to as 'Interview 1' or 'Interview 2' as opposed to using names or any other form of identification. The transcripts were not available to third parties and were only accessible to the myself as the researcher. Once the interviews were transcribed the recordings were deleted from the laptop of the researcher. Participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions at any stage in the research process and were made aware of the benefits and risks of taking part in the study before they began. The fact that participants could not withdraw from the study once the survey was submitted is outlined on the consent form, a copy of which can be found in appendix four. The university students taking part in the study were over the age of eighteen and therefore did not require parental consent to take part in the study.

3.4.9: Data Analysis

The questionnaire and interview responses were analysed using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) and a textual analysis was used for the nine selected novels. The details of these processes are given in more detail below.

3.4.10: Critical Discourse Analysis

Since this study focuses on issues of marginalisation, dominance, culture and social power, critical discourse analysis (CDA), with its emphasis on social problems, political issues (van Dijk, 1998) and power relationships (Paltridge, 2012), was chosen to analyse the interview and questionnaire responses. Critical discourse analysis, according to van Dijk relates to the way that 'social power abuse, dominance and equality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (van Dijk, 1998, n.p.). How we communicate and how we interpret language are all influenced by our culture, experiences, social class, religion and other defining factors:

> Critical discourse analysis examines the use of discourse in relation to social and cultural issues such as race, politics, gender and identity and asks why and what the implications are of this kind of use. (Paltridge, 2012, p.186)

Furthermore, critical discourse analysis observes the relationship between the language, culture and ideology of a particular individual or group (Qianbo, 2016) with particular consideration paid to how people communicate within their specific groups (Paltridge, 2012). The aim of such an approach to discourse analysis is to acknowledge and expose the elements of language which are not immediately apparent, for example, hidden values, attitudes, and standpoints and to make connections between the underlying social and cultural ideologies. Discourse analysis, therefore, examines the style and the

function of the language used and includes: 'spoken, written and signed language and multimodal/multimedia forms of communication' (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p.372). It also aims to enhance our knowledge of the ways in which language, discourse, and social and political structures interconnect (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017). Critical discourse analysis operates on the premise that power is monopolized by elite bodies in society in order to maintain control (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017). Power can be defined as 'the ability to impose one's will on others' (Paltridge, 2019, p.244), and in his theory of hegemony, philosopher Antonio Gramsci maintained that:

> The ruling class has created a hegemonic culture, which has disseminated its own beliefs, values, and norms in such a way that their power and authority have come to be taken as common sense and accepted by all members of society (Gramsci, 1970, in Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017, p.4).

A further goal of critical discourse analysis, therefore, is to highlight the power imbalance within text in order to create an awareness of its existence (Reisigl, 2008, in Flowerdew and Richardson, 2017).

The selected approach for this critical discourse analysis is van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach which 'attempts to connect the micro-structure of language to the macro-structure of society' (Jahedi, Abdullah and Mukundun, 2014). In this context 'macro level' refers to the inequalities of power within society and 'micro level' refers to the verbal communication within it (Jahedi, Abdullah and Mukundun, 2014). This approach was selected due to its focus on mass media publications to elicit social power and control and since this dissertation explores diversity and its representation within young

adult literature, it was deemed the most appropriate. According to Gerbner: 'Publication is the instrument of community consciousness and of governance among large groups of people too numerous or too dispersed to interact face-to-face' (Gerbner in van Dijk, 2011, p.15). Sims Bishop maintains that:

> Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books (Sims Bishop, 1990, in Ramdarshan Bold, 2019, p.ix).

According to Ramdarshan Bold, the Anglo-American publishing industry is dominated by a small quantity of large corporations whose focus is on best-sellers and mainstream demand. This results in the neglect of alternative or marginal publications (Bourdieu, 1993, in Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). When publishing is controlled by the dominant social group, therefore, members of minority groups who remain underrepresented or represented in stereotypical ways, may perceive themselves negatively or feel ostracised in a society where they are largely ignored. This further impacts on the ways in which readers from *dominant* groups perceive and interact with members of minority groups (Bishop, 1990, in Ramdarshan Bold, 2019). It is, however, important to acknowledge the fact that the novels chosen for analysis are mainstream publications. This does not negate their importance in any way since they present a diverse range of characters and tackle a variety of important issues.

Perhaps the most significant disadvantage of discourse analysis is that, in common with textual analysis, it is very much open to the interpretation of the individual

researcher. From a feminist viewpoint, critical discourse analysis has become a favoured method of analysis due to its focus on social inequity, oppression, and dominance (van Dijk, 1998, Hesse-Biber, 2014):

> Indeed, feminist scholarship is arguably the most extensive and theoretically the most developed form of critical discourse analysis, in which many forms of texts, talk, interaction and communication have been examined for their enactment and reproduction of male dominance and female resistance. (van Dijk, 1998, n.p.)

Equally importantly, a feminist perspective on research aims to elicit political, social and cultural change as opposed to searching for an unquestionable, 'absolute truth' (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p.52).

In the light of the above, therefore, the interview and questionnaire responses were examined for dominant discourses. These were arrived at through multiple readings of the questionnaire and interview responses. The process of analysis is outlined in the table below. In total, five dominant discourses emerged from the analysis, focusing on gender and the ways in which protagonists are portrayed by the authors. These discourses are as follows:

- The discourse of social expectation
- The discourse of diversity
- The discourse of marginalisation
- The discourse of social stereotyping
- The discourse of social change

3.4.11: Stages of Critical Discourse Analysis

The stages of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) are outlined in the table below and an extract from the analysis can be viewed in Appendix eleven.

Stages of Critical Discourse Analysis	
Stage 1	Interviews were transcribed and the interview responses and the questionnaires were scanned several times in order to make sense of the data.
Stage 2	The transcripts were annotated according to themes and topics which emerged. Words and phrases that disclosed the attitude of the respondent towards heroes, heroines, and tattooed protagonists were highlighted. Words and phrases that made references to power or an imbalance of power were highlighted.
Stage 3	The material was coded according to relevant themes and discourses. An inductive and deductive coding process was undertaken: inductively to ascertain which themes and perspectives emerged from the texts and deductively to gather evidence to support the themes and evaluations (Creswell and Poth, 2018).
Stage 4	The material was organised into dominant discourses.

Stage 5	Each discourse and the way in which it related to the participants responses was discussed in detail.

3.4.12: Analysing Texts

The nine chosen texts were analysed in the following ways:

1. The texts were organised according to literary genre – social realism, fantasy, and tattoo magic.
2. I looked at topics such as stereotyping, social class, personal characteristics, lifestyle choices of the characters, and the story arc in order to explore the authors' constructions of the tattooed protagonists.

3.4.13: Textual analysis

The nine young adult publications featuring tattooed protagonists were analysed using textual analysis. Its aim was to ascertain whether tattooed characters portrayed in literature – their relationships, lifestyles, and personal characteristics - reflect or challenge the research findings outlined in the previous chapters regarding social attitudes and stereotyping. For this reason, I have paid particular attention to the following:

- Positive or negative descriptions of tattooed characters relating to physical appearance and personal characteristics, for example, whether female tattooed protagonists are overtly sexual with more than one sexual partner.

- Story arcs which validate tattooed protagonists and present a selection of well-rounded, interesting, and balanced characters.
- Stereotypical language relating to the life choices of the characters, for example, whether the hero or heroine is a heavy drinker, a fighter, or a trouble-maker.
- Relationships between the tattooed protagonists and other key characters.
- The heroine/hero's journey.

This study has also sought to explore the ways in which the characters differ and the characteristics they have in common. The purpose of a textual analysis is to explore the varying discourses, genres and styles and the ways in which they are drawn upon and articulated together (Fairclough, 2005). It is a method by which the content, function, and structure of a text may be described and interpreted (Frey, Botan and Kreps, 1999) and can be seen as 'an attempt to gather information about sense-making practices – not only in cultures radically different from our own, but also within our own nations' (McKee, 2003, p.14). Textual analysis, therefore, is an examination of the relationships between language, approach, genre (Fairclough, 2005) and culture (McKee, 2003). It is a means by which social messages incorporated in a text may be interpreted and a method that requires 'analytical examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates' (Mertova and Webster, 2019, p.4). Fairclough (2005) ascertains that analysis takes place on several levels: semantic, grammatical, vocabulary and phonological. Textual analysis, then, is the relationship between these components.

Textual analysis has been criticised, however, for being a limited method if used alone due to the fact that meaning may vary according to the interpreter (Fairclough, 2005) and may be dependent on their life experience in terms of education, culture, economic

background, ethnicity and family life. Nevertheless, textual analysis as a method of interpretation is a valuable means of gaining an understanding of the messages conveyed by a text within its cultural context.

This stage of the research relates to the second two research objectives: **2. To identify whether literary characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative, positive, or ambiguous way; 3. To ascertain whether there are any differences in the portrayal of male and female characters with body modifications, specifically tattoos.**

The textual analysis of nine novels featuring tattooed protagonists makes up the main part of my research and follows on from the interviews. The nine narratives chosen for analysis were selected for the following criteria – that they were written specifically for young adult readers and that they contained one or more tattooed protagonist. In order to choose the relevant publications, I consulted publishing websites in search of contemporary fiction with a tattooing theme using the search terms: 'young adult literature featuring tattooed protagonists' and 'tattooed protagonists in young adult literature'. Tattooed protagonists do not appear with any great regularity until relatively recently. Of course, there have been fictional texts relating to tattooing – *The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury (1951) and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* by Stieg Larsson (2005) were written for an adult audience and *The Illustrated Mum* (1999) by Jacqueline Wilson was written for children. Goodreads listed thirty-six narratives from the newly-emerged tattoo magic genre and from this list, I selected three titles: *Ink Exchange* by Melissa Marr (2008); *Stolen Ink* by Holly Evans (2017) and *Frost Moon* by Anthony Francis (2010). *Stolen Ink* is the first of the four narratives in the *Ink Born* series (2017-2018) and *Frost Moon* is the first of the *Skindancer* trilogy (2010-2015). I had no prior knowledge of the titles or the authors, so I selected them at random. I felt that it was important that I did

not limit my research to fantasy scenarios in order to make worthwhile comparisons between characters presented in real world situations and those featured in fantasy settings. The main challenge encountered at this stage of my research was locating narratives where the stories were situated in the real world. I had read one of the publications, *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly* by Robin Klein (1989), prior to commencing this research and remembered that it contained a tattooed character. *Ink is Thicker than Water* (2013) by Amy Spalding was eventually located on Goodreads. *Green Angel* by Alice Hoffman (2003) was also chosen although as a fantasy realism novel, it stands alone, being neither set wholly in the real world nor situated in a world of fantasy. For the purpose of this research, however, I have referred to it as a fantasy novel due to the fact that it contains fantastical elements and references to magic. *Ink* (2017) by Alice Broadway was the second fantasy novel selected as its tattooing theme and fantasy setting conformed perfectly to the requirements of my study. Due to the fact that all the above authors and their literary characters are white, I searched for authors from diverse ethnic backgrounds writing about tattooed protagonists. This was to ensure richer, more varied data and to enable me to examine the texts intersectionally from a feminist perspective. With this in mind, I selected *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi (2018) and *Henna Wars* by Adiba Jaigirdar (2020) – two very different stories, the former taking place in a fantasy setting and deeply allegorical and the latter, a story set in the real world where the focus is heavily centred around culture, sexuality and racial discrimination. Although the tattoos in *Henna Wars* are not permanent, I included the novel due to its themes of culture, prejudice and the symbolism surrounding the tattoos. *Children of Blood and Bone* is the first in a series of four and *Henna Wars* stands alone.

3.5: Feminist Theory and Analysis

This study draws on feminist theory to aid my analysis, my particular focus being on gender and sex issues, stereotypical characterization, and negative language relating to tattooed protagonists. Young adult literature encompasses a wide range of themes and issues but typically there will be a quest or a journey of some sort which will change the life of the protagonist (Campbell, 1993; Hunt and Lenz, 2001). This quest may take the form of an outward journey. Traditionally, however, the hero's journey has related exclusively to the male experience: 'The hero tale, still the staple in contemporary fantasy, has been essentially a male preserve' (Hunt and Lenz, 2001, p.3). Women have tended to remain on the side lines, where they wait for rescue, administer poisons, or produce offspring – a beautiful, somnolent adolescent passively waiting to be kissed, a wicked, insecure stepmother offering poisonous apples as she watches her beauty fade. It is the prince (always handsome, of course), who ventures into danger to liberate the vulnerable female and provide her with a 'happily-ever-after'. The hero, then, must leave his familiar surroundings to seek his fortune or embark upon a precarious voyage: 'Heroic quests featuring male protagonists traditionally adhere to a pattern […] a humble birth; orphan status; being the subject of a mysterious prophecy […] a special gift' (Luthi, 1970, p.153). More often than not, he possesses a selection of magical powers and abilities which enable him to face a series of hazards and perils: '[…] the tendency has always been to endow the hero with extraordinary powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception' (Campbell, 1993, p.319).

In terms of the female journey, Maureen Murdock's model will be applied to the texts. The heroine's journey, according to Murdock (1990), is different. It is distinguishable from the 'stereotypical ego-driven masculine hero's journey admired in mainstream culture' (Murdock, 1990, p.xv) in that the female quest is centred around a pursuit for identity and a 'rejection of the feminine as defined as passive, manipulative, or non-productive' (Murdock, 1990, p.6). It further rejects the notion of perfection, the idea that being described as 'feminine' must mean appearing and acting in a certain way.

3.6: Reliability and Triangulation

Reliability

Reliability relates to the consistency of the analytical procedures and acknowledging any biases on behalf of the researcher (Noble and Smith, 2015). To ensure reliability, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that as a heavily tattooed female, I may be biased towards certain attitudes relating to tattooing as a practice. In order to avoid influencing the participants' responses in the study, the questions in both the questionnaire and interview relate to literary protagonists and do not refer to personal opinions or experiences regarding tattoos. Furthermore, as each interview was conducted online, my tattoos were not visible.

Triangulation

Triangulation can be defined as: '[…] the use of multiple data sources and multiple research techniques so that the researcher can gain a more complete understanding of

the topic under examination' (Paltridge, 2012, p.245). The importance of triangulation in any study is to enable to researcher to cross-examine the findings (Bell, 2014). Furthermore, utilising a variety of analytical methods reduces bias and provides more insights (Bans-Akutey, 2021). To ensure triangulation in this study, a critical discourse analysis of the interview and questionnaire responses was used followed by a textual analysis of nine narratives featuring tattooed protagonists.

3.7: Ethical Issues

To obtain permission to go ahead with the study, I applied to the Ethics Committee at the University of Northampton. There were substantial ethical concerns relating to this research due to the fact that it involved working with adolescent participants, focusing on issues around body image, which is potentially a sensitive topic, especially for adolescents due to social pressure to look a certain way and conform to social expectations. For this reason, my study was 'high risk' due to the fact that topics such as this may generate anxiety, emotional and psychological discomfort, and feelings of insecurity. Furthermore, adolescent participants may feel pressure from peers to give certain responses on the questionnaire. As a researcher I was aware of the sensitive nature of the topic and endeavoured to work in a respectful manner at all times. As a feminist researcher, I was conscious of my personal perspective on tattooing. I was also aware of my own physical insecurities and the fact that as a heavily tattooed woman, I have faced discrimination and bias due to my unconventional appearance. Due to the high-risk nature of my study, I upheld the standards outlined by BERA and undertook to

'minimize emotional harm' (BERA 2018, p.19) by ensuring that the discussion taking place during the interviews, together with the subsequent questions were kept general and related to literary characters as opposed to personal experiences and issues. To ensure the safety of my participants, a list of addresses and websites containing help and information surrounding body image concerns was placed at the bottom of the interview question sheet. Prior to taking part in the study, information sheets detailing relevant aspects of the study were issued to all the participants. These can be viewed in Appendix two. The participants' responses were anonymised, and no personal details were given including the name and address of the school, college or university they attended. Furthermore, as a heavily tattooed woman, I am aware that my appearance could have influenced participants' responses in the case of the younger participants since they were conducted face-to-face. However, my tattoos were not visible to the online participants.

Although participants' rights to withdraw from the study was clarified on the information sheet, the researcher ensured that participants felt no obligation to continue with the study if they experienced any discomfort or distress. Due to the COVID-19 situation, certain amendments were made to my original plan. These amendments can be viewed in Appendix three.

3.8: How did I minimize unexpected obstacles?

As with any piece of academic work, it is important to work in a consistent manner and where possible, plan effective use of time. The unexpected obstacle in this study

was of course, COVID-19 which meant that working with participants and analysing the data produced from the questionnaires and interviews was delayed. To minimize the impact of this obstacle I ensured that I had adequate time to receive and analyse the responses from both the interviews and the questionnaires.

3.9: Chapter Overview

This chapter focused on the aims and objectives of the study outlining feminist perspectives on multi methods research in terms of design and analysis. Ethical issues along with the obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic were also discussed. The two methods of analysis – textual and analysis and critical discourse analysis and the strengths and weaknesses of both were explored along with the problems encountered regarding recruiting participants. Ethical issues along with the obstacles posed by the COVID-19 pandemic were also discussed. The outcome of the study and its findings will be discussed in chapter eight. The following chapter contains the critical discourse analysis of the interview and questionnaire responses and explores notions of power relating to the predominant discourses which emerged from the analysis.

Chapter 4

Critical Discourse analysis

4.1: Introduction

The following chapter is a critical discourse analysis of the responses to the questionnaires and interviews given by readers of young adult literature. Findings from both the interview and questionnaire responses will be presented together within the key themes as opposed to being explored in separate sections. An example of the analysis can be found in appendix eleven. The predominant discourses which emerged from the analysis are as follows: **Social Stereotyping**, **Marginalisation, Diversity, Social expectation,** and **Social Change**. These discourses emerged from an analysis of the data and were deduced both inductively and deductively – inductively observing which themes emerged from the text and deductively from examining the theories surrounding body diversity outlined in the secondary research highlighted in chapter two. Furthermore, the nature of the research questions meant that certain assumptions could be made regarding potential discourses. There are of course, overlaps within the first four themes in that some of the responses placed in 'Social stereotyping' could also, for example, be applied to 'Social expectation.' There were also two smaller themes which emerged. Firstly, from a feminist perspective, observations were made relating to the fact that the heroine's journey is often eclipsed by that of the hero. Secondly, the notion of the imperfect hero or heroine who readers

were more likely to like and to relate to as opposed to the notion of the 'perfect' hero or heroine. However, since the focus of this dissertation is body diversity with particular focus on tattooed protagonists, it was necessary to adhere to themes relating to the physical appearance of heroes and heroines and their roles within literary narratives. Some of the responses relate to specific questions, however, references to the above discourses were made throughout both the questionnaires and interviews.

The following sections of this chapter contain the analysis of the interview and questionnaire responses and examine the relationships between power and discourse and how these relationships impact upon and create social structures.

4.2: Power and Social Stereotyping

One of the themes to emerge from the analysis was how literary protagonists were often presented in stereotypical ways in both their appearance and behaviour. The discourse of social stereotyping relates to the ways in which participants perceived literary characters to be portrayed by the authors of the stories. A power imbalance is reinforced when certain body types or gender-conforming tropes predominate to the exclusion of alternative lifestyles or diverse body types. This discourse indicates that although in the world of young adult literature things are slowly changing, traditional stereotypes are still evident in that often heroes, heroines, and villains are expected to adhere to a range of specific behaviours. One respondent commented:

> […]the evil stepmother trope and […] how that's linked to an ugly witch, and we look at pretty women to be good and deformities to be negative

> because it doesn't fit in with how women are meant to look […] and even for men as well. Like you never see a chubby hero (Interview 1).

This was reinforced further in interview four:

> The villain is always […] ugly, bald, rich, powerful. Lex Luther […] and then again, you've got Kingpin […] fat, bald, the ugly underdog. The superhero […] he's normally the perfect high school sweetheart (Interview 4).

Some respondents associated the notion of heroes and heroines with stereotypical ideals: 'Heroes and villains – makes me think of Batman' (Interview 7); 'Traditionally, all heroes are handsome' (Interview 9). Readers tended to associate a hero or heroine with characteristics such as 'bravery…power, and resilience' (Questionnaire 1) and stated that they were typically characters who have the innate ability to rescue others from peril: to 'save the day' (Questionnaires 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7); 'I feel that definitely the heroes […] are trying to save a family member or a friend, or more specifically, the world' (Interview 6). Some readers further observed that their heroes and heroines conform to a set of prescribed social norms regarding appearance – beauty is associated with purity and doing good deeds and ugly or deformed is linked to badness and evil (Dion, Berscheid and Walster, 1972). There is often a sense of wholesomeness regarding the traditional hero (Murdock, 1990). The participant in interview three mentions the hero in terms of the 'high school sweetheart' and backs up the notion that he is often the long-established good looking, athletic and popular heterosexual male that has for decades, dominated literature and film. Although his image dominates, he is, however, as much a victim of social stereotyping as his female counterpart. Chapter two examined the notion that body dysmorphia is becoming more common in men due

to the commodification of the male body (Wolf, 2002). Furthermore, larger women feature film and literature far more regularly than men. The observation that you 'never see a chubby hero' remains largely correct as the 'chubby' male character is relegated to play the role of the sidekick or the comedic distraction.

Interestingly, respondents regarded heroes and heroines as possessing similar characteristics. Adjectives such as 'determination', 'proactive', 'kind', 'resilient', 'brave' recurred throughout the interview and questionnaire responses relating to both genders. From a feminist viewpoint, these are important observations since traditionally, qualities such as brave, determined, and resilient were associated with the male hero. Participants referred to bravery as a heroic personality trait (Questionnaire 1, 2, 3). In terms of the physical appearance of protagonists, respondents were less concerned with detailed physical descriptions and more interested in personal characteristics. Interestingly, however, heroes were referred to as 'handsome' yet none of the participants described a heroine as being beautiful. In fact, kindness was a recurring theme relating to heroes and heroines and most respondents to the interview question five mentioned this in terms of the strengths admired most in a hero or heroine.

> People who are kind and able to make difficult decisions even in difficult situations. I like it when they are kind, if they have kindness. If they have a strong character and they know right and wrong, I can believe they're a hero (Interview 12).

> […]one who is compassionate and […] kind…and a good person as well (Interview 11).

Questionnaire respondents also referred to kindness as an important *quality* in a hero or heroine, overriding physical characteristics such as 'beautiful', 'muscular' or 'athletic'. This is summed up most eloquently in interview seven: 'The character of a person matters to me, not the physical appearance'. It may be pertinent at this point to acknowledge that out of all twenty participants, only three were male. Male participants did not place any more emphasis on the physical appearance of protagonists than female participants. Furthermore, they did not focus on the importance on the physical attractiveness of female characters.

When asked about the heroes and heroines they could relate to the most, respondents also focused on personality traits as opposed to physical appearance: 'diverse, powerful, brave, kind, able to overcome challenges, ethnically and neurologically diverse' were some of the descriptors given. There was also some emphasis on ambiguity – that respondents tended to relate to heroes and heroines who are neither wholly good nor wholly bad. The notion of 'doing the right thing' despite being under considerable pressure, conflicted, or being consumed with self-doubt was a recurring trope: (Questionnaire 7, Interview 1, Interview 4, Interview 11); 'I quite like somebody who isn't good or bad. They're not necessarily right but they're doing it for the right reasons (Interview 1); 'Heroes and heroines with flaws, who are not portrayed as being perfect' (Interview 11); Somebody a bit more approachable and relatable' (Interview 1); 'I like when they're just kind […] even with this power they might have, they're not […] absorbed with it […] They're still taking time for others…I find that if they're too perfect it's hard to like them' (Interview 2).

The same tendency was applied to the characteristics of literary protagonists that were admired the most (Questionnaire, question 8). Again, adjectives such as 'passionate' (Questionnaire 1), 'funny, determined, relatable' (Questionnaire 3), 'smart and brave' (Questionnaire 4), 'talented' (Questionnaire 5) were used to describe favourite heroes and heroines. Interestingly, again, there were not huge differences in the way in which participants described heroes and heroines. The general consensus, however, was that heroes are attractive and physically pleasing. One participant claimed that heroes were 'always handsome' (Questionnaire 3) and there were references to heroines being 'slim' or 'size zero' although described personal characteristics tended to be the same across the genders. However, three questionnaire participants described a heroine as a 'female hero' (Questionnaire 4, 5 and 7) without describing any personality traits. Their image of a hero was described in terms of bravery and physical strength, but the heroine was given no personality traits of her own.

In terms of tattooed protagonists, participants had observed that in accordance with the findings made in secondary literature, they are still portrayed in stereotypical ways – male tattooed protagonists tend to be tough or a 'hard-arse' (Interview 1), with a muscular physique whereas tattooed female protagonists possess magical powers and dwell in the realms of fantasy. In interview 3, the participant linked tattooing to being impure: '[…] the prince or the princess, they won't have tattoos […] that image of purity'. Here tattooing is related to the idea that the practice is somehow likened to being unclean and associated with disease (Osterud, 2009). Tattooed protagonists leading ordinary lives appear to be a rarity:

> I can't remember a book […] that just has a general protagonist that lists their piercings and tattoos […] The only one is if they've got tattoos and they're portrayed as being proper hardarse […] They'll just be a female protagonist with a buff man with arm tattoos. If it's a woman and she's got tattoos, she's like mysterious, slinky, and seductive. It's never some soft little woman reading in the corner (Interview 1).

> They (tattooed characters) have inherited their tribe […] they'll have tattoos […] biker, you know, the gangs […] they all tend to have tattoos, but they'll never have an everyday person with tattoos (Interview 3).

When they occur at all, tattooed female protagonists have been observed to be tough and feisty. An extract from interview three refers to tattooed characters as being '[…] the ones to be feared, they are the ones to be scared of'. Again, tattooing is linked to unsociable behaviour, the association with gang culture and the notion that tattooed individuals are trouble-makers (Osterud, 2009). Interestingly, this brings us to the subject of personal power. Participants used words and phrases such as 'warrior', 'mythical being' and 'seductive'. Although participants' observations regarding tattooed protagonists have been largely centred around stereotyping and traditional character representations, there is an undertone of innate strength within the characters. Each of the above words indicate a level of personal power and strength, qualities which are rarely associated with tattooed protagonists or indeed tattooed individuals in the real world. These descriptions are positive references to a set of characters who have historically been perceived in negative ways.

There was, however, also the recurring theme of tribal affiliation and stereotypical associations with gangs, pirates and sailors:

> There's not many people with tattoos but if you look at some comic characters, you get the Japanese Yakuza […] the traditional tattoos of their tribes and again, that's very stereotypical of books and comics […] they belong to that tribe, they must have tattoos (interview 3).

> […] but generally, a stereotypical bad person […] biker, you know, the gangs […] they all tend to have tattoos (Interview 3).

> When you talk about tattoos, it just reminds me of *Pirates of the Caribbean* (interview 10).

> They (tattooed people) used to be portrayed as violent lowlifes. Obviously, there are other aspects to it […] those characters would be portrayed as sailors […] a member of a biker gang (Interview 11).

This backs up the notion outlined in chapter three that tattooing is linked to subcultures and marginalised groups. Attitudes to tattooing, however, have slowly begun to change which is arguably why there are now a plethora of narratives featuring tattooed protagonists, at least in the fantasy genre. This observation, however, was only made by two respondents, backing up the notion that taboos and social stigmas are slow to break down and attitudes in some sectors of society are slow to change. With regard to gender, participants did not observe that tattooed females are generally viewed more negatively that tattooed males. In terms of power, the social message that is conveyed regarding the restricted presence of tattooed protagonists and their stereotypical

portrayal in mass media publications, is that tattooing is a negative practice. Its disagreeable associations have resulted in tattooed individuals being socially ostracised and being confined to the fringes of society. However, as has previously been mentioned, tattooed protagonists possess a power of their own - a strength which has thus far gone unnoticed in literature relating to the subject. The next section of this chapter explores the discourse of marginalisation and the ways in which certain social groups have largely been excluded from mainstream society.

4.3: Power and Marginalisation

A further theme emerging from the analysis was the theme of marginalisation – specific social groups being ignored or considered to be of lesser importance. The discourse of marginalisation refers to the participants' observations linked to groups that have been excluded or ignored. From a female gaze, it would appear that the heroine's story has traditionally been eclipsed by that of the hero (Hunt and Lenz, 2001). In interview one, the participant makes the following observations:

> As a woman, you do think about the female narrative and how this should be different […] women who have not been at the forefront becoming heroines (Interview 1).

> And what I've noticed, as well, is when it's a trio, it's always two men and a woman. It's never two girls and a boy. In a trio, a woman's allowed to be there but there's not allowed to be two of them […] *Harry Potter*, *Phineas and Ferb* […] two brothers and a sister (Interview 1).

The participant in questionnaire two also made the following observation:

> The masculine person always seems more important and has more spotlight, when a feminine person should also have that, but they're seen as […] not as important (Questionnaire 2).

The heroine's story differs from the hero's journey in that the heroine must fight for her right to be present in the story to begin with (Murdock, 1990) and is required to overcome and challenge feminine stereotypes together with barriers which prevent her from living the life she chooses. Interview One refers to 'women who have not been at the forefront becoming heroines'. While this particular response refers to retellings of classical mythology, it is an important observation because it can be applied to other narratives where the main focus has been on the male protagonist and the traditional hero's journey or quest. This notion is further reinforced with the reference to women being 'allowed to be there' (Interview 1).

One participant refers to the notion of larger women becoming heroines, a concept which has appeared relatively recently in both literature and film:

> I would like to read about heroines who are, y'know, slightly bigger in size and still do good things […] like they are not just overtaken by the fact that they are a plus-size character, they're still a heroine (Interview 2).

However, it is an important observation since it makes reference, not just to women as a marginalised group, but to female protagonists who do not conform to the 'ideal' body shape favoured in contemporary Western society. Up until recently, this demographic has been largely ignored and women whose physical frame is larger than

fashionably thin have failed to be represented. The fact that a woman's body shape should compromise her ability to do 'good things' and thus render her invisible (Interview 2) is both frustrating and ridiculous.

Interviews three, five, and twelve relate to the notion that tattooed protagonists are more likely to be found in fantasy fiction than in real world scenarios:

> Tattooed characters are more likely to appear in fantasy novels because they have that kind of freedom of how they want to be (Interview 3).
>
> I think that they (tattooed protagonists) are more likely to appear in fantasy novels because of the way it separates them from reality as they are often not accepted within society (Interview 5).
>
> I suppose probably fantasy […] unless in real life, they're probably classed as some sort of villain because they've got tattoos (Interview 12).

The fact that they are 'often not accepted in society' (Interview 5) indicates that mainstream society may be more comfortable with their presence in fantasy as opposed to the real world. In a fantasy setting, authors have the advantage of being able to create outrageous and eccentric characters and be as bizarre as they choose. In conventional society, this occurs less although it is not unknown for individuals to modify their bodies in creative ways. Despite the fact that tattooing has become more popular and has moved into mainstream culture (Pitts, 2007), prejudice is still apparent in some sectors of society. That tattooed protagonists receive some representation can only be viewed as positive, however, the fact that they are confined predominantly to fantasy fiction suggests that publishers may still not be comfortable with their presence

in mainstream fiction. An imbalance of power occurs where tattooed individuals still experience marginalisation and face exclusion from some areas of employment (Buss and Hodges, 2017) in the same way in which tattooed protagonists are excluded largely from real world narratives.

4.4: Power and Diversity

Diversity was an important theme which emerged from the initial analysis as it was mentioned frequently by respondents, especially when referring to more recent publications. It can be argued that power and diversity are closely linked in that the representation of a diverse selection of characters may result in previously excluded social groups feeling less powerless within a society which has previously failed to acknowledge their existence. A discourse of diversity relates to the participants' responses to interview question fifteen which asks whether they feel that a diverse range of characters are represented in young adult literature. Diversity in this context refers to race, disability, ethnicity, body diversity, weight, sexuality, and physical appearance and my interest in this question centred around whether or not participants felt that newer publications contained more diverse character representations than that of older publications. I was also interested in finding out whether diversity included tattooed protagonists or whether this group remains largely marginalised in literature. Questionnaire participants were asked if they thought that tattooed characters were represented in young adult literature (Question 12). Responses to the question varied: 'It depends, tattoos are more common now however […]not every person agrees with them' (Questionnaire 1); Not often as young adults with any tattoos are seen as bad

people who rebel against others' (Questionnaire 2); 'Sometimes like teen fiction, there's a 'good girl' and 'bad boy' trope and the boy always has a motorbike and tattoos' (Questionnaire 3). Some participants simply responded with the word 'no' or 'sometimes'. The general consensus amongst interview participants was that more recent publications featured a wider variety of characters, but few references were made regarding tattooed characters. Most respondents referred to disability, race, and body type. One important observation that emerged from the interview responses, however, was the reference to a predominant white culture:

> […] young, white, that is particularly what is represented (Interview 1).
>
> It's getting a lot better now but even when I started reading, it was all about the white female protagonists saving the day or white male protagonist saving the day (Interview 2).
>
> You don't see […] overweight people, or again, race […] and this is horrible to say, that token black person […] It's a very white culture, isn't it? (Interview 3).
>
> […]In terms of whether a varied selection of society is represented in literature […] there is too much stereotyping of white, British middle class (Interview 8).

In retrospect, this should have come as no surprise, yet with the onset of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013 and publications on the market written by black authors such as Angie Thomas, Renee Watson and Tomi Adeyemi, the climate is beginning to change, albeit slowly.

Although generally, it was agreed that there is more diversity in contemporary literature for young adults, there still remains the belief that more progress needs to be made: 'They're definitely incorporating it a bit more but they're doing it at a slow pace' (Interview 6). Respondents observed that there is still 'not a varied enough selection' (Interview 2) and that 'publishers tend to aim for 'that generic targeted audience' (Interview 3). However, there appears to be a clash between the generic, white-dominated literature publishers have produced in the past and material readers would like to read:

> I like to see a diverse range of characters in the books I read because in life people aren't all the same. It's like what I said earlier about body shape. Just having one type of body leads to people feeling insecure about their bodies and like they […] don't matter or aren't good enough (Interview 12).

> I like diversity […] I like to know that everybody has a place in the story. The idea that you are evil or should be excluded just because you belong to a particular group […] (Interview 11).

> Physically diverse characters reflect reality. We're not all the same, are we? It would be boring if we were, and strange, I think. I like diversity. I like to see it in books and in film. It's important to acknowledge that we're not all the same (Interview 9).

> I think it's good to have that representation […] to have that diversity instead of the typical skinny white girl (Interview 10).

The idea that literature is a reflection of the society in which it is produced backs up Rogers' (2004) observation that discourses are intricately entwined with the social, political, economic and racial relationships occurring within it. Messages conveyed within literature inform us which social groups are 'in' or 'out'. The majority of young adult literature published more than five years ago indicated quite clearly that the power within society remained predominantly with the white middle classes. Even within that demographic, there were subgroups which remained marginalised, invisible, and largely unrepresented – the disabled, the mentally ill, the sexually diverse, people whose bodies deviate from being fashionably thin, and individuals with tattoos or other forms of body modification. The exclusion of these groups in literature and in other areas of mass media communication presents the message that these groups are somehow unacceptable. In their invisibility, the unwritten message which is conveyed is that they are somehow flawed or have less to offer than an individual whose appearance and lifestyle conforms to a set of social norms.

Arguably, literature may play an important role in tackling issues of inequality; it even has a responsibility to do so. In the review of literature in chapter one, it is mentioned that publishers of children's literature are now encouraged to include diverse characters in their stories. A representative from Penguin Random House stated that:

> …we are keen that all young people have the opportunity to see themselves represented in the pages of books they read […] all aspects of diversity are important in our publishing and representation is actively considered during acquisition of our books (Penguin Random House, 2024).

A copy of the full letter that this quotation was extracted from can be found in Appendix fifteen. In this sense, the literary climate is changing. The discourse of social change and the power dynamics in society, however, shall be explored in the final section of this chapter. The following section of this chapter examines the concept of power and the discourse of power and social expectation. It explores the notion that the exclusion of specific groups and subgroups results in the expectation that our heroes and heroines will appear in a certain way. In other words, we have been led to believe that a hero or heroine can only be described as such if she or he possesses a physicality which conforms to traditional set of social conventions. This has occurred through continuous reinforcement through mass media communication and the prevalence of protagonists whose physical appearance is impossible to obtain.

4.5: Power and Social Expectation

A significant theme which arose from the analysis was social expectation. The discourse of social expectation relates to the body - the expectations that surround its appearance, shape, and size and how this is reflected in young adult literature. The notion of power in this context refers to the fact that portrayals of women (and often men) are limited to specific body types. This arguably reinforces the devaluation of those whose body does not conform to the socially accepted norm. Although there are books on the market that feature larger heroes and heroines, for example, *The Duff* by Kody Keplinger (2010) and *Fat Boy Swim* by Catherine Ford (2003), the traditional portrayal of the beautiful, thin heroine and the muscular, athletic hero is still apparent. However, as has previously been mentioned in Chapter 1, authors of young adult

literature have begun to portray larger female protagonists in positive ways. One participant made the following observation regarding the previously mentioned *The Duff*:

> The Duff […] She's the protagonist and she's chubby […] and she gets the micky taken out of her but she's still the main character (Interview 1).

Regarding portrayals of female characters, one participant made the observation that expectations surrounding the female body are full of contradictions:

> […] you still get stereotypical descriptions […] male bodies are meant to be strong and muscular and the cliché […] female bodies are meant to be slim yet still curvy and a size zero. They're meant to have small boobs and massive boobs at the same time, big bum, little bum (Interview 12).

When considering concepts of physicality, the ideal male body shape remains largely the same – the athletic, toned body of the hero in classical Greek mythology. The female body, however, must change and evolve in ways in which culture dictates. However, 'massive boobs' cannot exceed a certain size and a 'big bum' can only be so if it is fashionably surgically enhanced. Questionnaire participants were asked if they thought that male and female bodies were described differently in young adult literature. Whereas some responses were uninformative, consisting of '?' or simply, 'No', others confirmed that male bodies tended to be muscular and athletic whereas female bodies were more likely to be slim or 'size zero'. Questionnaire 5 sums it up with the following: 'Male = muscles, female = Figure/hair. Bodies that diverge from this prescribed social norm are largely ignored which is possibly why tattooed protagonists are more likely to be found in fantasy narratives than in real-life scenarios as well as the

fact that they are often perceived as 'bad people who rebel against others a lot' (Questionnaire 2). The observations made by the participants are that the body types of heroes and heroines all seem to be of a certain type and rarely vary. Of course, this could be because of the types of books participants choose to read or the types of messages they are receiving from the media at large. Again, in terms of social expectation, respondents referred predominantly to the ethnicity, or size of the body as opposed to focussing on body modifications of any kind. Interestingly, or perhaps frustratingly, despite the plethora of books on the market featuring larger protagonists and protagonists of ethnic diversity, it seems that traditional beauty norms and ideals are still very much apparent:

> […] the perfect mannequin-type person […] no-one's like that (Interview 3).

> Many men and women have the same body types […] it can be depressing for girls who don't have the same body type […] they don't vary the body types (Questionnaire 1).

> The men are always 'gym rats' that are six foot three and powerful, the girls always have […] a perfect body (Questionnaire 3).

All these responses very much relate to the readers' chosen reading matter and only represent a very small sector of society. Moreover, if readers prefer the fantasy genre, they are possibly more likely to come across a more diverse range of characters, including tattooed protagonists. Furthermore, some respondents claimed not to be great readers of current young adult literature so they may not have witnessed the wide

range of literature featuring a diverse range of ethnically, physically, and sexually diverse characters now available to young adult readers.

Although participants made observations that traditional, predictable stereotypes are still very much apparent in young adult literature, one important topic which arose from their responses was that of change relating to representations of diverse protagonists. The final section of this chapter examines the discourse of social change and how it relates to the notion of power and the imbalance of power.

4.6: Power and Social Change

The final major theme which emerged from the analysis was social change. As publishing becomes more diverse as a result of social demand and campaigns such as *We Need More Diverse Books* (2014), social power structures adjust. The discourse of social change concerns the ways in which societal attitudes shift and transform as a result of messages which are conveyed by the media. From reading the responses to the interviews and questionnaires, it is apparent that although stereotypical portrayals of literary protagonists still remain, readers were largely aware that regarding diversity, publishing is slowly changing. Most interview respondents agreed that recent publications were more likely to portray diverse characters:

> I think the newer books are beginning to, you know, have that representation but if I re-read older books […] they just don't have the representation […] but it's starting to become more varied (Interview 2).

> Books written more recently often include a lot of diversity within the characters (Interview 5).

> I think it's getting better in the presentation. They're definitely incorporating it a bit more but they're doing it at a slow pace (Interview 6).

Regarding tattooed protagonists, although most participants agreed that they would be more likely to appear in a fantasy narrative than in a real-world scenario, it was also observed that they are *less* likely to be portrayed negatively in more recent literature. This was attributed to the fact that social attitudes to tattooing itself are changing:

> Older texts often depict tattoos in a negative way but it's changing (Interview 9).

> They (tattooed characters) used to be portrayed in a negative light, but I think that's probably changing. Today, obviously, things have improved (Interview 11).

> Attitudes to tattoos have changed quite a bit over the years…where it used to be if you have tattoos, you'll never get a job to my generation where it doesn't matter so much. I suppose it's changed in young adult literature (Interview 12).

That diverse characters are now beginning to be represented in young adult literature can only be seen as a positive aspect of modern publishing. Yet it can be argued that there are some negative implications regarding diversity amongst authors and their protagonists. The commodification of diversity may lead a person to wonder whether it

is diversity itself that publishers are concerned with, or merely economics. Podoshen, Ekpo and Abiru argue the following:

> Meaningful inclusion requires that marginalized people not be included merely for institutional benefit; rather, there must be a transformational effort that more fully embraces removing the barriers contributing to inequity (Mashburn and Papalia, 2019, in Podoshen, Ekpo and Abiru, 2021, p.132).

The message communicated in contemporary society is that it is becoming more acceptable to be sexually, physically, and racially diverse. Yet when we consider the notion of power, it is important to question whether such power lies within the minorities or subgroups that have hitherto remained invisible in books, film and television or the corporations which now appear to celebrate their presence. In other words, this new acceptance of diversity may be of genuine concern to the media, government, and the ruling classes or it may merely be an example of tokenism brought about to appease proponents of social change.

The following three chapters provide a textual analysis of nine narratives featuring tattooed protagonists and to introduce the three genres by which the novels can be categorised. The chapters will be presented in the following order – social realism, fantasy, and tattoo magic and will give an overview of each genre and three novels will be analysed from each category. The key points in the analysis focus on the significance of the protagonist's tattoos and how each protagonist is portrayed by the author, for example, whether they are presented in stereotypical ways or whether their presentation challenges traditional social stereotypes. The subheadings related to the novels were generated through multiple readings of each story. Detailed notes were taken, and common themes emerged. Despite the fact that the novels are from different genres, young adult literature typically focusses on issues relating to sexuality, identity formation, and relationships. Initially, my aim was to ensure that the subheadings for each book were the same. However, although there were many common themes, some of the narratives contained important themes which others did not. For example, *Henna Wars* tackles issues of bullying, a subject which does not occur to any great degree in any of the other stories. *Henna wars* and *Children of Blood and Bone* explore racism and marginalisation, themes which are again not overtly apparent in the other stories. Since these are features which are integral to the stories, I felt that it was necessary to include them. There are, however, specific themes which have been explored in all nine novels. Themes such as symbolism and the meaning of the tattoos, relationship issues, and the hero's and heroine's journey have been examined in each analysis. In terms of themes relating to the textual analysis compared with the themes generated from the critical discourse analysis, there were some commonalities but also some differences. This will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

Chapter 5

Textual Analysis

5.1: Social Realism

In some accounts social realism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a young adult genre (Stephens in Montgomery and Watson, 2009). However, realism as a literary style developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and increased in popularity during the eighteenth century with texts written by authors such as Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding (Mathews, 2002). In the nineteenth century, authors such as Jane Austen and Charles Dickens received much public acclaim possibly as the result of increasing demand for and interest in 'stories of real life with ordinary, believable characters' (Mathews, 2002, p.3). Also known as the social problem novel (Seelinger-Trites, 2000), this genre originally 'developed a focus on social issues and strove to depict the realities of the everyday life experiences of society's urban underclass' (Stephens in Montgomery and Watson, 2009, p.320). Social realism, therefore, aims to depict a world that represents our own reality in that it attempts to 'show things as they really are' (Waller, 2009, p.18). Furthermore social realism in fiction for young adults is renowned for attempting to break taboos and addresses topics which have previously been considered to be off-limits in texts for children (Hollindale, 1997, in Waller, 2009). In young adult social realism, the journey from childhood to adulthood is often fraught with problems and one major criticism of this genre is that often these narratives 'lack aesthetic appeal and happy endings' (Hewings and Watson in Montgomery and Watson, 2009, pp320-321). As Pinsent states:

> It could be argued that texts which explore topics such as racism, substance abuse, bullying, divorce, death and disability in realistic ways require their readers to acquire kinds of knowledge that impinge on innocence and make optimism seem naïve and misplaced. (Pinsent in Reynolds, 2005, p.191)

However, although often bleak in content and outcome, the social problem novel may explore possible solutions and coping strategies (Aronson, 2002, in Habegger, 2004). It may also provide inspiration to young readers when they see protagonists confronting and surviving the challenges and tragedies that life presents (Macrae, 2003, in Habegger, 2004). Furthermore, the social realist novel with its portrayal of a plethora of social issues provides a lens through which the reader can experience an event or learn about a topic in a relatively detached manner without actually experiencing it (Habegger, 2004). Topics such as teenage pregnancy, alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, and sexuality are typically explored in children's and young adult social realism narratives. Examples of this genre include Jacqueline Wilson's *The Illustrated Mum* (1999), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) by Stephen Chbosky, and *Just Listen* (2006) by Sarah Dessen.

The three chosen texts for this category are *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly* (1989) by Robin Klein, *Ink is Thicker than Water* (2013) by Amy Spalding, and *Henna Wars* (2020) by Adiba Jaigirdar. *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly* conforms to the conventions of this genre where the character of Angie, a drug-addicted adolescent desperately attempts to create a brighter, better world for herself with a forced optimism while at the same time refusing to confront her addiction. *Henna Wars*,

written thirty-one years later portrays Nishat, a lesbian Muslim coming out to her parents and facing their subsequent hostile silence. Alongside issues of sexuality, *Henna Wars* also explores a range of other topics such as bullying, cultural differences, friendships, and familial and cultural pressure.

Although it tackles relationship issues, sex, and family conflict, *Ink is Thicker than Water* is slightly different in that it overlaps with the teen romance genre. The confusion and conflict its protagonist, Kellie, experiences regarding the relationship she has with boyfriend Oliver is typical of a teen romance. The novel also explores issues of identity formation and maturation as Kellie begins to make decisions relating to her life by finally developing the courage to end her relationship with Oliver due to his possessiveness and confronting her overly critical father. In the following section I provide a close textual analysis of each of my chosen texts.

5.2: Textual Analysis of Came Back to Show you I Could Fly

Came back to Show You I Could Fly by Robin Klein was published in 1989 and is the first social realism novel chosen for analysis. Written in the third person, it is told from the perspective of eleven-year-old Seymour who is sent to stay with Thelma, a friend of his mother's during the summer holidays, due to ongoing conflict between his parents. The story focuses on the relationship between Seymour and nineteen-year-old Angie and contains supplementary texts in the form of letters, lists and application forms which inform us about Angie's life. While running away from a gang of children along a back alley, Seymour encounters Angie: 'She was the most beautiful person he'd ever

seen in his life. Her large, gentle eyes were the colour of rain-wet lichen, fringed with dark lashes that curled back upon themselves' (p.28). Although Angie is significantly older than Seymour, they strike up an unlikely friendship. Seymour finds Angie fascinating and alluring - with her flamboyant, bright clothing, beautiful appearance, and the tattoo of a winged horse on her shoulder but as the story progresses Seymour realises that there is more to Angie than meets the eye. As Angie's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic, we learn that she is a drug addict and doubly vulnerable due to pregnancy. Angie's drug addiction angers and disappoints Seymour as he has previously perceived her as being imbued with magic, unlike anybody he has ever met before, although the story concludes with positive and hopeful outcomes for both characters.

The main focus of this story is the friendship between Angie and Seymour and Seymour's fascination and admiration for Angie's colourful appearance and personality. Unlikely hero Seymour develops his strength and personality as the story progresses. To begin with, he is also shy, lacking in confidence, doesn't make friends easily and is often the victim of bullying: 'Nothing was new, nothing under the sun…Confrontation and flight, huddling in some secret place trembling with cowardice. It happened inevitably at each school, every new place he lived' (p.24). Relating to the theories of the body, Seymour is described as being small for his age, lacking the stature that is equated with social success and physical attractiveness (Ricciardelli, McCabe and Banfield, 2000). To support this image, in traditional folk tales, the hero is frequently 'the insignificant, the neglected, the helpless. But he unexpectedly proves to be strong, noble, and blessed' (Lüthi, 1970, p.145). Indeed, as the story moves forward, we see the inner strength in Seymour as he develops his character and a more positive relationship with himself.

5.2.1: Mental Health and Tattooing

This section focusses on the significance of tattooing in the story and the way in which the tattooed protagonist is portrayed by the author. Although the novel does not wholly focus on the theme of tattooing, it is interesting that the author chose to feature a drug-addicted protagonist possessing a tattoo. The fact that she does goes hand in hand with the notion that tattooing has traditionally been linked to addiction and mental illness (Pitts, 2003). In fact, Angie's tattoo: '[…] a little blue horse with outstretched wings' (P.31) is mentioned only three times throughout the text. It is, however, a source of great fascination for Seymour who is both shocked and surprised at its existence, mainly because it is on the shoulder of a girl:

> She (Angie) bent to pick up a dropped pair of manicure scissors and Seymour nearly dropped his coffee mug. There was a tattoo – a little blue horse with outstretched wings, stencilled on one shoulder. He'd never known anyone with a tattoo before, specially not a girl. (p.31)

At this point, it is important to note that the story was published in 1989, prior to the tattoo renaissance of the early 1990s. Tattooing at this stage of its development was more commonly associated with men (Osterud, 2009). It was also connected with bikers, gangs, and prostitutes to which the story alludes to on one occasion*:* ' […] there's a lot of things you don't know about her (Angie), the things she does to get money […]' (p.198). As the story continues, we learn that Angie is also pregnant but the child's father, a young man whose age is not specified, called Jas, is not prepared to take any responsibility. It is also implied that Jas is in prison, but that fact is not made entirely clear. In fact, throughout the novel certain topics are alluded to but rarely actually

clarified. A lot is left to our imagination - Jas being in prison, Angie's prostitution, and Angie's rehabilitation program at the hospital. This may be synonymous with Angie's denial of her drug addiction and inability to face her pregnancy. It may also be representative of the fact that the drugs themselves have reduced Angie's ability to think clearly. Angie has no idea how she is going to take care of her child once it is born and refuses to get help for her addiction.

It is clear from the point that Seymour meets Angie that she is isolated from peers, her family, and her boyfriend. Her situation could be due to both choice and circumstance. Angie's marginalisation and isolation pertain to two factors: her appearance and her drug addiction. In a sense, Angie is a secondary character within the story as her journey is eclipsed by that of Seymour who develops confidence, resilience, and independence. Interestingly, female characters often appear in literature as muses, a means by which the male character is developed. The muse can be found in art in the guise of a 'passive, reclining female model; she is powerless, perhaps nude, and posing silently in front of a man' (Antoniou, 2022, n.p.). When Seymour first encounters Angie, she is, in fact reclining on a deck chair and Seymour is automatically entranced. Related to powerlessness and passivity, Angie is indeed powerless in the face of her addiction and passive in her inability to confront her problems, although in the eyes of Seymour still a heroine as she helps him to develop the above personal qualities that he previously lacked.

It seems initially that Angie's tattoo was a symbol of hope and of change. It is also implied that the image is a reminder of a happier time when she was a child:

> Pegasus, that's the name of the little flying horse. Wouldn't it be terrific to have a real one? Just hop on its back when things get rough and take off up into the sky […] I used to have that picture pinned up in my room when I was a kid at home. (p.106)

The legend of Pegasus states that he was born from the blood from the severed head of Medusa (Cotterell and Storm, 2003). Symbolically, Pegasus is perceived to represent the flight of the soul from the physical body and the immortality of the soul (New World Encyclopaedia, n.d.). A further source suggests that Pegasus is a symbol of dignity and goodness (Greening, 2020). The winged horse and all that it symbolises may transcend the depressing, drug-addicted life that Angie leads. Eventually, however, we learn that the tattoo, for Angie, is nothing more than a symbol of regret – something that makes her stand out when she would rather stay hidden: 'Yes, well, I'm sort of sorry I had that done. It's too noticeable – people remember you when you don't particularly want them to' (p.106). This regret contrasts significantly with the other tattooed protagonists whose tattoos are linked with power, identity, culture, and family connections as will be discussed.

Throughout the story Angie appears to be in denial of her addiction with a forced but determined optimism regarding the future. She tries on several occasions to re-engage with her estranged family - her parents and her younger sister Lynne, but is unsuccessful, leaving Seymour puzzled and outraged at their anger and rejection of Angie. At an early stage in the story, prior to a visit to her parents' home, Angie steals an ornament from a gift shop. At this point, we realise that Seymour too is in denial that something is wrong in Angie's life, although it is clear that he has suspicions that all

is not well. When Angie steals an ornament from a gift shop, Seymour refuses to believe that she is a thief: 'Of course she paid for it […] Only why was that assistant so snooty to her after she bought something as expensive as that? Of course she paid for it!' (p.63).

Along with references throughout the text that imply that Angie is not quite who she seems are the lies she tells Seymour about her illness. When Angie and Seymour first meet, she claims she has a hospital appointment. It is implied that Angie is on a withdrawal programme of some sort but Angie, unable to confront this fact, tells Seymour that the medication is for 'my metabolism' (p.98). Later on, as she becomes increasingly unwell, Angie tells Seymour that she has 'the 'flu': 'She's got the flu really bad, she gets it all the time' […] please let Lynne say it's the flu, he thought desperately' (p.177). Seymour passionately wants to believe this but even though he has led a sheltered existence he finally understands that underneath all the sparkle and glitter, something is very wrong in Angie's life. Arguably, this could be perceived as being the point at which Seymour strengthens as Angie weakens. Although his perceptions of Angie change, Seymour's own character and confidence in himself begin to develop.

5.2.2: Relationships

The changing of the relationships between the protagonist and their parent figures is a significant theme in young adult literature (Seelinger Trites, 2000). As the young protagonist 'comes of age' through trauma, sexual experience, or significant life events, the dependence on family shifts and changes. This is indeed the case for Seymour who from the very beginning of the story, we learn has lived a very sheltered existence with

a mother who has not allowed him much freedom. His relationship with her consists of feeling nagged at and overwhelmed by her discontent. The inadequate, absent, or deficient mother is an existing stereotype which often occurs in contemporary young adult literature (Just, 2010). This novel, despite its focus on challenging topics such as drug addiction, presents women in traditional, one-dimensional roles. Arguably Seymour's fascination with Angie stems from the fact that she is the antithesis of his mother with: 'her disguise of pastel-framed glasses, floral dresses and thin, martyred face' (p.11). Angie contrasts strongly with Seymour's mother in that she is more relaxed and easy-going. Although Angie is only nineteen, she is to Seymour grown up and Seymour's experience of adults has not been positive. Seymour immediately feels at ease with Angie which is perhaps part of her attraction: '[…] although she was a grown up, she wasn't really threatening in any way. She just lay there, soaking up the sun, quiet and calm' (p.28). Bound up with this is the idea that Seymour feels trapped by his parents' dissatisfaction with each other together with his father's heavy drinking and aggressive behaviour. Seymour's relationship with Angie could also therefore signify a coming away from parental control and influence, a way in which he begins to establish his identity and independence. It is implied at the beginning of the story that Seymour has faded into the background of his parents' lives and has become almost half a person, devoid of his own thoughts and opinions: 'Living with either of them, it was best to keep very quiet and not obtrude at all' (p.15). Although initially Seymour is shocked by Angie's tattoo, he is also drawn to it and to her. There is a kindness about her that Seymour does not receive from his parents.

5.2.3: The Hero's Journey

Arguably, a typical theme in young adult novels is the personal development of the dominant characters as they learn about themselves and grow into maturity (Nicolajeva, 2005). This certainly is relevant to Seymour as his confidence and courage strengthens. At the beginning of the story through attempting to remain invisible and caught between two dysfunctional parents, Seymour lacks the solid foundation from which to build self-assuredness: 'He saw himself as a soldier with no weapons at all, secret or otherwise. Someone had forgotten right from the start to equip him with any weapons (p.103). However, there is hope for Seymour. Through his association with Angie, Seymour begins to become a more vibrant and interesting character. Relating to the hero's journey, while Seymour is certainly not an orphan, his self-absorbed parents are not entirely present. Despite the fact that the orphaned hero is 'an honoured tradition in children's literature and folklore' (Hunt and Lenz, 2001, p.152), emotionally absent parents and the loneliness this represents may provide the opportunity for self-development and 'the possibility for humans to reinvent themselves' (Kimball, 1999, in Hunt and Lenz, 2001, p.152).

According to Joseph Campbell (1971), there are twelve steps in the hero's journey: these begin with the hero's call to adventure from the ordinary world he inhabits and end with his successful return, usually involving a reward or accomplishment. The stages of the journey will encompass a series of challenges including episodes of self-doubt, a meeting with a mentor, a crossing of the threshold, an ordeal, a resurrection, and a final reward, or elixir (Campbell, 1971). When considering Seymour's journey, we

can see that it does indeed conform to the stages outlined by Campbell. Seymour is called from his humdrum existence by his mother to stay with a stranger. To begin with, he refuses the call, timidly running away from the boys in the alley way. It is there, while hiding from his pursuers, that he meets Angie, who becomes his mentor. He crosses the threshold of his dull existence when he ventures out with Angie on a variety of expeditions. His ordeal comes when he is required to confront the fact that Angie is an addict and with that realisation, some of her magic begins to fade. Upon making that discovery, however, Seymour is rewarded with a strengthened sense of self and a growing confidence. In the closing pages of the book which are in the form of a letter from Seymour to Angie, it is clear that the old, shy Seymour has been resurrected with a new-found confidence and happiness. He is living in a new house with his mother and has developed new relationships. Seymour, therefore, has completed the hero's journey having 'returned home' a more complete person than he was prior to his journey.

5.2.4: Tattoos and Symbolism

The symbolism of the tattoo in this section relates to the differing ways the tattoo is perceived by Seymour and Angie. For Seymour, the tattoo initially symbolises freedom and magic due to its outstretched wings and it is of no surprise that Angie herself becomes a creature of mystery, surrounded by an aura of magic. To begin with, Seymour's relationship with Angie is exciting. She appears to enjoy his company and through his association with her, he breaks free from his suffocating existence. Angie's outward persona, however, is an illusion, a way in which Angie denies her life is falling

apart. This illusion gradually fades as the story progresses and Seymour learns the truth about his heroine:

> She held up the silver lace skirt Angie had been wearing the first time Seymour had met her, and it seemed now to have no connection with the reality of everyday living. It seemed garishly out of context, like something that belonged to a theatre stage. (p.194)

Freedom appears to be a recurring theme throughout the story. Seymour experiences freedom for the first time when he climbs over Thelma's gate and escapes from her 'unbearably smug little house' (p.16). There is a feeling that restrictions are being lifted and a sense of relief when he lands on the road outside: 'He […] sat on the frame for a moment to gather his courage, then dropped down onto the flagstones. It was like escaping from a cage' (p.16). Seymour wants freedom from his suffocating life and difficult parents and Angie wants freedom from her addiction.

In a sense Seymour needs Angie to be the person she initially appears to be – kind, attentive, flamboyant, and beautiful - and is reluctant to believe otherwise, even though all the signs are there. The story alludes to the fact that Angie is concealing an unpleasant secret and makes subtle implications that things are not all they seem. As has previously been discussed, this reflects Angie's denial and Seymour's reluctance to admit that Angie is anything but perfect. Seymour doesn't want to admit that Angie is flawed in any way because then she would disappoint him just like all the other adults in his life. Seymour eventually is required to confront his own denial and admit that something is very wrong with Angie: 'All the elaborate pretences he'd so carefully built

were no longer any use, and he stood, stricken […] Drugs […] Angie […] that's how things were with Angie' (p.195).

In this story there is no magic associated with the tattoo. Indeed, as is common in the social problem novel, it represents a certain seediness, desperation, fragility, and ugliness together with a sense of irresponsibility and recklessness. On the other hand, it may initially signify a symbol of hope, optimism, and positive change, at least for Seymour. In this context, however, the tattoo is not a symbol of power; it is merely a drawing on the skin of a drug-addicted, pregnant young woman. In terms of power, it is Angie's addiction that has its hold over her. The tattoo, for Angie, is merely a symbol of lost dreams. At the end of the novel, for Seymour, the winged horses' magic fades as he realises that:

> There would never be any little winged horse plunging splendidly from the sky to land at your feet and carry you away from things not to be borne. That was something you had to learn to do by yourself. (p.220)

5.2.5: Conclusion

Although this ending could be construed as pessimistic in that neither Seymour's nor Angie's issues can magically be resolved, Seymour learns that power comes from within. Neither Seymour's parents or Angie can bring him confidence or make choices for him. Realistic endings such as this can effectively help young adults to accept the often stark, uncompromising reality of the mundane world. In spite of the fact that Angie is a disturbed character with a plethora of unpleasant secrets, who appears to inhabit a

world of fantasy, she is not portrayed in an entirely negative light. On the one hand, the optimism, colour, and adventure Angie brings to Seymour's life is an illusion, yet Angie is the first person to really see Seymour as anything other than an inconvenience and who allows him to have a voice and to express his opinions and thoughts. It is Angie who brings colour into Seymour's life. Furthermore, as the story progresses, Seymour develops the courage to stand up for himself and to find an identity. Unlike novels typical of this genre, *Came Back to Show you I Could Fly* is not a boy-meets-girl love story and for Angie, there is no handsome boyfriend to rescue her from her situation. Although Angie is the most vulnerable of the two protagonists, it is she who 'rescues' Seymour from his shyness and lack of confidence. Towards the end of the story, he courageously voices out loud the anger he feels towards his mother: 'Well, if you really want to know what I think, she's always making a stupid big drama out of everything […] like a TV soapie, the way she carries on' (pp.181-182). Later on, he gets angry with Angie as she continues to be in denial about her addiction and the fact that she is pregnant: 'For the first time in his life he didn't much care if people turned to gape at him […] He felt angry and powerful enough to swallow up the whole mess' (p.219). Through his relationship with Angie, Seymour gains inner strength and determination that were not present in the beginning, a strength and autonomy that have not been nurtured by either of his parents. For example, Seymour makes the decision to visit Angie in the rehabilitation unit by himself, something the reader cannot visualise him doing at the beginning of the story.

Arguably, of the nine tattooed protagonists in each of the chosen narratives, Angie possesses the least potential due to the fact that she is not the hero, merely an ally or the catalyst by which the hero develops his own strength. Her tattoo is not magical, and

her addiction is a weakness which prevents her from making positive changes in her life. What power she has, however, lies in her ability to captivate Seymour and influence him in such a way that he becomes a more vivid person, less likely to fade into the background of the lives of others. In contrast, Seymour, as the hero of the story, does grow and mature.

5.3: Textual Analysis of Ink is Thicker than Water

Ink is Thicker than Water by Amy Spalding (2013) is the second social realism novel chosen for analysis. The story focuses on and is narrated by sixteen-year-old female protagonist, Kellie, who feels invisible amidst her strong-minded family who have very definite identities – her tattooist stepfather, hippie mum, overachieving, academically-inclined adopted older sister, an endearing younger half-brother, Finn, and an ultra-conformist father who seems to favour her sister. The feeling of being invisible begins to fade when she meets Oliver, who is older than her and at college. As the relationship progresses, however, Oliver becomes very intense, and Kellie begins to feel suffocated by his attention and experiences feelings of unease as the situation begins to spiral out of control. Meanwhile, Kellie's adopted older sister meets her birth mother and her best friend becomes friendly with a different group of people and Kellie experiences rejection from them both. For Kellie, getting a tattoo symbolises permanence and is a way of defining herself amidst a family which is starting to feel unstable. Although not a dominant theme in the story, insecurity relating to the body is apparent when Kellie compares herself unfavourably to her best friend, Kaitlyn who 'emerged from puberty with a tiny waist and the perfect bra size' (p.2). In comparison, while Kellie likens

Kaitlyn to a 'renaissance painting' (p.2), she describes herself as 'artless puberty' (p.2). Importantly, however, contrary to the theories put forward by Peterson (1996) and Younger (2009), neither Kellie nor any of the other female protagonists are defined wholly by their physical appearance. The insecurities faced by Kellie relate predominantly to her relationship with others.

The overarching themes in this story are family dynamics, relationships, identity, change, and stability. Once again, the themes of control and power in this story are important ones. Kellie feels that she is losing all the people around her, and events continue to conspire to make her feel powerless that she has no control in her life. Lack of control and personal conflict are common themes in adolescent novels as the protagonist copes with physical changes, new friendship dynamics and demands from school and family (Seelinger-Trites, 2000). Adolescence is a period of 'limbo between childhood and adulthood' (Younger, 2009, p.xiv) and this liminal phase feels particularly apparent in this narrative as Kellie strives to find her place within her family. Her disengagement with the world conceals feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, and fear of change. The tattoo Kellie eventually receives at the end of the story is a symbol, not of rebellion, but of permanence and family identity.

5.3.1: Family Dynamics

Family dynamics in this section relates to Kellie's perception of her place within the family unit and the insecurities she deals with in the face of her father's negativity towards her. As we shall see in the following chapter, in common with Leslie in *Ink Exchange*, Kellie is demeaned and belittled by a strong male character – her father -

who is the polar opposite of her mother, a free-spirited hippie who runs a tattoo shop together with her husband, Russell. Kellie's father is uptight and conservative, appearing to prefer Kellie's adopted older sister, a high-achieving academic. The difference between Kellie's mother and father is made apparent at the beginning of the story:

> It's a casual day for Dad, which means he's in shiny black shoes and perfectly pressed black slacks, with a grey shirt and a patterned blue tie […] It's a casual day for Mum, too; she's wearing ragged jeans […] her feet are bare, chipped red manicure showing as well as the black line drawings of flowers tattooed across the tops of both her feet. (p.10)

Parental conflict and rebellion against the establishment are also common themes in young adult novels (Seelinger-Trites, 2000). In a way, Kellie's father, in his conformity, represents an unyielding system or establishment. Kellie's mother has rebelled against this establishment by escaping the marriage, but Kellie remains firmly planted within it. Feeling as if she can never fulfil her father's expectations of her, Kellie disengages and fails to take an interest in much at all. Kellie's passivity, however, could be perceived as a form of rebellion, her detachment could be considered a means by which Kellie copes with her father's criticism.

Throughout the story, there are references to Kellie feeling second-best and overlooked: 'Obviously, Sara is Dad's favourite […] I haven't admitted that the more often I think about Sara away at college with her clear path in front of her, the less delight I take in feeling useless' (P13). The derogatory comments also come from her mother, although the relationship between her and Kellie is a much more positive one:

'I'm not very good at many things that are useful, a fact Mom delights in telling me' (p.12). In this sense, Kellie remains stuck in a liminal state, unable to make a constructive decision or assert herself. Carol Pearson introduces the notion of the captive heroine whose subordination is reinforced by a significant figure in her life: 'A husband or lover, mother or father, female friend or stranger, may be a captor figure if he or she reinforces the myths of female inferiority […]' (Pearson, 1981, p.65). Kellie's father is in fact a domineering character in that he appears to be the source of her inability to achieve academically: he puts her down during most of their interactions and throughout the story, it is implied that their relationship is not a positive one: 'Dad's not into emotions outside of victory (court cases, Sara's report card and plaques and trophies) and disappointment (other court cases, me)' (P.30).

Arguably, the most important point here is that on the surface, Kellie appears to accept this criticism without ever contesting its validity, passively accepting her place within the family unit. When considering this narrative from a feminist viewpoint, the submissive daughter and the critical, dismissive father could be a source of irritation, leaving the reader wishing that Kellie would rebel, get angry, or do something to dispel the notion that she is in any way lacking. As the story progresses, however, it becomes evident that there are undertones of sadness and anger in the narrative as the author brings to our awareness the fact that Kellie's upbeat attitude is an act: '[…] it's so weird I care. I was convinced not caring too much kept you sane, but lately, this tiny voice in my head says it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world' (p.5). At the beginning of the story, however, it is implied that Kellie's inclination was to drift, seemingly with no direction. In a sense, it is Kellie herself who is impermanent as she appears to flit through life with no specific goals. However, at only sixteen, at a time of transition and

change, one would not expect Kellie to have her whole life mapped out. This strategy, however, may serve as a form of self-defence as a result of the fear of failure that might occur if she decides to commit to anything. Even Kellie's decision to join the newspaper is met with disdain from her father:

> 'So, I joined the newspaper staff.'
>
> 'Since when do you write?' he asks. 'Didn't you get a B in English last year? Your sister hasn't got a B in her life.' (p.83)

The story makes use of dialogue such as this between father and daughter, yet both Kellie and her sister accept this pattern of communication without questioning its negative effects leaving us wondering whether it is the author's intention to promote the message that in a patriarchal society, one must not question the dominant father figure or established system. Certainly, there is an element of sadness as Kellie is continuously pushed aside in favour of her sister: 'I'm fine staying in.' I say, even though I do mind, in that part of my brain that understands just how disappointed Dad is that I'm not more like Sara and less like myself' (p.87). It is interesting that the author makes no reference to the fact that Kellie has every right to be disappointed with a father who pays her little attention except to criticise. It is with some satisfaction to the reader, therefore, when Kellie finally discloses the following: 'Sometimes I hate my dad […] I don't know why. I've known my dad my whole life and still get my feelings hurt when he acts like he always acts' (p.165). Towards the end of the story, Kellie does confront her father with her anger at him for his continuous implications that she is inadequate: '[…] I'm just me and I wish you could finally be OK with that' (p.267).

Compared to the other female protagonists featured in this study, Kellie is the least courageous. In this sense, she defies the stereotype of the feisty tattooed heroine who challenges existing cultural norms. On the other hand, however, Kellie's imperfections could also be seen as refreshing and relatable. The stereotypically 'perfect' heroine is impossible to emulate. Pearson suggests that:

> Female characters […] are caught in a double bind: If they cannot be 'perfect women', they are inadequate; but if they appear to be perfect, they are threatening and alienated. It is unlikely, however, that any woman will absolutely conform to the culture's image of the ideal, because such images are based on mutually exclusive ideas. (Pearson, 1981, p.25)

The fact that Kellie does not attempt to conform to any sort of ideal, therefore, can be seen as simultaneously subversive and submissive.

Arguably, Kellie's fight is an internal one – a fight for self-acceptance that does not depend upon the opinions and positive reinforcement of others. On the one hand, Kellie fails to defend herself when others perceive her negatively, yet it emerges that her strength lies in the fact that she is certain about what she likes and where her interests lie. She does not go along with the crowd, feels no desire to do so, and does not feel any need to put on an act for anybody.

5.3.2: Relationships

Although relationships within the context of family dynamics were discussed above, this section focusses on other aspects of Kellie's relationships, for example, the

relationships she has with her former best friend and boyfriend. Permanence and stability seem to be the things Kellie craves, she begins to have doubts about her relationship with her new boyfriend Oliver when he gets too intense: 'If a guy wants you to spend all of your free time with him, is that nice, or is it too much?' (p.186). The men in Kellie's life do not conform to a particular type although none of them appear to provide her with much stability. Her stepfather, Russell is merely a background character, somebody who seems to flit in and out of the plot. He does not appear to have the same power over her as her father although he is present in her life far more. The relationship Kellie has with her boyfriend Oliver is intense and a little controlling albeit in a different way to that of her father. Her father's control takes the form of constant criticism whereas her boyfriend elicits a different kind of control – continuous texting and wanting to know where she is and what she is doing at any given time. As their relationship continues, it becomes evident that Kellie is not ready for the complications it entails. At its beginning, however, Kellie obsesses over their meetings and time together in a manner that is typical of female protagonists in the young adult genre: '[…] I can't believe how cute and smart he is and how good kissing him is' (p.183). However, this is not a story which focuses specifically on a romantic encounter. Although romance and sexual relationships do play a part in this story, they are not a dominant theme. Kellie's heartbreak centres not on the eventual breakup of her relationship with Oliver, but on the potential loss of her sister as she begins to bond with her biological mother and the desertion of her best friend as she chooses a new friendship group.

Alongside the men in Kellie's life, the women also provide little security. Kellie's mother, although appearing kind and loving fails to support Kellie when her father

criticises her: 'Mum squeezes my hand under the table because she isn't big on calling Dad out on his shit' (p.121). Adding to this is the erratic behaviour of Kellie's adopted sister Sara and her best friend Kaitlyn, both of whom, at certain points in the story, reject Kellie, Sara for her biological mother and Kaitlyn for a new group of friends, with little regard for Kellie's distress. It is of no surprise, then, that Kellie craves some stability and permanence and strives to keep her family unit together despite the feeling that it is rapidly deteriorating. Again, dialogue between Kellie and her sister leaves the reader wishing that Kellie *would* rebel and get angry:

> I wonder why lately conversation with me is such a horrifying option to the two people I used to talk to the most. Still, I open Sara's door fand lean in:
>
> '[…] I said *what*, I didn't say *come in*.'
>
> My mouth actually falls open because she sounds so mean. (p.169)

Kaitlyn's rejection of Kellie occurs alongside her sister meeting and eventually going to stay with her biological mother:

> 'Don't you get it?' She asks, 'We're not friends anymore, Kellie'.
>
> 'We were friends last week.'
>
> 'I guess, stuff changes,' she stares at me, hard. 'Don't be such a baby about it.' (P.169)

Running through the narrative is Kellie's acceptance of her ill treatment by others although it can be argued that this helps her to develop a sense of self sufficiency and resilience. Maturation and character development are common themes within young

adult literature (Cart, 2010). As Kaitlyn rejects Kellie's friendship for no reason other than to be with a different friendship group, Kellie makes no response except to hope that Kaitlyn finds out that her 'immature former friend is practically doing it with a college guy' (p.170). Towards the end of the story, both Kaitlyn and Sara are forgiven for their lack of support and desertion, an unlikely happy-ever-after for two equally undeserving characters.

5.3.3: Tattooing, Identity and Change

Identity and change characterise Kellie's conflict between wanting certain aspects of her life to remain static, yet at the same time needing to accept the fact that life is transient. It also relates to Kellie's tattoo – how it symbolises attachment and commitment to family. Kellie is portrayed by the author as being happy-go-lucky, laid back, and accepting of peoples' bad treatment of her as they move on and experience their own life changes, seemingly leaving her behind. Yet she craves stability and the security of things being as they always have been. As the story progresses, however, it becomes apparent that Kellie *is* the permanence in her life in that she remains steady, reliable, and much more likeable than either her sister, her former best friend, or her father. In fact, as the story draws to close, Kellie is finally praised by her father for 'always trying to take such good care of your family' (p.267), which leads Kellie to acknowledge that: 'It's definitely safe to assume I'll never be considered useless again' (p.276). Furthermore, Kellie does have her own transformation – a new look, new friends, extracurricular activities, and a new job when she begins work in her mother's tattoo shop. Despite this, however, Kellie still clings onto past relationships which offer

little fulfilment and Kellie's decision to get a tattoo at the end of the story is not based upon the need to exert independence, rebel, or express her identity. In a way, her tattoo is a means of claiming kinship and belonging. The tattoo she eventually chooses marks her out, not as Other, but as being firmly attached to her family almost in the same way as a tribal tattoo marks affiliation with a clan or tribe (Pitts, 2003; Beeler, 2006). Kellie feels that in a world that is ever-changing, a tattoo will be the one thing in her life that stays the same. Kellie and her sister choose to be tattooed at the same time as the family is once more reunited. Furthermore, the chosen tattoo is a family coat of arms and is identical to her sister's: 'The Brooks coat of arms is topped with a little lion, while the Stone one has a lamb' (p.282). The placing of the tattoo also has some significance for Kellie as it does for many people who choose to become tattooed: '[…] my bicep seems a good choice. Lots of people can see it, but I can keep it hidden if I need to, and also, it isn't one of those stereotypical girl places to get inked' (p.281). The only nod to rebellion is that Kellie is under-age when she receives her tattoo, being only sixteen (the minimum age for tattooing is eighteen), however, it is her mother who does the work: 'Mom rolls up my sleeve, cleans off my skin, and presses on the transfer design, just like I've seen her do a million other times for a million other people' (p.282).

5.3.4: The Heroine's Journey

As a heroine Kellie's journey involves accepting that life does not remain static and embracing the changes this brings. At the end of the story, Kellie finally relinquishes her need for control and acknowledges that: '[…] change doesn't have to be the end of the world anyway (p.272). Kellie has little in common with the stereotypical edgy, hard-

hitting tattooed female protagonists such as *Frost Moon's* Dakota, a text that will be explored in chapter seven which focuses on the tattoo magic genre. She is passive and likeable with a desire to be liked in return. There is, therefore, an element of conformity about her that is not present in the other characters. Kellie's wish for her father to be proud of her despite his ill treatment of her, is a case in point. There is, in Kellie, the desire to please, even though at intervals, throughout the narrative, Kellie gives the impression that it's easier not to try too hard at anything. Being an adolescent, Kellie's journey is just beginning. According to Murdock: 'part of the heroine's quest is to find her work in the world, which enables her to find her identity' (Murdock, 1990, p.47). Pearson further maintains that:

> As in the classic version of the story, she descends into the underworld of her psyche to encounter the life-denying forces or 'dragons' within. These are the forces of […] self-loathing, fear, and paralysis. When she slays the dragon, she becomes, or is united with, her true self.' (Pearson, 1981, p.63)

Kellie has yet to 'find her work' although in finding she has a talent in writing, this may yet be achieved. Kellie's passivity also appears to be a hindrance regarding her ability to achieve. Utilising the masculine aspects of herself may help her to exert some firm control over her decisions: 'The heroic quest is not about power over, about conquest and domination; it is a quest to bring balance into our lives through the marriage of both feminine and masculine aspects of our nature' (Murdock, 1990, p.135). Furthermore, according to Murdock, the heroine's journey encompasses acceptance and in Kellie's case this acceptance relates to the fact that life is in a constant state of flux. Nothing is permanent - even a tattoo fades with time as the body ages. It is,

however, worth acknowledging that in common with the other tattooed characters, Kellie possesses a certain strength and autonomy in that the decisions she finally makes as the story draws to a close are not hindered by others, especially the dominant males in her life.

5.4: Textual Analysis of *The Henna Wars*

The Henna Wars by Adiba Jaigirdar (2020) is a novel not just about henna tattooing and its cultural significance and importance but also about sexuality and the judgement faced by a lesbian within her Muslim family. The story is greatly influenced by the author's own experiences as a lesbian Muslim. Set in the Republic of Ireland, within the context of the real world as opposed to the secondary realms of magic and sorcery, this novel is a multi-layered narrative featuring a range of multicultural characters where the female protagonist, Nishat, faces racism and the prejudice of her own family regarding her sexuality. The story features Nishat and Flavia who although attracted to each other, find that they are rivals in a school business competition – they both decide to paint henna tattoos – which complicates their feelings for each other. Nishat accuses both Flavia and her cousin Chyna of cultural appropriation as neither character comes from a Muslim background. Nishat's initial attraction to Flavia is therefore eclipsed by anger towards her. Other key characters in the story are Nishat's sister, Priti, her two best friends, Jess and Chaewon, and her grandmother who encourages her artistic talent. This story is told in first person from the perspective of Nishat. Dominant

themes in this narrative include sexuality, prejudice and racism, friendship dynamics and culture. One of the main issues that arises within the novel is Nishat being a lesbian in an Irish Catholic school. This novel is unlike the other eight in that it does not focus on permanent tattooing. However, in common with permanent tattooing, Henna tattooing has a rich cultural heritage, and is symbolic in its placing and design. In each novel, tattoos are an important aspect of a person's identity serving many functions – magical power, reconnection with the body after a trauma, coming of age, and helping with the grieving process. In this novel, henna tattooing is a huge part of Nishat's identity, not only on a cultural level, but on a personal one. Henna tattooing helps Nishat to express herself creatively, but it also helps to assuage her anxiety and keep her grounded when her life is fraught with conflict, family pressures, and anguish. Diversity and inclusivity relating to race are explored in chapter one where the observation was made that diverse characters have only appeared in literature in the past decade. Therefore, I felt that it was important to include a diverse range of novels with a tattooing theme to ensure a thorough exploration of the topic.

5.4.1: Social Stereotyping and Marginalisation

Marginalisation within the context of this section relates to the lack of visibility of minority groups in literature. Social stereotyping refers to the ways in which members of such groups are portrayed. Although this is slowly changing, young adult narratives featuring lesbians as lead characters have, up until relatively recently, been scarce, with male homosexuality receiving far more attention (Younger, 2009). Furthermore,

according to Epstein, there has been much criticism of the portrayal of lesbian characters with the notion that they are presented in limited ways:

> Besides the butch and the feminist, there are few other lesbian characters, and they are categorized through the use of stereotyped jokes and other descriptions, often with the suggestion that one type of lesbian is more acceptable than another. (Epstein, 2013, p.116)

Moreover, queer characters in young adult novels have been predominantly white and middle class (Cart, 2011; Epstein, 2013). There has, however, over the past five years, been a plethora of texts written by authors of more diverse cultural backgrounds featuring protagonists of varying ethnicities and sexualities. *Felix Ever After* (2020) by Kacen Callendar and *The Black Flamingo* (2019) by Dean Atta are examples of this. *Henna Wars* is an important novel for several reasons - it features a character who has been marginalised due to both her sexuality and her ethnicity although her portrayal is far from stereotypical. She does not fit into the 'butch lesbian' stereotype. Furthermore, her sexuality is not the only thing that defines her. The female protagonist in *The Henna Wars* is Muslim and faces prejudice not only in the Catholic school she attends but also within her own Muslim community. Stories written in the past feature queer characters who typically endure an assortment of unpleasant occurrences - an early death or at the very best, a lifetime of loneliness and rejection (Epstein, 2013). This fact is observed by Nishat at the very beginning of the story when she is about to come out to her parents: 'I try to think back to every movie, TV show, and book I've ever seen or read with gay protagonists. Even gay side characters. Each coming out was tragically painful. And they were all white' (p.3). Further criticism of

queer characters in novels has stated that a large number of such narratives have focused on coming out as: 'a defining feature of LGBTQ lives and personalities' (Epstein, 2013, p.75). According to Younger:

> By portraying others coming out of the closet, many YA novels that portray sexuality of all kinds serve as a sort of safe space for an adolescent character (and her readers) to discover the place sexuality has in her life, and maybe practice coming out. (Younger, 2009, p.60)

Important also is the fact that in common with many other lesbian novels, there are no strong male protagonists. According to Younger:

> While female bonding is an important feature of many YA lesbian novels, they also provide alternatives to the cultural paradigms of heterocentrism, male-centred sexuality, and male dominance. (Younger, 2009, p.50)

In fact, the only male character featured in the story is Nishat's father. All the other characters, both major and minor, are female.

5.4.2: Sexuality

As a Muslim, Nishat faces prejudice not only from her peers but from her parents. The story begins with her coming out to her parents, a decision which has taken great courage since within Nishat's Muslim culture, being gay is not perceived in a positive way although arguably it is potentially fraught with challenges in any culture. The first line of the book reads as follows: 'I decide to come out to my parents at Sunny Apu's engagement party' (p.1). The coming out conversation with her parents does not go

well: 'Ammu's frown and the chill in her voice suggests anything but understanding […] I'm waiting, hoping for them to call me back. But there's nothing except silence' (p.7). Unlike the tattoo magic narratives where sexual diversity is neither unusual nor unexpected, in this narrative, it is something which still remains taboo as Nishat's parents retreat into silence and denial in response to their daughter's news. During a conversation between her parents, Nishat overhears the following conversation: 'She's confused, she's probably seen it in the movies, heard her friends talking about it. Let her work it out and she'll come back and change her mind' (p.9). As *The Henna Wars* takes place in a real-life setting, Nishat's 'quest' is not to fight evil tattoo magicians or tattoo thieves but to overcome prejudice and fear while remaining true to herself:

> After all, it's not just Bengali relationships that are complicated, is it? It's this weird, suffocating culture that tells us exactly who or what we should be. That leaves no room to be anything else. (p.15)

Throughout the story, Nishat's fight is for acceptance – her family's acceptance of her sexuality, the acceptance of her peers in a Catholic school and Nishat's acceptance that she may never achieve either. The Catholic church's stance regarding homosexuality is somewhat ambiguous in that homosexual desires in themselves are not considered to be wrong or immoral. Acting upon them, however, is seen to be sinful (Catholic Answers, n.d.). A recurring theme in the story is also conflict between Nishat and her family and Muslim culture. Nishat is fiercely proud of her cultural heritage but at the same time feels suffocated and oppressed by it. She is conflicted between the love she has for her parents and the need to be herself. She is also aware that within both her Muslim culture and the Catholic church, homosexuality is considered sinful. Added to

this is the fact that Flavia, who is from an Irish/Brazilian background has not yet come out to her friends and family. Nishat's parents are also conflicted between their love for their daughter and the loyalty to their culture and strict upbringing. A conversation with her mother later on in the story reinforces this: ''Your Abbu and I need you to make a different choice […] the *choice* to not be […] this'' […] The choice she wants me to make isn't between being gay and straight, it's between them and me' (p.147). In the past, books featuring lesbian characters perceive lesbianism as a problem to be overcome and an issue which often leads to some sort of punishment (Younger, 2009). In *The Henna Wars* Nishat's sexuality is not depicted as being a problem in itself. Rather the prejudices she faces at school and from her family are the problem. Nishat's cousin is even asked by her parents to speak to Nishat in an attempt to change her mind: "'[…] Muslims aren't gay.'' […] I would laugh if this weren't such a ridiculous claim. Because of *course* Muslims can be gay'' (p.123).

Although at the beginning of the story, Nishat's parents pressurise her to make a different choice, Nishat herself refuses to deny her sexuality, being fully accepting of herself. Although rebellion against parents is a recurring theme in young adult literature (Seelinger-Trites, 2000), Nishat's refusal to deny her sexuality cannot be perceived as an act of rebellion, merely the determination to be honest about her identity. Furthermore, although Nishat and Flavia do not begin their relationship until the end of the story and do not have sex, Nishat does have to confront her parents' negative reaction to her coming out and the hostility and homophobia she endures in school.

As the story progresses, it becomes clear that Nishat's parents have their own act of rebellion to contend with in that they had already met and fallen in love before they were married as opposed to having an arranged marriage, an act which was tainted with shame: 'I always thought that Ammu and Abbu were proud for defying tradition, not ashamed of it' (p.146). Yet the conversation continues with Nishat's mother admitting that: 'For doing that to your grandparents […] for tainting our family […] Shame runs deep in our lives' (p.146). Nishat feels confusion regarding the fact that although her parents were strong enough to rebel against cultural expectations and familial pressures, they appear not to accept Nishat's sexuality and need to express herself in the ways in which she is comfortable:

> I'm stuck on the fact that Ammu and Abbu can leave their entire world behind, yet they can't pause for a moment to consider who I am. How they can sacrifice everything for me and Priti, but they can't sacrifice their closed view of sexuality to accept me as I am. (p.80)

Faced with these uncertainties and a series of adversities she must overcome, Nishat refuses to deny her sexuality, yet in doing so, she must face the ostracization of her family and peers. It becomes apparent, as the story progresses, that Nishat is prepared to withstand the ensuing isolation. It is admirable that she does so with quiet determination, asking for nothing from those around her, enduring the silence of her parents and the vicious comments of her peers. The notion of the isolated hero or heroine is a common one. According to Carol Pearson in her book *The Female Hero in American and British History* (1981):

> However, self-confident and life-affirming the hero may be, she often feels alone and confused […] Having lost faith in the culture's categories, the hero may wander […] in a world she does not recognise […] the environment is filled with unknown and potentially unrecognised dangers. (p.82)

When considering Nishat's role as a strong protagonist, while her heroism does not involve fighting dragons or slaying demons in the way of the heroic archetype, she does courageously challenge her Bengali culture and possess the determination to refuse to adhere to her parents' wishes.

5.4.3: Culture and Tattooing

The following section explores the importance of henna tattooing and how it is deeply entwined with Nishat's culture and personal identity. The henna war which is at the centre of this story begins when Nishat's business studies teacher sets the group the challenge of forming their own business. The project takes the form of a competition with a prize of a thousand euros for the winners. Nishat chooses henna tattooing for her group's business, a process at which she is both skilled and talented. The plan becomes jaded, however, when Nishat's enemy, Chyna, the malicious school gossip, chooses the same business idea. Further complications are added when Flavia, an old classmate from primary school reappears after years of absence. Flavia is Chyna's cousin and fellow business partner. Conflicts arise when Nishat accuses them of cultural appropriation, claiming that they have no right to practice henna tattooing: 'Chyna and Flavia are making a profit out of my culture, and my culture is important to me. Henna

is important to me' (p.159). The attraction between Nishat and Flavia adds more confusion for Nishat who is unsure where Flavia's loyalties lie – with her or with Chyna. Henna tattooing, however, is important to Nishat, not only because it is an important aspect of her cultural heritage but also it is because henna is part of her personal identity. As with permanent tattoos, henna tattooing is not merely a decoration or personal adornment – it has a plethora of meanings bound up with tradition and ritual. Henna also provides a way in which Nishat can forget about the chaos which surrounds her: 'There is something calming about the henna, something familiar and *real*, and *solid*. It makes me forget about everything else, at least for a few minutes' (p.16). This aspect of the story is also an important one. Nishat's sexuality and attraction to Flavia are not the only aspects of her life that define her. Her creativity and cultural heritage also play a significant role and are important in her personal development. The references to the process of henna tattooing being 'real and solid' echoes of permanence in the way that an ink tattoo is permanent. For Nishat, henna tattooing provides the security and safety that is missing from her life and helps to define her as a person: 'I began to pour my heart and soul out in the form of henna patterns […] the curved lines and circles and the knowledge that this is something that's mine, something important' (p.198).

It is clear throughout the story that Nishat experiences a sense of unbelonging, a feeling of being Other – a knowledge that there is no place for her in her Irish Catholic school but also no place for her in Bangladesh. She acknowledges that: 'Aside from the fact that being gay there is punishable by death, I'm also not sure where I would even fit in. I don't fit in here, but would I fit in there any better?' (p.79). For Nishat, then, perhaps winning the competition and beating Flavia and Chyna is not merely about the

monetary reward of one thousand euros but more about owning an important part of herself and finding an activity that she loves in a society where she feels ostracised and disregarded. By engaging in a cultural practice that is not their own, Chyna and Flavia are taking something away from Nishat. In the middle of a family conflict, friendship dilemmas and relationship difficulties, henna tattooing is the only thing in her life which remains constant, and Nishat needs her business to succeed when everything around her is breaking down.

Despite feeling suffocated by her culture, Nishat also experiences conflicting feelings of pride and frustration relating to it. Throughout the story there are references to cultural appropriation where Nishat struggles with her white peers wearing Bengali dress at a wedding and the aforementioned use of henna: 'There are two girls huddled in one corner of the room who are both white and, I'm pretty sure, Irish. The pink and gold salwar kemeez […] looks oddly out of place on them' (p.19). Having the classmates who mocked her culture adopt certain aspects of it without truly understanding its significance leaves Nishat feeling angry and insulted. There is a feeling that something is being stolen from Nishat as her classmates use important aspects of her culture to win a competition. As the story concludes, we are made aware of how important henna tattooing is for Nishat. In common with permanent tattoos, henna images are symbolic and an important part of a person's cultural identity. For Nishat, when she and Flavia finally admit their feelings for each other, placing a henna tattoo on Flavia's skin is heavily bound with her culture and her sexuality:

> I grab hold of the henna tube and begin to squeeze a pattern onto Flavia's palm while she beams at me as if this is the best day of her life […] The

> warmth of her hand. The tenderness of her gaze […] The fact that I'm weaving my culture onto her skin. (p.383)

The placing of the tattoo is also significant: 'When henna is applied to the top of the hands, it suggests protection, henna placed on the palms allows the person to receive and offer blessings' (Rostamian and Michalak, n.p.). When Nishat places the henna on Flavia's skin, it is almost as if she is performing a sacred and a sexual act, one that binds her and Flavia together.

5.4.4: Racism and Bullying

Although the themes of racism and bullying do not occur in all of the stories, they form an integral part of Nishat's story and are therefore included as part of the analysis. The racism began when Nishat first attended school in Ireland: 'In primary school, I was terrified of the other girls. They already made fun of me because of my slight accent […] They also pointed out that my food was weird and smelled bad' (p.76). Although Nishat isn't an obvious rebel like Dakota or Angie, she fights stubbornly and courageously for her right to be herself even if her decisions aren't always advisable or honest. She buys all the henna tubes from a shop in town to prevent Chyna and Flavia accessing them and attempts to break into Flavia's locker to steal the henna that is kept there. Neither of these acts are to be recommended yet the reader can't help admiring Nishat's fervent determination not to be a victim. In this narrative, negative judgement is not related to tattooing. Nishat experiences prejudice due to her sexuality and race. Nishat attends a Catholic school, and the homophobia begins after she is publicly outed by one of her sister's friends. During the business showcase at school, her henna stall is

vandalised, an occurrence which makes Nishat even more determined to win the competition and face up to the bullies. An important theme running through the story is power. Chyna has power through her gossip, but Nishat has the power to hold her head up high despite the gossip and rumours that have been spread about her and her own misgivings and concerns regarding attending school amidst the hatred and malice that she endures daily: 'There's panic bubbling in my stomach at the very thought of stepping into the school again, but I try to bite it down' (p.229-230). There is an element of defiance relating to Nishat's determination to face each day with her head held high. Pearson (1981) states that this rebellion is at the core of the heroine's journey: 'The hero who is an outsider because she is female, black, or poor is almost always a revolutionary. Simply by being heroic, a woman defies the conditioning that insists she be a damsel in distress' (p.9). Yet despite her refusal to feel shame just because other people expect her to, Nishat still maintains that: 'Sometimes being yourself, really truly yourself – can be the most difficult thing to be' (p.369).

Bullying in this story is strongly linked to the racism and homophobia that Nishat endures and features as a strong theme in this story. As with many stories where bullying occurs, the many incidents which Nishat has experienced remains unresolved. This may reflect the reality that despite the anti-bullying policies put in place by educational establishments, bullying is a problem that is still in existence (Nassem, 2018). Nishat claims that: 'The teachers couldn't have failed to hear the whispers in the hallways like horrid secrets the girls carried with them, spilling them with glee into each other's ears. But nobody ever bothered to put a stop to it' (p.217). It is Chyna's racism and bullying which has reinforced Nishat's anger when she starts to wear henna designs:

> That's what makes it all the worse. Chyna, who spent the past three years of school coming up with the most horrendous, racist rumours about me and my family […] is now sporting henna on her hands like it's nothing. (p.103)

The mockery and bullying that Nishat has endured, however, have resulted in her expecting to be excluded since this appears to be what she is used to. When texting her friends at a party she attends with her sister, Nishat states: 'This is the worst party ever […] What did I expect? (p.133). Some of Nishat's isolation therefore be construed as being self-inflicted due to the lack of trust she has in others. Throughout the narrative, Nishat makes references to the fact that she often feels very lonely and spends lunchtimes hiding 'behind a few bookshelves' (p.76). The theme of marginalisation relating to characters who are different or Other is a common one as is the isolated hero or heroine trope (Hunt and Lenz, 2001). In Nishat's case, there is no gay community, and to begin with, no family support but she continues to hold her head up high and confront her problems with determination.

5.4.5: The Heroine's Journey

Compared with the other tattooed protagonists featured in this study, Nishat is an unlikely heroine and does not fit into the predictable tough-talking, physically prepossessing, full of bravado embodied by Dakota in the aforementioned *Frost Moon* or the fragile, beautiful, needing-to-rescued Angie. Quiet, unassuming, and lacking in confidence, Nishat, however, possesses an inner strength that is unexpected and enviable. In common with heroines like Dakota and Leora in fantasy novel *Ink,* she

meets her 'quest' head on and faces her challenges with courage. Like Green the heroine in *Green Angel*, she quietly and determinedly fights for herself through difficult circumstances. According to Murdock (1990), a heroine's journey is a search for identity. Nishat, however, is already clear about her identity – she is a lesbian from a Muslim background. In a sense, Nishat's journey involves cultural and social acceptance *of* her identity. Her journey also involves finding her place within a culture that could potentially reject her while at the same time, embracing the positive aspects of it. Henna tattooing serves this purpose. Through the process of creating beautiful patterns, Nishat comes into her own. As the story draws to a close, Nishat's parents finally accept her sexuality, understanding that she will not and cannot change. Friendships are reconciled and although Nishat does not win the competition, she decides that: '[…] at the end of the day, none of that really mattered […] Because I'm still here and I have my friends, my sister, my family' (p.361). Furthermore, although Nishat's henna tattoos do not possess any magical power – they cannot come to life or be controlled – they do weave a magic of their own in that they enable Nishat to find, not just inner peace, but also a powerful connection between herself and her culture.

5.5: Conclusion

The novels selected for this chapter feature three very different tattooed protagonists – Angie who is battling with addiction, Kellie who is desperate for stability and afraid of change, and Nishat who faces racism and homophobia but who fiercely refuses to deny her sexuality. Each character comes from a different social and economic background and their tattoos tell very different stories. In terms of personal development, each

character emerges from their story having achieved some degree of positive personal development and autonomy. Even Angie, although more significantly the catalyst for Seymour's character development, agrees to undergo a rehabilitation program. Although the tattoos in each story vary in significance, any negative aspects of the characters' personal development relate not to their tattoos, but to other aspects of their lives. With the exception of Angie, therefore, each tattoo represents a *positive* aspect of the characters' development. They do not represent marginalisation and prejudice. Contrary to the negative aspects of tattooing outlined in chapter two, tattooing in *Ink is Thicker than Water* and *Henna Wars* relates to a sense of belonging, family, and cultural connection. The following chapter focuses on the textual analysis of three novels from the fantasy genre. It begins with an introduction to the genre and moves on to explore themes which include the heroines/hero's journey, the significance of the tattoos, identity, and sexuality.

Chapter 6

6.1: Fantasy

This chapter consists of the textual analysis of three fantasy novels, *Ink* (2017) by Alice Broadway, *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi, and *Green Angel* (2003) by Alice Hoffman. The significance of the tattoos in each novel and the ways in which the protagonists are portrayed will be explored. Fantasy is a difficult genre to define, owing to the fact that it encompasses a significant variety of story types (Pinsent, 2016). According to Peter Hunt, fantasy can be divided into the following categories:

> Other world fantasies […] future fantasies (often merging into science fiction); books in which magic intrudes into the contemporary world […]; dreams […]; excursions into other parallel worlds […]; animal fantasies […]; make believe magic or mythic worlds. (Hunt, 2001, in Pinsent, 2016, p.62)

According to Farah Mendelsohn, there are four types of fantasy: portal-quest fantasy, immersive fantasy, intrusion fantasy, and liminal fantasy. The portal-quest fantasy involves protagonists leaving their ordinary lives to enter a portal into a secondary world. Examples of this include *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis (1950) and *The Wizard of Oz* by Frank Baum (1900). Immersive fantasy, also referred to as 'high fantasy' (Grenby, 2008), takes place 'in a world built so that it functions on all levels in a complete world' (Mendelsohn, 2008, p.59). Immersive fantasy therefore does not take place across different worlds. It may occur in realms which differ from our own but there are no outside influences. *Shadow and Bone* by Leigh Bardugo (2021) and *House of Salt and Sorrow* by Erin A. Craig (2019) could be considered

examples of immersive fantasy. Intrusion fantasy features the intrusion of magical or supernatural elements into the mundane world. This invasion 'disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back where it came or controlled' (Mendelsohn, 2008, p.115). An example of this type of fantasy is *The Raven Boys* by Maggie Stiefvater. Liminal fantasy consists of an elusive fantastical element which leaves the characters (and the reader) uncertain regarding its existence: '[…] in the liminal fantasy the magic hovers in the corner of our eye' (Mendelsohn 2008, p.xv). Liminal fantasy may also be referred to as 'low fantasy' as it usually takes place in the familiar mundane world (Grenby, 2008). Examples of this type of fantasy are *Holes* by Louis Sachar (1998) and *Wizard of the Pigeons* by Robin Hobb (2020).

Many theorists agree that fantasy stories often portray the 'construction of the impossible' (Mendelsohn and James, 2012) and that fantasy tropes involve a quest of some sort or a fight between good and evil (Mendelsohn and James, 2012). Furthermore, in the fantasy novel, protagonists are frequently bestowed with an ability or power which enables them to fight evil and/or defeat the enemy. For example, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children are bestowed with gifts by Aslan: Peter receives a sword and a shield, Susan, bow and arrows, and Lucy, a small dagger and a bottle of healing elixir. Typically, in the fantasy novel, the protagonist must undergo a quest or journey of some sort (Campbell, 1971, Hunt and Lenz, 2001, Mendelsohn, 2008) or there is a prophecy which must be fulfilled (Grenby, 2008). The quest may take place on an external or an internal level: fighting external supernatural forces while also battling with inner doubts and uncertainties (Pearson, 1981, James and Mendelsohn, 2012). Often the protagonist will not discover their abilities or magical connections until a specific event takes place or they have an encounter with a

mysterious character. Furthermore, fantasy tales may frequently be didactic in nature and contain a moral message:

> The great fairy tales and fantasy stories capture the meaning of morality through vivid depictions of the struggle between good and evil, where characters must make difficult choices between right and wrong. (Guroian, 1998, p.18)

Fantasy itself is very much influenced by ancient folklore, myth, and fairy tales: 'The earliest forms of written fiction that we have from the ancient world are works that we might understand as fantasy and which have influenced many modern fantasy writers' (Mendelsohn and James, 2014, p.7). Initially such tales were communicated orally (Bearne and Watson, 2002) and were done so in order to inform and share experiences by 'acknowledging fearful realities and transforming them into fantasy to make them more manageable' (Bearne and Watson, 2002, p.188). The function of folklore, therefore, was to offer guidance alongside a set of cultural morals and expectations 'providing those materials to which the members of the culture return again and again in the form of ritual behaviour' (Hunt, 1992, p.155).

Modern fantasy has its roots in myth and fairy tale which can be seen as representations of our inner fears, struggles, hopes and dreams (Manlove, 1983, Campbell, 1993): '[…] the myths of the hero pertain to our most essential struggle within ourselves' (Pearson, 1981, p.3). Myth can be defined as a '[…] traditional story about heroes or supernatural beings, often explaining the origins of natural phenomena or aspects of human behaviours (Dickerson and O'Hara, 2006, p.23).

Green Angel, (2003) by Alice Hoffman*, Ink* (2017) by Alice Broadway, and *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi are the three chosen fantasy novels for this study. While *Ink* and *Children of Blood and Bone* remain firmly in the fantasy category, both being set in realms significantly different from our own, *Green Angel* could more strongly be defined as magical realism or dystopian fiction. Magical realism 'combines the characters and events of contemporary and recognisable adolescence found within teenage realism with some aspect of the consensually impossible, supernatural or unreal' (Waller, 2009, p.17), whereas dystopian fiction portrays a bleak, futuristic society whereby 'individuals are manipulated to further the agenda of the politically powerful (Rabkin, 1983, Daniels and Bowen, 2003). Certainly, the apocalyptic event that kills Green's family and leaves her alone and grieving is synonymous with events which have occurred in the world as we know it. Furthermore, Green experiences the usual teenage anxieties relating to her appearance and compares herself unfavourably to other family members. My reasons for including this text in the fantasy category are due to the fact that there is an element of fantasy and magic which intrudes throughout the narrative thus linking with Mendelsohn's fantasy categories - which is more strongly apparent when the tattoos which Green marks on her body as an expression of her grief turn from black to green as she begins to recover from her grief-induced numbness. According to Waller, an important element of magical or fantastic realism is that: 'the fantastic occurs at the level of the story as an impossible event or situation that invades the realist narrative' (Waller, 2009, p.18). The novel has fairy tale overtones which are discussed in more detail in the analysis and differs from *Ink* and *Children of Blood and Bone* in that it takes place in a world very much like our own. Although they tackle issues of prejudice, class divide and political corruption, topics which are prevalent in

our own world, *Ink* and *Children of Blood and Bone* take place in universes where the customs, culture, and religious beliefs are significantly different. In *Ink*, prejudice and suspicion are aimed at the 'blanks', the people who remain unmarked, whose bodies are devoid of tattoos. In *Children of Blood and Bone*, the fear and prejudice are directed at the magi, individuals whose bodies are marked with designs and patterns which signify their magical abilities. In this narrative, Zelie must fight to claim the magic which is her birth-right. Although *Ink* does not take place in a magical realm, protagonist Leora can read people's tattoos and see beyond the images on their bodies and into their thoughts and motivations. The tattoos in these two novels, however, do not possess a power of their own. The power comes from the individuals who wear them. In contrast, in the three tattoo magic novels discussed in chapter seven, it is the tattoos themselves which contain the power to elicit change and affect the lives of the people around them. In relation to Mendelsohn's definitions of the four types of fantasy, *Green Angel* could also be defined as liminal fantasy as the fantasy or magic is present but has an elusive quality. *Ink* and *Children of Blood and Bone* conform to the description of immersive fantasy in that there are no influences from secondary worlds or realms.

6.2: Textual Analysis of *Ink*

Ink (2017) by Alice Broadway is the first in a trilogy and is narrated in first person by sixteen-year-old Leora who is living in a world where the life history of its occupants is tattooed on their skin – every decision, every choice is marked and once a person dies,

their skin is made into a book which is kept by their families as a way to immortalise the departed:

> The life story etched onto your body is kept forever […] when we preserve the words, pictures and moments imprinted on your skin, our story survives for eternity. (p.2)

However, if the marks on the body are deemed to be negative, that is, if the wearer has committed a crime or has not lived a virtuous life, their skin book is thrown into a fire and their soul is banished forever. These individuals are known as the forgotten and are never spoken of again. Leora lives with her mother but was closer to her newly deceased father. The story begins as Leora is about to leave school and begin a new profession, along with her best friend Verity. She finds out upon her father's death, however, that her family have been concealing secrets which may lead to his skin book being destroyed. In Leora's world, prejudice and suspicion are not directed towards people who have tattoos. Instead, it is aimed at the group of people known as the 'blanks' – those whose bodies remain unmarked, whose lives are impossible to read because their history is concealed.

6.2.1: Tattoos and Tradition

This part of the analysis explores the connections between tattooing and tradition. It is clear from the beginning of the novel that tattooing is an integral part of the culture in Leora's world as opposed to being an activity that separates an individual from mainstream society. Babies are tattooed with their 'birth mark' (p.1) at two days old.

This appears to be something akin to a christening ceremony along with the notion that babies who die before they are marked are forgotten in the same way that age-old superstition dictated that un-christened children would remain in limbo instead of going to heaven. It is also synonymous with tribal markings and tribal affiliation discussed in chapter two. In common with tattooing in the real world where the practice can be linked with ritual (Pitts, 2003) and as a rite of passage (Beeler, 2006), tattooing in this world is also bound up with symbolism and marking significant events in a person's life. Leora's community is rich in tradition which could potentially be viewed as positive in that it provides security and a sense of belonging. Traditions range from the aforementioned skin books, and: 'The weighing of the soul ceremony […] where the leaders announce their final decision about the destiny of your soul' (p.9), to the speaking ceremony, a lengthy ritual involving speaking out loud the names of the ancestors who through the virtues of their actions, are remembered with reverence. However, it is implied more strongly as the story progresses, that the community is possibly *too* fixated on the past and therefore unable to embrace change or consider new ideas. Tattoos in this story are also highly symbolic and possess both personal and social significance. The crow symbol, for example, is a negative image, associated with crime and misdeeds, as we shall see further on in the analysis. Aside from the reference to the christening ceremony, the novel has significant religious undertones and makes continuous references to Saint, an ancient Messiah-like figure who: '[…] longed to share his knowledge with them. How desperately he wished to heal their wounds and lead them into righteousness' (p.105). The story of Saint in fact reads like a biblical parable and the community's traditions revolve around the sort of fairy tales which are used to frighten and control small children. Much of the conflict between the marked and the

blanks revolves around the tale of Moriah who was ‘as good as she was beautiful’ (p.54) and whose life story was beautifully etched on her skin. Her twin sister, however, ‘didn’t have golden hair or ruby-red lips, her voice wasn’t like a thousand angels laughing, and her eyes didn’t sparkle like stars in the heavens’ (p.54). This sister remains unnamed but becomes the blank woman, the White Witch, imbued with evil, whose skin is forever unmarked due to the wickedness in her soul.

6.2.2: The Heroine’s Journey

Leora’s journey and character development begins when she questions the dogma she has been taught since childhood. To begin with, it appears that Leora feels pride in her ancestry and very much a part of her community. The first pages of the story explain the concept of the skin books, which also appear strongly linked to the soul of the dead ancestor: ‘Everyone has the skin books in their homes: our shelves are full of my ancestors. I can breathe them in, touch them and read their lives’ (p.2). As the story advances, however, it becomes clear that Leora feels a degree of conflict and rebelliousness relating to her own tattoos and the customs of her community. Rebelling against the customs of family and society are of course common themes in young adult literature (Seelinger -Trites, 2000) and arguably occur as the adolescent begins to form her identity. In Leora’s case, at the beginning of the story, her identity is very much dictated by the governing bodies in her society: ‘I feel less naked today and […] and I would never say this out loud – it feels nice to hide my marks’ (p.17), also: ‘’My skin tells the tale the government has chosen for me.’ (p.69).

In this story, therefore, tattoos appear to be more about social control than beautiful imagery commemorating personal history and the autonomy of the wearer. In the second chapter of the story, Leora witnesses a public marking - a means by which criminals are punished and outlawed. The tattooing of criminals is not a practice unique to this story. Tattooing has historically been associated with criminals (Van Dinter, 2005, Oettermann, 2000, Miflin, 1997 in Adams, 2009), a factor which has undoubtedly contributed to the negative attitudes surrounding the practice. The tattoo which is inked upon the miscreant is a crow. In the recesses of her memory, Leora recalls seeing this very same image on the head of her father. The story does not inform us as to the specific meaning of this image; presumably this is covered in more detail in the subsequent novels. It is only at the end of the story that we are led to believe that the crow may be the symbol of a revolutionary or at the very least, not as tainted with evil as Leora initially assumes.

The blanks are despised and feared because their desires, choices and thoughts are not marked on their bodies for all to see. Any crimes the blanks commit remain hidden: 'Our teacher told us that only someone with something to hide would keep their story inside them' (p.91). Although the main focus of the story is the significance of tattooing, and how this controls the lives of Leora's community, it is also a story of prejudice and social division. At one point in the community's distant history, the blanks and the marked lived together but the blanks were eventually banished: 'sent far away […] to live in communities where they could no longer hurt us' (p.60). This banishment and subsequent isolation of the blanks is similar to racial segregation of apartheid and other forms of marginalisation. The blanks, therefore, in their decision to remain unmarked, instead 'chose to reject salvation' (p.65). This phrasing is reminiscent of the type of

religious fervour and evangelical utterances of fundamental religious organisations which may, on the outset, appear to be about genuine faith but in fact are used as a means to control and brainwash thousands of people. As the story does not focus on what life was like when the two communities lived together, we can only assume that the blanks were banished due to the fact they refused to submit to the sort of social control where their very thoughts were emblazoned upon their bodies for the whole world to view.

Leora's society has chosen to control its inhabitants with the use of propaganda against the blanks and a series of ancient traditions and stories handed down through the generations. Leora has been indoctrinated from birth to believe in these stories and she, along with most members of her community, has never questioned the words of the leaders. It is only when Leora meets Obel, a tattooist to whom she has been apprenticed, that she begins to question the things she has been told since birth. It is from him that she finds out about a group of revolutionaries, her father included, who wish to obtain equality for the blanks. He tells her that:

> They (the government) want to know everything about you; they want to control you […] Have you ever wondered if the blanks are really so terrible? Or are we just told they are? (p.224)

It is easy to find Leora's unquestioning belief in the doctrines of her community irritating at the start of the story. In this sense she differs from heroines like Zelie in *Children of Blood and Bone* and Dakota in *Frost Moon* whose rebellious natures are apparent from the start. Since tattoos are commonplace in Leora's world, being tattooed is not an act of rebellion. Leora's bravery does not manifest until the end of

the story when she begins to question her beliefs and actively rebels against the strict and restrictive dogma by which her community is bound. Small gestures at the beginning of the story, for example, wishing to cover up her tattoos and wanting to remain unreadable indicate that a part of Leora does question and even dislike the customs of her community. As the story continues, however, Leora's character develops and her resolve strengthens as family secrets are exposed: 'For the first time in my life, I'm doubting my faith, and it terrifies me' (p.240). Aided by boyfriend Oscar and best friend, Verity, Leora sets out to uncover the truth and face an uncertain future. According to Maureen Murdock: 'The modern-day heroine has to confront her fear about reclaiming […] her personal power; her ability to feel, heal, create, change social structures, and shape her future' (Murdock, 1990, p.135). Leora's relinquishment of her faith and reclamation of her personal power is initially a reluctant one, perhaps because her beliefs cushion her with a kind of comforting security:

> When I was at school, I quite liked rules. It made me feel safe that I knew what I had to do […] My faith in the system – in our marks and our eternities – has always been iron clad. As long as I stick to the rules, everything is neat and good and safe. (p.239)

It is the love for her father and her need to understand her family's history which result in Leora breaking free from her rigid existence. The closing pages of the story witness Leora actively rebelling as she reads out loud a list of names of people who have been forgotten during a speaking ceremony.

6.2.3: Beauty and Social Convention

Physical appearance is a theme which occurs regularly in young adult fiction, especially relating to female protagonists (Younger, 2009). The subsequent self-doubt of the female protagonist is also a common trope in this literary category. For Leora, whose skin is relatively clear due to being so young, she is literally a blank slate. She feels however, that the markings she *does* have do not successfully reveal her true self, that there is more to her and her life than the markings on her skin. Consumed with feelings of inadequacy and fear which encapsulate the young adult themes of teenage angst and uncertainty regarding the future, Leora is undecided about which designs she will eventually choose for herself. Her tattoos alone, therefore, are not all that she is: '[…] maybe if people can't see how bare my skin is they'll make up a better story than the truth' (p.71). In this story, unlike in the real world where tattoos are generally not strongly associated with traditional beauty ideals (Yuen Thompson, 2015), tattooing and beauty are very closely linked. In real-world settings tattoos have been considered to be challenging accepted beauty norms, especially related to women (Yuen Thompson, 2015). Perhaps because in Leora's world, tattooing is related to purity of the soul, they are also associated with physical beauty. The 'Beauty is Good' study conducted by Dion, Berscheid and Walster in 1972 cited in chapter two backs up this theory. Interestingly, the opposite may be true in our world where purity is perhaps more associated with having clear, unmarked skin. When Leora sees an image of the white witch, she is surprised by her reaction and begins to question her own ideas of beauty:

> High cheekbones […] make her appear fragile, and yet her stance is so bold. She doesn't look like she's trying to hide anything, even though I know she holds deception beneath that perfect skin […] I feel strangely

> uneasy. Someone so terrible – so utterly blank – should not be so beautiful. (p.197)

At this point she sees the likeness between herself and the white witch, an observation which shocks her to the core: 'She's me. I am her. I am the exact image of the White Witch' (p.198).

Aside from this revelation, Leora experiences the typical adolescent insecurities associated with her physical appearance. She compares herself unfavourably to her best friend, Verity, and describes herself in the following way: 'My breasts are too small to be curvy, and my bum is too big for me to be slim […] my face is too quirky to be pretty and too plain to be striking' (p.70). When she meets Oscar, she experiences attraction towards him but also doubt that he could possibly feel any desire for her. It is interesting that even though Leora acknowledges the white witch's beauty, she fails to recognise it in herself, despite the fact that she is aware of the likeness between them. In Leora's case, there does seem to be a marked lack of confidence and an inability to perceive herself as anything but plain. Relating to the theories of the body discussed in chapter two, Leora does not conform to Naomi Wolf's description of 'the official body' (Wolf, 2002). While bearing in mind Bartky's 'tyranny of slenderness' (2003), and Orbach's theories that women's bodies must conform to a fashionable ideal to be considered attractive, it appears that even in an alternate universe the pressure to meet specific physical requirements still prevails. Certainly, in our society, it is difficult to see ourselves as attractive if our appearance does not conform to conventional notions of beauty. As Leora looks critically at 'the stretch marks on my hips and the paleness of my skin' (p.70), we can assume that even within a fantasy setting, similar beauty ideals and

standards apply. In Leora's world in common with our own, the thin ideal is perpetuated and held in higher esteem than other body shapes (Orbach, 2001, Bordo, 2003). However, despite the fact that Leora is not a confident heroine, and indeed is consumed with self-doubt, she possesses a degree of determination which strengthens as the story draws to is conclusion. At the start of the story, Leora is afraid of her body and its flaws and unsure of the future. On the final page, however, she makes a bold, possibly life-threatening statement by revealing her new tattoo, an image she has chosen herself:

> I drop all my outer layers to the ground and stand in my breastplate and skirt. There are gasps as I walk down the aisle away from everyone and everything. The talons clawing at my breast, the tips of its wings fluttering down my arms. A crow. A crow. The mark is a crow. (p.366)

As Leora does not outwardly rebel until the final page of the story, we are not told of the consequences of her actions. Everything which occurs in this narrative, however, potentially gives her the strength to face the challenges presented to her in the second two stories. As Murdock maintains: 'Skills learned during this part of the heroic quest establish a woman's competence in the world' (Murdock, 1990, p.47). As a heroine, Leora presents as a strong protagonist whose character strengthens as the story evolves. Despite her obvious misgivings and fear for her future, Leora fights for what she believes is right without relying on a stronger male ally. Her initial self-doubt remains present throughout the story, yet she battles resolutely to uncover the truth relating to her family with a single mindedness and strength of will.

6.3: Textual Analysis of Children of Blood and Bone

Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi (2018) is a multi-layered story addressing themes of racism, class, prejudice, and power. The story is the first in a trilogy and although set in a fantasy world, it is allegorical as it runs parallel with events from the real world including the marginalisation, outlawing, slavery, and murder of countless people due to their ethnicity. It comes as no surprise that the author has an MA in West African mythology and culture as the story as the story is richly bound in magic and sorcery. The story is set in fictional Orisha which bears a marked similarity to Nigerian culture, in particularly regarding the significance of marking the body which shall be discussed further on in this section. The divide between dark-skinned and light-skinned characters in the novel is also synonymous with the theme of lighter-skinned people being treated more favourably within black communities in the real world (Hill-Collins, 1990) as outlined in chapter two. This patriarchal society is ruled by the cruel dictator, King Saran who wishes to avenge all the deaths in his family by killing all the magi and ridding the world of magic. The story is centred around two sets of siblings, Zelie and Tzain, and Amari and Inan. The narrative focuses predominantly upon the precarious relationships between the three main protagonists, Zelie, Amari and Inan, giving all three characters a voice as they narrate their separate experiences. The story examines the dynamic between these three characters – their changing attitudes towards each other; their prejudices, fears and growing attraction between Zelie and Inan and Amari and Tzain.

Zelie and Tzain come from a background of poverty and tragedy – their mother, a maji, was killed by King Saran's soldiers and their father, after having been brutally beaten is

mentally ill and severely traumatised as a result. They live in fear of being put to work in the stocks, a fate from which they would never be able to escape. In contrast, Amari and Inan are the children of King Saran and have come from a life of privilege. That life, however, has come with its own set of fears and disadvantages – both Amari and Inan have been brainwashed by their father into believing magic is evil, wrong, and must be eradicated, and that the maji are the underclass who deserve to be enslaved. The story focuses on how the dominant female protagonist, Zelie, comes into her magical power from a life of fear and oppression in order to defend against the tyrannical reign of King Saran. Zelie's quest to reclaim her magic, the symbolism of the tattoos on the magi's bodies, the power of the magic itself and what it means when and if it returns play significant roles within this narrative.

6.3.1: Prejudice and Racism

Of the nine novels, *Children of Blood and Bone*, *Ink*, and *Henna Wars* are the only novels where racism and prejudice occur. In fact, the dominant themes in this narrative are racial prejudice, class divide, and the obvious distinction between the lighter-skinned nobility and the darker skinned maji. Despite the fact that this thesis focuses on physical diversity, in this novel social class plays a significant role. However, when considering diversity, class is a subject which is often neglected (Carthew, 2020). Working-class characters are often marginalised or subject to stereotypical portrayals. Furthermore, there appears to be a marked lack of working-class writers (Carthew, 2020). According to Natasha Carthew: 'I still find it hard to find many working-class

characters in fiction that are truly typical of my childhood or the lower socio-economic world that children and teens have to negotiate in Britain today' (Carthew, 2020, n.p.).

Although *Children of Blood and Bone* is set in a fantasy world, the female protagonist, Zelie is from a working-class background and she embarks on a quest to fight for the rights of her people who are belittled and abused. They are imprisoned, enslaved and vilified on the basis of their appearance and their social standing. They are also demonized due to the magic they once possessed. Prejudice and discrimination are rife within her society and Zelie's people constantly live in fear. From the very beginning of the story, we are made aware of the significance of skin colour – whiter, paler skin is synonymous with privilege and wealth. Zelie describes one of her peers in the following way:

> This close to Yemi, the only thing I see is her luscious black hair, her coconut-brown skin, so much lighter than my own. Her complexion carries the soft brown of Orishans who've never spent a day labouring in the sun, a privileged life. (p.4)

Along with darker skin, the maji have white hair, another aspect of their appearance marking them out as Other. This is referred to by Zelie as 'the sign of the gods' touch' (p.14) yet despite this, it has negative connotations, draws unwanted attention and is something that cannot be easily hidden: 'We are the people who fill the king's prisons, the people our kingdom turns into labourers' (p.27). The appearance of the maji, however, is not the only thing that outlaws them. Although the supernatural abilities of the maji lay dormant having been cruelly destroyed by King Saran, the fear of what the

maji can potentially accomplish still remains. The maji are humiliatingly referred to as maggots and due to the fear and ignorance of their society, are forced to live in poverty on the outskirts of the city where many are forced into slavery: 'Those stuck in the stocks toil endlessly, erecting palaces, building roads, mining coal [...] an excuse to round up my people [...] starved, beaten, and worse, the diviners are transported like cattle. Forced to work until their bodies break' (p.28). This cruelty bears marked similarity to the slave trade where millions of Africans were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries to work on plantations or as slaves to the wealthy reinforcing the allegorical nature of this narrative.

6.3.2: Duty and Identity

In common with Leora in *Ink*, Zelie's identity and that of her companions is very much bound up in tradition, cultural expectations, and duty. One important theme which runs through the story is duty both to family and wider society. Zelie is determined to support her family but sometimes risks her own safety and the safety of others in order to do so by making reckless decisions: 'I fall to my knees, nearly collapsing on the wooden walkway. My gods [...] It's not even midday and I've already risked two lives' (p.25). Forever at odds with her brother Tzain who attempts with varying degrees of success to exert some control over her choices, Zelie rebels against the expectations of her society, but finally is able to use this energy to embark upon a quest to reclaim her magic and bring it back into the world: 'There is no living under their tyranny. Our only salvation is power' (p.314). Zelie is a strong, feisty heroine which makes her a positive female protagonist. Her growing attraction to Inan, however, leaves her conflicted, since

he is the enemy who has been instructed to capture her. Although this is not a romance novel, there is within it, the somewhat predictable opposites attract trope and the lustful musings of Inan could be found in many young adult narratives: 'Unable to stop myself, I drink Zelie in, every curve, every line. The crescent-shaped birthmark along the shape of her neck. The specks of white swimming in the silver pools of her eyes' (p.291). For Zelie, however, the desire and duty to reclaim her magic potentially overrides her desire for Inan.

Inan too feels a sense of duty, only his commitment to his family is caught in conflict. The 'duty before self' mantra that he has been brought up with and his father's bloodthirsty attitude to the maji clashes with his own desire to spill no blood. Yet for him, magic is connected to fear. Both Inan and Amari have been brainwashed and manipulated by their families, although this has impacted upon Inan more severely that Amari who escapes the confines of her castle when her maid servant is murdered by her father. When Inan finally discovers his magical heritage, he perceives it as a sickness and a disease and attempts to suppress it: 'I hate my magic [...] I despise the way it poisons me. But more than anything, I hate the way it makes me hate myself' (p.323).

6.3.3: The Heroine's Journey

Zelie is a reluctant heroine which is a typical trope of the fantasy quest (Campbell, 1971). She and her companions must embark upon a quest involving locating three powerful artefacts, a scroll, a sunstone, and a bone dagger, together with the eventual performance of a ritual which will potentially bring magic back into the world. Zelie's

heroic quest, therefore, involves both an inner and outer journey – the inner, to reconnect with her own magic, and the outer to free her people from slavery. Her desire for magical artefacts does not relate to monetary wealth but freedom from oppression. Murdock relates this story arc to the female heroine's journey:

> The quest for […] entitlement, attainment, acclaim and riches […] is no longer germane. That misguided quest has taken too much of a toll on the body and soul of women […] the task of today's heroine is to mine the silver and gold within *herself.'* (Murdock, 1990, p.193)

The inevitable acceptance of her quest and faith in her ability to fulfil it therefore play an important part in the story. This is a typical aspect of the fantasy genre – a seemingly impossible challenge and a quest which must be fulfilled. The protagonist is the only person who has the power to fulfil it, despite their initial reticence (Murdock, 1990). Zelie lacks faith in her ability to successfully complete the quest but is empowered by her determination to seek justice for her family and her people. This determination makes her an admirable heroine as she meets her adversaries with courage and resolve.

6.3.4: Tattoos and Power

In this narrative, tattoos are associated with power, magic, and cultural identity: 'Dark men, women and children in fine suede robes roam, beautiful lines and symbols dotting their skin in elegant swirls of white' (p.141). They also represent the coming of age – the young diviners receive their magical abilities and become maji when they reach the

age of thirteen. This resonates with the scarification of children as they approach puberty in Nigerian and other sub-Saharan African cultures. Scarification is a process involving a variety of different techniques including the cutting, burning, or branding of the skin (Garve et al, 2017). This process was undertaken as a means of tribal identification and beautification (Edisana, 2022). During the slave trade, for example, it was a means by which escaped slaves could be identified. However, in modern-day Nigeria, scarification as a practice is becoming less popular being perceived as being a form of mutilation and associated with shame (Ukiwe, 2018). Those who have these markings on their skin may be subject to discrimination and ridicule (Edisana, 2022). Again, this runs parallel with the prejudice and racism experienced by the magi due to their magical abilities and unusual appearance. Tattoos within this narrative are also symbols of re-awakening, becoming whole and of personal identity. In fact, the reclamation of magic could be equated with the reawakening of feminine power. As Zelie receives her magic for the first time she responds with the following:

> The strange sensation buzzes beneath my skin, foreign yet familiar at the exact same time. It rumbles in my core, warming me from the inside out. It beats like a second heartbeat. (p.77)

Culturally, they stand for hope and rebirth and reclaiming of the body after a regime of oppression. Tattoos in this context are associated with the sacred and connect their wearers to their heritage, people, and customs: 'They are called senbaria [...] The language of the gods, as old as time itself' (p.156).

The magical tattoos, or senbaria (a word which is exclusive to this story), on the skin of the maji do not appear to be inked into the skin in the traditional way. No reference is made to the tattooing process which leads the reader to assume that the tattoos appear on the bodies of the maji because they are in the possession of magical abilities. Only one reference is made to the 'marks inked into the man's neck' (p.156) and it is implied that the 'inking' takes place supernaturally. Although prejudice in this story does not relate to tattooing but to deeper, more complex social issues, it is interesting that the author has focused upon the marked body as another form of marginalisation. The white tattoos are perceived by the magi as being symbols of beauty. The branding at the beginning of the story, however, represents a more sinister and negative aspect of marking the body: 'The acrid smell of burning flesh hits me as the stocker presses the cane into the boy's back. Smoke rises from his skin as he struggles to crawl to his knees' (p.53). Again, this practice resonates with certain aspects of the aforementioned slave trade. Branding, for example, was a way in which slave traders marked their slaves: 'Branding is an act which ostracises […] and serves to reduce humans to property' (Keefer, 2019, p.662). Branding in the story bears a stark contrast to the perception of tattoos. Tattoos within this narrative are considered to be symbols of power and liberation, but marks made by branding are considered humiliating. According to Jennifer Putzi: 'Scars or brands evoked pity but were rarely seen as marks of power […] they could be seen as representing the 'degradation' of slavery and as being somehow shameful' (Putzi, 2001, p.130). In contemporary society, however, branding is considered by some as being a form of body reclamation and a means by which an individual can gain control over their body (Pitts, 2003).

The association of tattooing with power is an important one and a theme which has largely been neglected in secondary literature thus far. However, tattooing in the same way as branding, has been linked to self-empowerment relating to reclaiming and reconnecting with the body after physical and emotional trauma as has been discussed in chapter two. This narrative and the other tattoo magic and fantasy narratives focus on power relating to magical or supernatural abilities. It can also refer to hierarchical power and its subsequent use or misuse. Power, however, can also be associated with personal qualities such as inner strength, autonomy, and fortitude. Zelie and Amari are powerful characters in this respect as they continue to fight for justice and freedom in a world fraught with danger. These qualities make them admirable protagonists. However, while Zelie is, on the one hand a strong, feisty protagonist, she is required to adopt masculine traits in which to confront her enemy. She does not, however, at any point in the story compromise her femininity, making her a well-balanced lead female character:

> If she has wittingly or unwittingly chosen the path of the masculine warrior, she can either continue stoically along this path alone or […] she can internalise the skills learned on the hero's journey and integrate these with the wisdom of her feminine nature. (Murdock, 1990, p.167)

6.4: Conclusion

Arguably, all three protagonists are victims of their personal circumstances and are portrayed accordingly. Tattoos and the magic they represent mean something different

to each character – for Zelie, they symbolise freedom and power, for Amari, they are a means by which she can escape her oppressive life, and for Inan, they symbolise fear, hatred, and self-loathing. Of all the main characters in this narrative, Inan is the weakest. Powered by his father's prejudices and violence towards the maji yet at the same time, conflicted between his personal desires and his sense of duty, it seems he does not truly know where his loyalties lie. Amari and Zelie, however, are powerful heroines, each focused on the outcome of their desires and willing to make sacrifices to achieve them. They fight courageously within the patriarchal society which oppresses them. This contrasts greatly with traditional narratives where male characters dominate the story. According to Pearson: 'Patriarchal society views women essentially as supporting characters in the drama of life. Men change the world, and women help them' (Pearson, 1981, p.vii). Tattooing in this narrative is not only linked with power, freedom, and magic but also with cultural heritage and strong feminine connections. Zelie's power comes from her mother and from her mentor, Mama Agba who trains Zelie in her quest to be a warrior. As Zelie herself says as the story draws to a close: 'Magic shatters through every heart, every soul, every being. It connects us all, threading through the shell of humanity' (p.518). The tattoos in this narrative therefore represent connection - familial, spiritual, social, and tribal affiliation (Pitts, 2003; Beeler, 2006) together with a sense of belonging in the same way in which they do in the real world.

Textual Analysis of *Green Angel*

Green Angel by Alice Hoffman (2003) is a haunting post-apocalyptic story where female protagonist, Green, loses her entire family in a disaster. The story does not

specify what the disaster *is,* but it refers to 'fire, ashes and smoke.' In order to cope with her grief and survive in a world without her parents and sister, Green retreats into herself and spends most of the time in the ruins of her garden. In an attempt to deal with the difficult feelings she experiences and come to terms with the trauma she has endured, Green begins to tattoo herself with images of vines and thorns. Healing begins to take place when Green begins to help other people within her community including a stray dog, a neighbour, and a mute boy.

The overarching themes in this story are trauma, transformation, transition, grief, hope and survival. The survival trope can be linked with the common idea that a hero or heroine must overcome a challenge or face some sort of peril to be considered heroic (Campbell, 1971). Often the heroine possesses a power which enables her to do so. This is also a coming-of-age story which has fairy tale undertones with the tattoos taking on magical properties and where certain aspects parallel with *The Sleeping Beauty* which will be discussed further on in this analysis. Green herself also has a magic and power of her own in her ability to make things grow and is portrayed by the author as being shy and awkward but with an inner strength which, as the story progresses, enables her to survive. The journey of the heroine is an important theme to focus on at this juncture. Traditional literature focuses mainly upon the quest of the hero (Hunt and Lenz, 2001) which typically involves 'a humble birth; orphan status; being the subject of a mysterious prophecy; exceptionality – a special gift' (Luthi, 1970, p.153). Although Green's story does resonate with that formula in that she is an orphan with a gift – the ability to make things grow – her journey, or quest, does not involve a battle in the conventional sense of the word or the location of a series of powerful artefacts. The heroine's journey differs from the 'stereotypical ego-driven masculine hero's journey

admired in mainstream culture' (Murdock, 1990, p.xv). In Green's case, it is an inward journey fraught with mental anguish and grief with the final goal the acceptance of loss and of her younger self. Even before the tragedy that befalls her, we learn that Green lacks confidence and belief in herself. Her journey not only consists of learning to live without her family but also to trust herself and believe in the skills she possesses. As has previously been discussed in the analysis of *Ink is Thicker than Water*, 'Part of the heroine's quest is to find her work in the world, which enables her to find her identity' (Murdock, p.47) and to enable her survival, Green's identity must change from the insecure child to the strong, independent woman she becomes.

6.4.1: Transition and Transformation

There are three main themes in this story that run parallel to each other – loss of family and Green's survival without her family, the tattooing of her body to mark her grief and sadness, and the transition from childhood to adulthood. The story contains a substantial amount of symbolism: Green's tattoos are a sign of grief and anger but also stand for independence and personal growth and change. The thorns that she tattoos are a way in which she redirects her mental pain but are also a form of protection and act as a talisman against danger. They may also be symbolic of nature's cycles of death and rebirth.

In this story, tattooing herself is a way in which Green copes with her grief and arguably, reconnects with her body after trauma. At the beginning of the story, we learn that Green feels less than her family: *'*I was the least among them, nothing special, just a girl. I was a moody, dark weed.' (p.6). In common with Kellie, in *Ink is Thicker*

than Water, Green feels eclipsed by her family although arguably she has aggrandized them in her guilt at being the only one of them to survive: *'*[…] my stomach growled all the time. I hated it for wanting food. I didn't deserve anything, not food to ease my hunger or water to ease my thirst' (p.30). Compared with her sister and mother, Green feels like 'a weed who grew too tall' (P.8). Green possesses the usual adolescent insecurities relating to her changing body and does not perceive herself to be beautiful, feeling awkward, gawky, and self-conscious regarding her height. While the tyranny of slenderness (Bartky, 2003) generates female insecurity, so too does being 'too tall' or having tangled hair. Characters such as *Frost Moon's* Dakota and Zelie who experience no such anxiety are refreshing in their portrayal – Zelie because she is confident in her body's strength and her ability to fight and Dakota because she is a naturally confident person, sure of her place in the world and confident in her role as a tattooist.

Green is shy, more at home with plants than people, compared with her younger sister who everybody notices. Green's skills lie in making things grow – in tending her garden, hence her name:

> […] they called me Green because of my talents in the garden.' (p.6); '[…] I could whisper to the old, twisted wisteria and it would turn green at my urging. I could encourage the sweet peas to blossom with one word (p. 10).

Before the disaster which changes her entire life, Green was waiting for her sixteenth birthday and imagined that this day would transform her from the shy, awkward girl she was into the outgoing, gregarious woman she wants to be:

> Everything would change then. I would cast away my fears and step into my future. I would comb the tangles from my hair and wash the dirt away. (p.10-11)

Again, we see the themes of maturation and personal growth which have been discussed in the previous chapter. The adolescent protagonist must face a series of challenges in order to move from childhood to adulthood (Murdock, 1990). In many fairy stories, the sixteenth birthday of the female protagonist holds great significance. Traditionally, she experiences a life-changing event on or just before her sixteenth birthday – Sleeping Beauty pricks her finger on a spindle, an enchanted mirror reveals Snow White to be more beautiful than her stepmother. For Green, it is an apocalyptic event that changes her life, throws her into a state of grief and forces her to become an adult.

Green also has a fascination with the nearby city, a place where she feels safe and comfortable to be herself: 'The city was my treasure, and I loved everything about it […] You could be who you wanted in the city'. (p.12). The city, then, becomes an elusive, magical place which, like becoming sixteen, will contain the answer to Green's problems. Arguably, it is a place in which Green can be herself without being mocked or ridiculed. On the other hand, it also provides a place where Green can disappear into anonymity and hide away. This may be synonymous with the adolescent's desire on the one hand to declare to the world, 'look at me, here I am', yet on the other, become self-conscious and shy in a changing body with the social demands of entering adulthood. The city, like her sixteenth birthday becomes unobtainable – the city, because it is

obliterated in the disaster and her birthday because there is nobody there to celebrate it:

> Green, who was always waiting for the future, biding her time. Now the future was here and the silver city across the river was on fire, and I was hiding under the table, where I stayed until darkness fell. (p.17)

For Green then, the elusive future arrives and fails to yield the magical changes that she had hoped for: 'If this was the future, I wasn't certain I wanted to be in it. I started to feel as though I was disappearing. Perhaps I myself was a figment of my imagination' (p.22). Green is, however, forced to make some changes: 'I cleaned until my fingers hurt. I swept the floor until the brown bristles were ragged from use […] I chopped off all my burnt hair. I didn't need it anymore.' (p.28)

Here there are allusions to getting rid of the old in order to make way for the new. Green doesn't need her hair anymore as it symbolised her 'old' childhood self. There is also the notion that the future, with its promise of positivity and change can also be overwhelming and frightening in that the individual hasn't changed but the expectations of society have. Furthermore, the act of cutting her hair may be symbolic in other ways. Firstly, it may symbolise the rejection of the past in order to grow something new. Secondly, it may also signify a rejection of her femininity. According to Murdock: 'The beginning of the female journey often includes a rejection of the feminine as defined as passive, manipulative, or non-productive' (Murdock, 1990, p.6). In this sense, Green no longer has time to consider her appearance. In fact, the more aggressive and masculine she appears, the more protected she feels. Green, and other young adults have to throw off the constraints of childhood to become adults even if that means embarking

upon new and uncertain journeys. Green's character begins as somebody who does not fit in – shy and awkward, with all her hopes are pinned on her sixteenth birthday, as if in one day, her life will miraculously change. Indeed, it does change, although not in the way that Green had hoped.

There is also, along with the desire to grow older, change, and become somebody different, the fear of moving on – a fear of getting older and leaving family behind. In Green's case, her family left her, but her story almost symbolises the desire to come of age and face the unknown and uncertainty of the future which can be contradicted by the desire to remain a child, safe in the security of the familiar: 'I could have run after them. Then I would have been there to turn to my mother at the instant when it happened' (p.31).

In real-life scenarios, getting a tattoo has been perceived as a form of rebellion (Swami *et al.,* 2015) and a way in which an adolescent may mark their individuality and symbolise their independence. For Green, becoming tattooed is a way of expressing her grief and mental distress, a reaction which backs up the findings in some secondary literature which claims that there is a link between tattooing and mental unrest (Pitts, 2003). Tattooing in one sense could be viewed as a rite of passage – a coming of age – moving away from childhood to become an adult, becoming somebody new. Furthermore, as Green transitions from childhood into adulthood, she is no longer unmarked: the tattoos themselves are marks, not just of trauma, but of experience and change. Before the disaster and the loss of her family, Green describes herself as being: '[…] the girl with the long, black hair who held the open book, white pages, empty and clean, black words flying like ravens, still waiting for the future, still hopeful, still me'

(p.36). The references to 'white pages' and being 'empty and clean' could almost be references to virginity, yet in Green's case, her coming- of- age is not about the loss of her virginity but the loss of her entire self.

6.4.2: Tattooing, Grief, and Survival

Green Angel is the only novel where tattooing is linked to grief and survival. Although *Children of Blood and Bone* focuses on Zelie's grief after her mother's death, her tattoos relate predominantly to her magical inheritance as opposed to grief. The role of the tattoo in this narrative therefore is to aid the grieving process and to enable the protagonist to finally recover from her trauma. As part of her transition and loss of self, Green changes her name as well as her appearance: She becomes Ash as: 'Every time I tried to say my name out loud the word stuck in my throat' (p.43). In her village, Green becomes somebody to be feared and avoided: '[…] leather jacket, clothes with thorns, […] heavy boots into which I'd hammered half a dozen nails' (p.39). These become symbols of instability and aggression and her whole image becomes stereotypically associated with tattooed individuals (Pitts, 2003). Green's tattoos, however, serve as a kind of protection, a talisman, and a way in which to ward off and redirect further pain: 'I felt protected by my bad reputation and the nails I hammered into the trees all around my house […] I didn't mind a certain kind of pain because it took me away from my loss' (p.47-48). It is not uncommon for some individuals who choose to be tattooed do so as a means of redirecting emotional discomfort into physical pain which may be more manageable (Atkinson, 2003; Cann, 2014, in Swann-Thomas, Fleming and Buckley, 2021). Furthermore, Green's tattoos may serve as a form

of memorial for her family and Green's act of tattooing every evening takes on an almost ritualistic quality. As Green does not attend a memorial service or funeral for her family, she must find other ways in which to mourn their loss. In this sense, tattooing becomes therapeutic and a way in which to gain control in a situation where she has previously had none. The practice enables Green to process her grief in a constructive way, even though to begin with, the act of tattooing appears to equate to self-harm. Individuals who self-harm, however, are more likely to hide their scars as a means to escape the shame associated with them (Alderman, 2009). Green's tattoos, however, are not hidden and her grief is displayed on her body for all to see. According to Sundberg and Kjellman: 'In a society where the bereaved are no longer given space to grieve, memorial tattoos can allow the bereaved to […] portray personal and poignant memories' (2018, n.p.). The tattoos, therefore, become an important aspect of Green's new identity and enable her to come to terms with her new reality: 'Memorial tattoos permit their bearers to partake in the active process of creating their own identity, where the extended self is formulated and changed to reinvent a new personal identity' (Altmaier, 2011, in Swann-Thomas et al, 2021, n.p.).

Green's coming-of-age is about moving on from tragedy, finding inner strength and dealing with grief in a constructive way. Green has a power and magic of her own: an ethereal quality and a mystery about her. The ability she has to make things grow, however, is eclipsed by her beautiful family, yet it is this ability, at the end of the story, which saves her from destroying herself. Her name, after all, is synonymous with growth. Many of Green's peers who, in common with Green, lost their families in the disaster, cannot cope with their grief and resort to alcohol and drugs to cope. Green's

coping methods, although on the surface, appear to be self-destructive, become an effective coping strategy.

Interestingly, Green becomes blinded – both by the ash left over from the disaster – and, arguably, by grief, although she can still see well enough to tattoo her skin: 'Each night, before I slept, I took the black ink and tattooed ravens, roses, and bats […] (p.38). This blindness could also be associated with denial which is one of the seven stages of grieving outlined by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in 1969. In this way, Green can be both physically and emotionally removed from the source of the trauma.

Arguably, it is not her sixteenth birthday which marks Green's eventual transformation, but the tattoos she uses to mark her body as a way of channelling her anger and grief. Although initially, the images are dark and ugly, symbolizing the anger, darkness and morbidity of her thoughts and feelings, grieving is a necessary process in the coming to terms with a tragedy or trauma. Since Green has nobody to help her to come to terms with her sadness, she turns to herself. Green's grief almost becomes a living thing, something that she nurtures in a way that she used to nurture and tend to her garden and Green tattoos images onto herself as a way of obliterating the person she once was:

> That was when I took a pin and some black ink. I began to mark my arm. I outlined a raven, and then a bat, then a rose that looked like a flower found at the end of the world. That's who I was without my mother and my father and my moonlit sister. Blood and ink. Darkness where before there had once been Green. (p.30)

To begin with, her shaven head, spiked and thorny clothing and tattooed skin present a person to be avoided, yet eventually, as Green's peers fail to cope with their tragedies and lose themselves in narcotics, Green slowly recovers and awakens from her grief-induced stupor. Her change of image, her aggression and her tattoos are coping mechanisms which in time, are far more productive than those of her peers.

Green's tattoos, therefore, symbolise her anger, her mental unrest, her desire to become somebody else now that her life has changed irrevocably. Whereas the tattoos in the Tattoo Magic genre symbolise personal power and identity, and Kellie's tattoos in *Ink is Thicker than Water* symbolise permanence in an ever-changing world, Green's tattoos are symbols of grief and mental unrest. Through anger and sadness, Green becomes Other. Her tattoos stand for darkness and the desire to be obliterated: 'Wanting only darkness, I began to sleep. I slept longer and longer. I ignored daylight and hope. There was the promise of sunshine. That wasn't what I wanted' (p.35). Through her grief and anger, Green is broken down and emerges stronger, but different. In stark contrast to the way in which she used to describe herself: 'Some other girl might have slammed the door and put the bolt on […] but I wasn't just any girl. I was one with a talent for gauging truth from dishonesty, copper from gold […] a friend from an enemy' (p.78).

At the end of the story, 'Ash' becomes Green again, and the tattoos change with her: 'When I looked down, I could see the […] tattoo […] turned green around the edges. In the centre, it was red' (p.114-115). Part of this transition involves Green connecting with the world again. As Green begins to recover, she begins to let other people into her life -a school friend who she tries to help, a neighbour, a silver greyhound dog and a

boy who she names Diamond. This story, however, is not a romance as Diamond only appears at the end of the story. He does help Green to heal but he is only one aspect of her healing. The catalyst is Green herself who has the strength to carry on living even when she feels like giving up.

6.4.3: Recovery and Positive Change

The evolution of the protagonist after a trauma, tragedy, or challenging event is a further common theme in young adult fiction (Hunt and Lenz, 2001). The trauma acts as a catalyst from which the protagonist emerges a better, more confident individual, having learned many lessons about life along the way. Tattooing is one of the methods by which Green recovers from her suffering. Several parallels with the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty* are apparent throughout this story. Perhaps the most obvious parallel is the act of tattooing – of pricking herself with a needle. In this story, the vines and thorns that are referred to do not rise up throughout the kingdom as she sleeps but are drawn by herself on her body and serve as a form of protection as well as a deterrent for others who may take advantage of a young girl living alone. Neither are they hacked down by a handsome prince, although arguably, Diamond helps to break down the walls of protection she has erected around herself. In the fairy tale, the thorns 'turned to fine flowers which of their own accord made a way for him (the prince) to pass through' (von Franz, 1972, p.11). In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bettelheim equates this occurrence with the loss of female virginity (Bettelheim, 1976):

> When Sleeping Beauty has finally gained both physical and emotional maturity and is ready for love […] and sex and marriage, then that which

> has seemed impenetrable gives way. The wall of thorns suddenly turns into a wall of big, beautiful flowers, which opens to let the prince enter. (Bettelheim, 1976, p.233)

Yet, in *Green Angel*, as Green's tattoos turn from black to green, this can be seen as a sign of new growth and positive psychological change as opposed to something purely sexual.

Further parallels include Green's blindness from the ash of the disaster and subsequent withdrawal and isolation from others. In her sadness, Green is blinded by grief and sleeps as a way of escaping her pain. When she finally awakens and begins to recover from her trauma, she emerges a different, stronger person. Beauty's long slumber, according to Bettleheim, could be associated with the liminal stage between childhood and adulthood: '[…] in the symbolic language of fairy tales […] after having gathered strength in solitude they (the heroes and heroines) now have to become themselves' (Bettelheim, 1976, p.226). Both characters emerge from their long sleep changed and ready to begin the next phase of their lives.

6.4.4: The Heroine's Journey

In fairy tales the hero or heroine is typically sent on a quest in which 'they try to prove their young manhood or womanhood, often through dangerous adventures' (Bettelheim, 1976, p.226; Campbell, 1971) which accurately describes Green's experience but in a modern-day parallel. The quest theme occurs in many young adult novels to a greater or lesser degree. Typically, they present a quest, adventure or an

issue or concern to be overcome. In doing so, in fighting the battle, waking from the sleep, confronting the enemy or hacking down the forest, the young adult will emerge a 'better', more confident, more fulfilled individual (Campbell, 1971, Hunt and Lenz, 2001).

Green, then, is a complex character, who even prior to experiencing tragedy, is subject to the crippling insecurities regarding her appearance and personality experienced by many adolescents. Her change of image after the disaster is also typical of the rebellious acts of teenagers as they gain independence from their families and discover their identities. In real-life scenarios, Green's tattoos may also be considered acts of rebellion. For Green, however, they are a sign of inner strength and determination as they help her to overcome disaster and emerge a stronger person. When considering the traits of a strong female protagonist, Green is a positive character, a strong role model who confronts her grief and initial isolation alone and survives through quiet determination and inner resolve. It is her ability to make things grow with her own gentle magic that defines her as opposed to the relationship she has with Diamond. In this sense, her presentation is that of a strong, independent character who possesses the admirable skills to enable her to survive a tragedy which could have potentially destroyed her.

6.5: Conclusion

Again, as in chapter five, this chapter features three very different female protagonists, each with a different challenge to overcome. When we view each story

from a feminist lens, each protagonist is portrayed as being strong and determined. Although each story contains strong male characters, their story does not eclipse that of the heroine. In terms of their tattoos, in common with the three aforementioned protagonists, the significance of their tattoos vary. For Zelie, they symbolise a coming of age and the development of magical abilities, for Leora, they represent both oppression and freedom, and for Green, they are a symbol of grief and subsequent recovery. Perhaps most importantly as was the case for the social realist texts, the tattoos in these stories do not indicate any negative quality relating to their wearers. In fact, they represent an element of power, relating to both magical ability and the personal power of the characters in terms of character development and autonomy. The concept of power relating to tattoos, however, will be explored in more detail in the final chapter.

The following chapter explores the final three narratives chosen for analysis. These three texts are from the tattoo magic genre, a relatively new literary category which has developed over the past decade. The themes which emerged from this analysis include the heroine's journey, tattoo symbolism, and power and control.

Chapter 7

The Textual Analysis of Three Tattoo Magic Novels

7.1: Tattoo Magic

This chapter presents the textual analysis of three novels in the tattoo magic genre, *Ink Exchange* (2008) by Melissa Marr, *Frost Moon* (2010) by Anthony Francis, and *Stolen Ink* (2017) by Holly Evans. It examines the similarities between the tattoo magic and fantasy genres and explores the ways in which tattooed protagonists in this genre are portrayed. It also focusses on the significance of the tattoos in each novel and the part they play in the identity of the protagonist. Tattoo magic can be defined as the ability to utilise tattoos for magical purposes. That is, the protagonists in this genre are able to wield magic using the tattoos inked onto their bodies. This is a newly formed and rapidly growing genre which emerged in the mid-2000s, possibly owing to the popularisation of tattoos in mainstream culture due to television programmes such as *Miami Ink* and *Tattoo Fixers* mentioned in chapter two. Its emergence can be considered important as it portrays a variety of diverse tattooed characters who have previously been absent from young adult fiction. Although such characters appear predominantly in a fantasy setting, their presence potentially normalises a practice that has up until recently, been tainted with stigma. There is now a plethora of tattoo magic novels available on the market - On Goodreads alone there are over fifty books available in this genre, many of which are series fiction. Examples of these are The *Irin Chronicles* (2013-2018) by Elizabeth Hunter, *The Chronicles of Elantra* (2005-2012) by Michelle

Sagara, and *The Mortal Instruments* (2007-2011) by Cassandra Clare. These three authors appear to be among the key authors of this genre. Other narratives conforming to this genre are *Ink Witch* (2016) by Lindsay Sparks and *Ink in the Blood* (2020) by Kim Smejkal. Possibly due to its relatively recent emergence, there is little critical literature relating to this genre. The overlaps with fantasy, however, are obvious. The stories take place in worlds unlike our own. There is, as Hume suggests: '[…] the deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal' (Hume, 2016, p.63). The main difference at least in terms of the texts listed here is that it is the tattoos themselves that possess the power or magic. Tattoos in these narratives are viewed positively which may also be due to the shift in the social perception of tattoos and attitudes towards them. Tattoos in this context are to a certain extent, controlled by their owners, but they also have a life of their own. For example, In *Frost Moon* and *Stolen Ink*, protagonists Dakota and Dacian possess tattoos which can function independently of their wearers. Tattoo magic, therefore, relates to the ability to elicit magical control over the tattoo. In fact, it is the dragon tattooed on Dakota's back which kills a powerful tattoo thief in *Frost Moon*. *Ink Exchange* differs from *Frost Moon* and *Stolen Ink* in that it overlaps with both the social realism and teen romance genres. Female protagonist Leslie is traumatized after having been raped by friends of her brother and her tattoo is chosen in order to reclaim her body and bring about recovery. The story, however, takes us into the realm of faerie and Leslie's tattoo has the power to link her with Irial, the king of the dark realms and thus lead her further into danger. It is also important to note that although *Frost Moon* and *Stolen Ink* come under the genre of tattoo magic, there are also significant overlaps with the urban fantasy genre.

The stories take place within a city inhabited by a population of otherworldly and eccentric characters in a universe which differs from our own.

The following sections of this chapter provide textual analysis of each narrative examining the ways in which tattooed characters are portrayed in terms of stereotyping, physical and personal characteristics, and their overall role in the story.

7.2: Textual Analysis of *Frost Moon*

Frost Moon by Anthony Francis (2010) is the first of the chosen texts in the tattoo magic genre. It is narrated in first person by Dakota Frost who is a bisexual magical tattooist, a 'skindancer' who is able to bring her tattoos to life. Once the tattoo is brought to life, a skindancer is able to control its behaviour. Furthermore, the tattoos on a skindancer's skin can be animated on the skin of their wearer. This is the first book in the *Skindancer* series of which there are five in total. The story is set in Little Five Points in an alternative Atlanta, inhabited by shapeshifters, witches, and vampires in which a serial killer stalks talented tattooists for their tattooed skin. Against her will, Dakota is enlisted to help the police find the killer assisted by a group of diverse characters including a feral werecat called Cinnamon, her vampire ex-girlfriend named Savannah, a witch called Jinx, and Phillip Davidson, a handsome Special Agent who is working on the case. The further along in her quest she progresses, however, the more endangered and vulnerable she becomes.

7.2.1: Tattoos and Symbolism

This section relates to the ways in which tattoos form part of the protagonist's personal and professional identity. Dakota differs from the traditional clichéd heroine in stature, clothing, hairstyle and physical adornment. In comparison with a real-life setting, the concept of a magical tattooist remains firmly confined within a fantasy narrative. However, Dakota, with her six-foot-three frame, coloured mohawk and tattooed skin is herself in danger of becoming a stereotype, both in terms of being a tattooed character who is sexually diverse as well and in terms of her tough, no-nonsense personality. Although her portrayal as the antithesis of the traditional blonde, thin, delicate heroine makes a refreshing change, she is a character who is equally unobtainable and difficult to identify with.

The story begins with a description of the heroine, Dakota Frost, along with the declaration that she is 'the best magical tattooist in the South-East' (p.1). In many ways her unconventional appearance is predictable within the setting in which she is portrayed:

> Little Five Points was the center (sic) of the Edgeworld, a brand-new subculture rejecting the secrecy of magical tradition and defying centuries of religious oppression, dragging magic kicking and screaming into the light. (p.22)

The name Edgeworld also implies a life on the fringes of society where you are perhaps more likely to find eccentric and alternative characters. Dakota is not a shy or retiring character. She makes no attempts to cover her tattoos or to conform. The intention of the character is to stand out and get noticed and to create a specific image:

> […] when I found my true profession, my hairstyle turned into an ad. People's eyes are drawn to it, but their gazes linger on the tattoos which start as tribal vines […] and then cascade down my throat to my shoulders, flowing into roses and jewels and butterflies. (p.1)

Her tattoos also are an advertisement for her profession as well as being an integral aspect of her identity. Here is a heroine who is bold and unafraid to be noticed. Yet it is acknowledged that sometimes when you look as conspicuous as Dakota, other people may view you negatively and become prejudiced and judgemental which relates to issues of deviance explored in chapter two:

> Some of the folks you want to attract start to see *you* as the scary low-life […] unfortunately I find the more tats I show the greater the chance that the cops will throw *me* into the back of the van […] if a bar fight breaks out. (p.2)

Therefore, although Dakota is described in a positive way, her unconventional appearance may potentially be described as deviant and therefore results in protagonists like her being relegated to fantasy scenarios (Younger, 2009) being deemed 'unworthy of full social acceptance' (Thompson et al, 2016, p.37). This judgement may be harsher when related to the female form since heavily tattooed women have typically been judged more negatively than heavily tattooed males (Osterud, 2009). According to Patterson and Schroeder:

> When a woman's body is a sex object, a tattooed woman's body is a lascivious sex object; when a woman's body is nature, a tattooed woman's

> body is primitive; when a woman's body is spectacle, a tattooed woman's body is a show. (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010, p.14-15)

This also resonates with real life scenarios where individuals with tattoos are associated with criminality and trouble making (Osterud, 2009). It seems that even in a fantasy setting where characters exist alongside diverse characters such as werewolves and shapeshifters, choosing an alternative appearance still generates misconceptions and negative assumptions. Heavily tattooed women have traditional been associated with promiscuity and prostitution (Osterud, 2009) and at the beginning of the story, Dakota's appearance leads a sleazy male character to mistake her for a stripper:

> After a moment, his eyes slid to me, my tattooed arms, and my bare midriff […] 'forgot to pay your fees?' he leered. 'Floor five is where you get your stripper licence […] I'm just saying, girl, you could do the job if you wanted. (P.3)

For Dakota, however, apart from being her means for making a living, her tattoos symbolise power, magic, and a significant part of her identity. Unlike Angie in *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly*, who appears emotionally detached from her tattoo, Dakota's tattoos define her personality and are an integral aspect of her life:

> Real magical tattoos are filled with the compounds that dispense control and discharge mana; and with the life force of a living being just beneath their surface, magical tattoos are some of the most powerful marks around. (p.87)

Dakota, then, appears to revel in her conspicuousness yet is both welcoming and repelled by the attention she gains. Throughout the story, however, Dakota is objectified by the author in a manner that raises the question whether he would have treated a male protagonist in the same way. Dakota is a heroine who is strong in her physical presentation but who is, at the same time, vulnerable because of it: 'the heavily tattooed female may be considered grotesque, at once abhorrent and fascinating, attracting the gaze and challenging it' (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010, p.15). Furthermore, Dakota is presented as a sexually attractive female, and her sexual attractiveness is heavily linked to her tattoos: '[…] parallels have been drawn between the process of tattooing and sexual intercourse […] the very process of tattooing is essentially sexual' (Patterson and Schroeder, 2010, p.11). In many ways, Dakota embodies the stereotypical tattooed woman. Compared to Leslie in *Ink Exchange*, Dakota is confident, overtly sexual, and whereas Leslie wishes to remain inconspicuous, Dakota's tattoos as well as her body are fully on display.

7.2.2: Sexuality, Power, and Control

Sexuality is a theme explored in *Henna Wars* and *Stolen Ink*. In this section the ways in which sex and sexuality are linked with power, control, and the objectification of the female protagonist are explored. Power and control in this novel as in the other two novels in this genre relate both to power in the magical sense and power relating to physical and emotional control. Throughout the story, it is clear that Dakota is a sexually diverse character, being attracted to both males and females: ' I checked out the curve of her breasts, pressed between one delicate hand – they were full and

luscious and looked quite lickable' (p.12); 'At this point I really noticed his colleague, Alex Nicholson: young, not too tall, tanned […] like an edgy Ken doll. Yummy!' (p.30). The objectifying language used by Dakota is interchangeable with the descriptions aimed at women by men and prompts the reader to wonder whether a female author would have used alternative language to describe a characters' physicality. Dakota's bisexuality is an important aspect of her identity and is refreshing in that it is not the only factor that defines her, an aspect of young adult literature which has been heavily criticised (Epstein, 2013). However, she makes no apologies for her sexual preferences and is forthright about who she is attracted to. This contrasts strongly with Nishat in *Henna Wars* whose sexuality results in bullying and familial pressure to change. Whereas Nishat's attraction to Flavia must at first remain a secret, Dakota is blatant and forthright about her sexual fantasies. Furthermore, in common with Dacian's world in *Stolen Ink*, the alternative universe which she inhabits appears to be free from prejudice relating to sexuality.

Although Dakota is portrayed as a feisty bolshie heroine, she is not altogether the hard-hitting heroine who can fight her way out of any situation. There is a vulnerable side to Dakota that makes her more relatable as she battles to recover after having been brutally attacked by a suspect:

> I still wake up almost every night, sometimes screaming, sometimes crying, always holding my right hand in my left, massaging my first two fingers, reassuring myself they are still there. (p.264)

The theme of control is an important one and is woven into all three tattoo magic narratives. In *Frost Moon*, however, control relates not just to the control of magical

abilities but to the control over Dakota when she is captured by her assailant towards the end of the story. This scene has sadomasochistic undertones arguably more suitable for older readers, and could be the author's attempt to control his unwieldy heroine:

> Icy water splashed over me, and I screamed, bucking. I was awake, cold, and in pain, hunched over in a kneeling position, my head pressed to a stone surface before me. I tried to sit up and found my hands bound together with twine, fixed tight with a steel ring set into the stone. My legs pulled apart by something similarly tight and sharp. And as the water ran over me, I realized, in utter terror that but for my steel collar, I was completely naked. (p.233)

Dakota, then appears to be the sexual fantasy of the author as she is objectified throughout the story in scenes such as the above. Although she is a strong and positive character in many ways, her sexuality is both a strength and a weakness. Germaine Greer argues that: 'The stereotype is the Eternal Feminine. She is the sexual object sought by all men, and by all women […] Her value is solely attested by the demand she excites in others' (Greer, 1970, p.58). Dakota is unashamedly bisexual, is comfortable in her own skin, and does not shy away from conflict. Yet the author seems to relish placing his heroine in life-threatening situations in which she is physically attacked and in one scene, almost raped. The theme of rape is sadly currently prevalent in specific areas of popular media, for example, graphic novels and gaming. Games such as *Night Trap* (2006), the cancelled *Rape Day* (2019), and *Grand Theft Auto* (1997), (2013) all feature either the rape of a woman or the misogynistic objectification of women.

According to Hoffin and Lee-Treweek: 'This trope dismisses abuse towards women, subjugating it to the 'more important' male storyline' (Hoffin and Lee-Treweek, 2020, p.159). It is as if has the author has created a strong heroine; has built her up, only to knock her down again and again. Dakota's strident attitude, striking appearance, and her heavily tattooed body are aspects of her which need to be controlled and tamed.

7.2.3: The Heroine's Journey

In this narrative Dakota's journey involves the acceptance of her quest and using her magical abilities to fight the evil which pursues her. Dakota is therefore not rescued by a handsome prince or a strong, macho hero. Instead, she draws upon her own resources and is able to beat her captor by controlling her body and using her tattoo magic to fight him in a manner which is observed by Murdock: 'Our heroine puts on her armor (sic), picks up her sword, chooses her steed, and goes into battle' (Murdock, 1990, p.6). Dakota uses the dragon tattooed on her back to overwhelm her enemy although in giving the dragon life, she loses control of it as it develops a life of its own: 'My link to the dragon severed abruptly, and I opened my own eyes to see its curling form, rippling and alive. With each bite it seemed to grow more real and strong […]' (p.248).

A typical aspect of the hero in traditional fairy tales is that he or she is an orphan and Dakota partially conforms to this trope. In *Frost Moon*, Dakota's mother is absent although her father appears at the beginning of the story and features briefly at the end. According to Murdock, however, the heroine's journey differs to that of the hero:

> The heroine must become a spiritual warrior. This demands that she learn the delicate art of balance and have the patience for the slow, subtle integration of the feminine and masculine aspects of herself. (1990, p.11)

Dakota, however, with her loud brashness and strident attitude could be accused of possessing more masculine traits than feminine although at the end of the story, she is captured by her enemy in a manner that is typical of traditional fairy tales.

According to Hunt and Lenz (2001), the hero's story has overshadowed that of the heroine. Although Dakota's appearance and behaviour could be described as stereotypical and clichéd, her journey is an admirable one. She is a tattooist, not a warrior, yet a warrior she must become in order to fight and overcome evil. In common with Leora in *Ink* and Zelie in *Children of Blood and Bone*, this series commencement sees Dakota provided with the tools she needs in which to embark upon her quest: 'I have started karate, three times a week. I have two […] weekly appointments […] to school me in graphomancy and help me master the power in my tattoos […]' (p.264). She recovers from her injuries, learns to defend herself, accepts her challenge, and begins her journey.

7.3: Textual analysis of *Stolen Ink*

Stolen Ink by Holly Evans (2016) is the only one of the three tattoo magic novels chosen for analysis which features a male protagonist. It is the first novel in the *Ink Born* series and is narrated in first person by Dacian who is a tattoo magician – an ink magician who lives in an alternative universe inhabited by elves, shapeshifters, and a variety of other magical creatures. Although *Stolen Ink* and *Frost Moon* are written by

different authors, the story arcs are very similar – both portray sexually diverse characters who are able to bring their tattoos to life with the use of magic, and both protagonists play a reluctant role in hunting down villains and saving the world from evil. In many ways, both characters are clichéd and predictable, yet at the same time, they are strong protagonists who unashamedly flaunt both their sexuality and their tattooed bodies. Ink magicians are able to bring their tattooed images to life and control them, but magicians with skills like Dacian are rare, and he soon becomes aware that his life is at risk, both from the tattoo thief who has recently entered his city and The Council, a body of powerful people who run it. It is because of these two factors that Dacian keeps his identity secret. Dacian discovers that he is the person who must stop the tattoo thief and he must do this without revealing his secret. In order to avoid capture from The Council and further risk from the tattoo thief, Dacian embarks upon a quest to capture the thief, accompanied by a group of friends and allies.

7.3.1: Sexuality

In the three novels where the characters are sexually diverse, the sexuality of the protagonist plays more of a key role than in the novels where the protagonists are heterosexual. At the beginning of the story, we are made aware that Dacian is gay and shamelessly promiscuous, a trait commonly associated with tattooed individuals (Osterud, 2009). Dacian is introduced on the blurb at the back of the book: 'I'm Dacian, a tattoo magician. Life was pretty good. All I had to worry about was finding a pretty guy to fall in bed with at the end of the week.' There is a refreshing quality surrounding

Dacian's honesty regarding his sexual preferences which differs from young adult narratives published even a decade ago:

> Far from the asexual, highly gendered, white, middle-class children and youths that dominated […] the publishing scene for most of the twentieth century, the last three decades have seen a steady pressure to be inclusive, and increasingly, to question the codes we use to think about childhood and adolescence in relation to sex and gender. (Reynolds, 2007, p.130)

The characters in *Frost Moon*, *Ink Exchange* and *Stolen Ink* are alluring, sexually attractive and dangerous. Dacian is a very sexual person who cares more about hedonistic pleasure than saving the world from evil. Sex and sexuality are major themes within the story although they have no real part to play in the overall plot. These are common features of young adult literature where themes of sexuality and identity are explored (Younger, 2009. Sex scenes are present throughout although are not explicit. Intertwined with these elements are the sense of mystery, the unknown, and the elusiveness of the magical beings that populate the narratives, which arguably, adds to their attraction.

There is also an element of urban seediness which resonates with some aspects of the social realism novel. In common with three of the chosen tattoo magic narratives, much of the story takes place in the derelict underbelly of the city – the fringes of a town or city is arguably where you would perhaps most likely come across marginalised groups or subcultures who come under the description of 'Other'. The bar in the story, for example, is called The Silent Scream, and is located in the 'fashionably dangerous part of the city' (p.31).

> The heavy wooden door was falling off its hinges for the second time that week. The tables had all been bolted down to the floor […] and the stools had sigils (symbols used in magic) engraved in the legs that stopped them being used as weapons (p.31).

There are many references to heavy drinking, another characteristic associated with people who have tattoos (Osterud, 2009): 'The bar was like a second home, and I wasn't as ashamed of that fact as perhaps I should have been.' (p.31).

There is a certain unreliability about Dacian which is conveyed by the author's references to his inability to commit to a relationship although his fear of commitment may also be due to the fear of having his secret discovered. At the beginning of the story, he stresses the importance of this and his need to remain inconspicuous: 'Keep your head down, your mouth shut, and your eyes averted' (p.12). His closest friend is an elf named Kiern from whom Dacian is, for a while, able to conceal his secret. Even Dacian's education shows a lack of commitment and application: 'I never did pay attention in classes. Good grades weren't something I concerned myself with' (p.33). His unreliability and lack of commitment to others is similar to that of Angie in *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly*, Kellie in *Ink is Thicker Than Water,* and to a certain extent, Dakota in *Frost Moon.* Irresponsibility is a trait which has been strongly linked to individuals with tattoos (DeMello, 2000) and Dacian appears to conform to this description as he drifts through life seemingly with very little focus, although his reluctance to commit to a relationship changes when he meets Isaiah in a local bar.

7.3.2: The Hero's Journey

Unlike the other chosen texts, *Stolen Ink* features mainly male protagonists with the exception of Vyx, a stray, shapeshifting, feral vixen who Dacian rescues from the streets. To a certain extent, each protagonist in the tattoo magic stories are unlikely heroes or heroines although the notion of an anti-hero, or reluctant hero, is a predictable trope within the fantasy genre (Luthi, 1970). In many ways, however, Dacian can be considered a typical hero. If we examine the criteria put forward by Luthi, (1970): '[…] a humble birth, orphan status; being the subject of a mysterious prophecy; exceptionality – a special gift […]'(p.53), we see that Dacian conforms to at least three of these principles. Although not an orphan, Dacian's mother is not present in his life: 'He'd (Dacian's father) raised me alone, my mother having abandoned us both when I was a baby. The desire to find her had never surfaced. She's walked out of our lives' (p.53). Despite the fact he is not impoverished, Dacian was not born into a wealthy family. Perhaps the most significant of these criteria, however, is the special gift. Dacian's special gift means that he is the only person who can potentially track down and kill a dangerous tattoo thief. His reluctance to do so but eventual commitment to this cause results in him making other changes to his life, for example, committing to a relationship with Isaiah. This embodies the somewhat formulaic journey of the hero: 'Those who are exposed to danger can naturally perish in it; but they can also grow in it' (Luthi, 1970, p.66). Furthermore, Dacian conforms to the appearance of a hero. On the front cover of the book is the image of a handsome, athletic young man whose cocky smirk indicates that he is fully aware of the extent of his attractiveness.

A further significant theme in young adult literature is the hero or heroine coming to terms with an aspect of themselves they are unhappy with or uncertain of thus aiding the maturation process (Nikolajeva, 2005). Ultimately, the quest they undertake and

journey they experience in order to complete it is the catalyst by which they accept aspects of themselves or their lives which they are dissatisfied with. This is not the case with Dacian, who presents as being comfortable with who he is at the beginning of the story. In this narrative it is external circumstances which cause him to feel threatened, resentful, and uncertain but which eventually challenge him into become a more accomplished, likeable, and well-rounded person. According to Luthi: 'The handsome youth sets out to see the world, but at once demands are made of him and later, he steps forward to solve the difficult tasks' (Luthi, 1970, p.70).

7.3.3: Tattoos, Identity and Power

This section examines the link between identity, power, and control. Again, in common with *Frost Moon* and *Ink Exchange*, power relates to both magical ability and the exploitation of power by an adversary. Dacian has a reason for wanting to stay hidden although in his efforts to conceal his true identity as an ink magician, he would rather hide away in pubs and bars than become a hero: 'I'm comfortable with the life we have […] I just want the quiet life' (p.53).

Dacian identifies as a gay tattooist. More importantly, he is an ink magician, and his tattoos are a huge part of his identity, particularly as they can function independently from him:

> 'My own tattoos wriggled and clawed, trying to be free […] My instincts took over, removing all superfluous thought. I was verging on nothing

more than a vessel for the magic. It was a dangerous dance, but one I loved more than life itself.' (p.6)

Identity in this story is strongly tied in with the notion of power and the magic Dacian possesses has an energy and force of its own: 'The ink magic was a living entity, a network of sorts' (p.24). On the one hand, Dacian is fiercely proud of his abilities but on the other, he must keep the extent of his talents concealed, thus hiding a part of his identity. Dacian's abilities as an ink magician mean that he too can be considered powerful, despite the fact that he is reluctant in his quest to use this power to locate the tattoo thief. Dacian's power can be used for good but at the same time, its use could potentially mean exposing his gift for the misuse of others. Arguably, the desire to control tattoos within this narrative could be compared with the desire of a marginalised group to gain control in a world where in the past, they would have had no control. Dacian is not the predictable heterosexual hero favoured in traditional young adult narratives belonging to a subgroup which, not so long ago, would have been ostracised. Although Dacian's diversity is a refreshing change from the tough, stereotypical heterosexual hero, it is once again telling that both he and Dakota back up the observations made by Beeler (2006), that characters whose appearance diverts from culturally accepted norms are firmly situated within fantasy narratives. Furthermore, young adult literature has been heavily criticised for its inability to feature protagonists from more than one marginalised group (Cart, 2011; Epstein, 2013). The fact that tattooed characters are more likely to be found in fantasy settings speaks volumes in a society where sexuality is no longer such a taboo subject. Despite an increase in the popularity of tattooing, within pop culture and the media, the stigma still remains, more predominantly in the workplace and more 'traditional roles' where

tattoos are typically considered to be unprofessional, resulting in tattooed characters remaining markedly absent from real world scenarios (Beeler, 2006, Dann, 2019).

In terms of the theories of the body explored in chapter two, Dacians' physical appearance conforms to the male ideal (McCreary and Sasse, 2000) in that his body is athletic and muscular. If we disregard Dacian's tattoos, his image on the front cover of the book shows a handsome young man not unlike the images on the cover of a conventional teenage romance.

However, it feels important that within this genre, authors have given marginalised individuals' powers and abilities that surpass those who dwell in the mundane world. The fact that Dacian is required to keep his rare abilities as a tattoo magician secret, however, is also telling. It could even be said that a moral message is woven into the story – if you mark your body in some way or if your body is different or unconventional in its appearance, then there will be unpleasant consequences. That tattooing is associated with magic and sorcery in a wide variety of narratives implies that there are still myths and prejudices linked to the practice. Long-standing stereotypes associated with tattooed characters being trouble-makers certainly still remain. Dacian, however, does not conform to this trope, and is in fact, gentle in nature, although we are made aware that he is able to defend himself should that skill be required: 'Kiern and I shrugged off our bruises […] we were both experienced fighters' (p.94).

Even in this story of magic and fantasy, there are rules which must be adhered to, and the work of tattooists has to be controlled and monitored. The Council are a body of people who regulate the tattooing world and are portrayed in a manner that one would anticipate:

> ‘The man in the suit fixed his cold, grey eyes on me. His hands were in the pocket of his slate-grey pants. He stood up, military straight, shoulders back, weight carefully distributed. Something about him made the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end.’ (p.48)

Although it is not made clear in the story whether members of The Council possess magical abilities, they appear to strongly represent elements of the mundane world and conformity. The Council embody the rigid, unyielding establishments which appear in many forms in young adult narratives (Grenby, 1990) – the church, the family, school. With their uncompromising attitude and their strict adherence to rules, The Council represents a system against which to rebel: ‘Even in Fairyland there is no escape from politics’ (LeGuin, 1993, in Grenby, 2008, p.154). In alternative worlds, therefore, rules still apply and ‘fantasy is seldom very anarchic’ (Grenby, 2008, p.157). In this narrative, however, it is fear of being controlled by the Council that drives Dacian as opposed to rebellion against them: ‘If The Council found out what I was, they would do everything in their power to make me their tool’ (p.51).

Overall, as a tattooed protagonist, Dacian is a likeable character, complete with flaws and imperfections that make him believable. He is not so perfect that he is intimidating, neither does he pretend to be a fearless hero. However, despite these personality traits, the story is peppered with clichés, and Dacian’s character and that of his tattooed counterparts is portrayed as being irritatingly glib at times. The story, too, is somewhat predictable and formulaic although enjoyable in the sense that the characters are open about their sexuality and entertainingly subversive.

7.4: Textual Analysis of *Ink Exchange*

Ink Exchange (2008) by Melissa Marr is an example of the tattoo magic genre where female protagonist Leslie chooses to become tattooed after the trauma of having been raped by some friends of her drug-addicted brother, Ren. With an absent mother and an irresponsible alcoholic father, Leslie is in a vulnerable position, and her tattoo is a way in which she attempts to reclaim her body and gain some control over her life. The chosen tattoo and the tattooist himself, however, are not all they seem. The ink of the chosen image has been mixed with the blood of the faerie king, Irial and the tattoo, far from being a symbol of personal power and control, becomes the means by which Leslie is again controlled by another man. Adding further complication is Leslie's attraction to Niall, another inhabitant of the faerie realms who attempts, without any degree of success, to protect Leslie from Irial. Whereas the other two tattoo magic narratives take place in fantasy settings, *Ink Exchange* differs in that it takes place partially in the real world and partially in the realms of faerie.

7.4.1: Tattooing and Trauma

This is a story where the female protagonist, in common with some women in real world scenarios, gets a tattoo after the trauma of being raped (DeMello, 2000). In Margo DeMello's book *Bodies of Inscription* (2000), interviewees referred to the tattoo process as being almost ritualistic and symbolic – the body is wounded, pain is endured, the wound is cared for, and the body heals. This wound, however, has been inflicted upon the body through personal choice; the aftercare and the subsequent healing are

the responsibility of the individual. The tattoo, therefore, for Leslie, is a way of regaining control over her life – moving away from a difficult family life, an abusive, controlling brother and sexual assault:

> She'd finally decided to go through with it, to get a tattoo […] In the last few months, she'd become near obsessed with it […] she thought about that act far too often – claiming her body, reclaiming it as her own, a step she needed to take to make herself whole again. (p.16)

> It was her *body*, despite the things that'd been done to it, and she wanted to claim it, to own it, to prove that to herself. She knew it wasn't magic but the idea of writing her own identity felt like the closest she could get to reclaiming her life. (p.29)

Ironically, what Leslie does in an attempt to recover from trauma leads to yet more trauma which will be explored further on in this section. In this sense, Leslie's tattoo is a superficial move towards change. Once again, the theme of control runs through this story, only this time, the very act of attempting to reclaim her body leaves Leslie open to being controlled yet again by the elusive Irial, king of the dark court of the faerie realms where the inhabitants thrive upon and are sustained by human emotions. For Leslie, there is an element of desperation in her quest to find the perfect tattoo and when she finally does, she is both drawn to it and fascinated by it:

> 'Inky-black eyes gazed up from within black-and-grey knotwork surrounded by wings like coalescing shadows and in the middle was a chaos star. Eight arrows pointed away from the centre; four of these were thicker, like the lines of a spiked cross.' (p.31)

'*Mine*'. The thought, the need, the reaction was overpowering.' (p.32)

Enduring the physical pain of being tattooed in an attempt to redirect it from emotional torment is a common reason for being tattooed (Atkinson, 2003; Cann, 2014, in Fleming and Buckley, 2021). In the story, Leslie craves release from the recurring memories of her trauma: 'She wanted something she didn't have words for – peace, numbness, *something*' (p.30). It seems that in this story, getting a tattoo is synonymous with running away and escaping the pain of trauma and as Leslie first experiences being tattooed, she experiences almost a sense of relief as well as the ability to reconnect with her body: 'It was wonderful. The only sound was the hum of the machine. It was more than a sound though: it was a vibration that seemed to slip through her skin into the marrow of her bones' (p.53).

Another important theme in this story is addiction which can also be a coping mechanism for victims of trauma (Lewis-Herman, 1992). Through the ink exchange, Leslie becomes addicted to Irial, unable to escape from the desire that he awakes in her: 'Her drug might have a pulse and a voice, but he was a drug all the same. And she'd sunk to depths that would make her dissolve in shame if such feelings were still in her reach' (p.281). In common with the physical sensations sustained through the use of narcotics, Leslie's experiences in the faerie realms results in haziness and an inability to focus. Linked also in this story are themes of desire and sexual pleasure. Although Leslie is controlled and intoxicated by Irial and bound to him by magic, she also finds him irresistible and is unable to break away from the spell he has put her under: 'I can't step away. I can't. I keep telling myself I'm going to go. But I don't' (p.259). As Leslie's life becomes more intertwined with Irial's, she achieves the peace and numbness that

she'd been wanting so badly as she loses touch with her emotions and sense of reality: 'Nothing made sense. I am angry now. I am afraid. Yet she couldn't feel those things' (p.228). This numbness or loss of sense of self (van der Kolk, 2014) may be synonymous with the dissociation often experienced both during and after a trauma - there may be a sense of loss of time similar to a hypnotic trance. Research into trauma has found that: 'Traumatized people feel and act as though their nervous systems have been disconnected from the present' (Lewis-Herman, 1992, p.35). To begin with, this detachment from life may serve as a coping mechanism and may appear on the surface, to be advantageous. However, this behaviour eventually becomes dysfunctional (Gordon, 2019) and this becomes apparent as Leslie loses her grip on reality: 'Although dissociative alterations in consciousness, or even intoxication, may be adaptive at the moment of total helplessness, they become maladaptive once the danger is passed' (Lewis-Herman, 1992, p.45). Leslie realises that remaining with Irial will eventually kill her. The tattoo that binds them together has to be removed and Leslie's association with the real world has to be rekindled to enable real healing to take place.

7.4.2: Tattooing and Marginalisation

The marginalisation and 'Othering' of tattooed individuals is a common thread which runs through each of the tattoo magic novels. This may be due to the idea that tattooing is tainted with an element of risk (Armstrong and Murphy, 1997). In Leslie's case, it nearly results in the loss of her life. In *Frost Moon*, Dakota and others like her, are hunted and killed for their tattoos. Similarly, in *Stolen Ink*, Dacian is required to keep his abilities secret in order to preserve his safety. Predictably also, is the theme of

Otherness. Leslie's tattoo is inked by Rabbit, a dubious character who is half human, half hound. Her subsequent, albeit unwilling associations with those who can only be marked as Other, may run parallel with the long-standing notion that tattooed individuals are separate from mainstream society (Osterud, 2009). Leslie's addiction to Irial's blood can also be liked to an addiction to narcotics and alcohol and again, places her in a marginalised group. All three tattoo magic novels chosen for this study take place in in alternate universes where tattooed characters are linked with werewolves, vampires, faeries, and other mythological creatures. Moreover, each story challenges traditional heteronormative tropes – Dakota is bisexual, Dacian is gay, and even though Leslie falls in love with two male characters, neither of them is human. Despite this, sexually diverse protagonists, it can be argued, are in danger of becoming another convention within the tattoo magic/fantasy genre, rendering them predictable and overused.

7.4.3: Power and Control

As we have discovered in the previous sections of this chapter, power and control play integral roles in the tattoo magic narratives. The theme of power, however, will be discussed in further detail in the final chapter of this dissertation. On the surface Leslie's character conforms to the stereotypical trope of helpless female dominated and controlled by stronger male protagonists:

> The pervasive stereotype of the female victim seems to encompass many…standard traits. She is physically weak, hysterical, […] unable to make a decision, […] unable to formulate a plan to defend herself and

> unable to retaliate whenever the situation requires.' (Lieberman, 1972, in Overstreet, 1994, n.p.)

As the story advances and Leslie's character develops, however, we see a heroine who, despite finding herself under a powerful spell, finally has the strength to think for herself and feel anger regarding how she has been treated: '*Belong*? A burst of anger consumed her sadness […] *Belong*? Like a trinket? I belong to myself' (p.224). Through a huge effort of will, Leslie renounces the world of faerie, renounces her relationships with both Niall and Irial despite her ongoing attraction to both of them, and finally goes to college to complete her studies, choosing the ordinary over the magical. In choosing the mundane over the faerie realms, she re-engages with her life. This can be compared with trauma victims in real life scenarios: 'Whereas in the past, survivors often imagine that ordinary life would be boring, now they are bored with the life of a victim, and ready to find ordinary life interesting' (Lewis-Herman, 1992, p.203).

However, despite Leslie's determination to regain autonomy, it is still a male character who frees her when, as the story comes to an end, Leslie chooses to rid herself of the tattoo by freezing it off. In the real world, tattoo removal can be more painful than the initial tattoo and this too is the case for Leslie:

> Leslie felt icicles piercing her skin. And she screamed, though she tore at her lip to keep that sound inside […] her hands were fisted so tight that she felt the cover rip. Her spine bowed. Niall's knee was on her back, holding her down. Tears were soaking the blanket under Leslie's face. (p.297-298)

The rape which is alluded to at the beginning of the story is not described at all, yet out of its context, the above quotation could describe the violation and assault of a woman

by a man. Interestingly, it is this very act which finally frees Leslie from the influence of Irial: 'She smiled despite it all, for just a moment, she smiled. She was free. It hurt like hell, but she was free' (p.298). However, it is important to note that at every stage throughout the story, it is a male character who helps to determine Leslie's fate – she is neglected by her father, used and abused by her brother, raped by a man, tattooed and tricked by a man and finally freed by a man although the choice to undergo the pain that finally frees her is all hers. Also, importantly, Leslie does not find her happy-ever-after through meeting a boy. It is about confronting her past, however painful, and returning to the mundane world. In fact, a positive outcome is something she finds through her own inner strength despite the feelings she still has for both Niall and Irial: 'No, I'm pretty sure seeing you or Niall is a bad idea…I don't want this world […] I want to go live my life, be normal, and sort out what happened – before you' (p.307). Although the tattoo that was supposed to free her only creates more trauma, it does serve as a catalyst for change. Arguably, the addiction, entrapment, and dissociation are part of the process of Leslie's recovery. Without it, such recovery may never have occurred.

7.4.4: Relationships

As has been acknowledged in previous chapters, the theme of absent or irresponsible parents plays a significant role in this narrative and is a dominant theme in the journey of a hero (Luthi, 1970) who is traditional an orphan. Feeling the rejection of both parents, Leslie has no choice but to survive alone without their support. According to Murdock: 'the heroine crosses the threshold, leaves the safety of her parents' home, and goes in search of herself' (1990, p.49). In Leslie's case, the search for self is

inhibited by her time spent with Irial. The dazed, intoxicated state evoked by the magical bond between Irial and herself has been equated with dissociation after a traumatic event but may also be associated with the denial of self, a rejection of the feminine: 'The continuing devaluation of women on the outer levels affects how a woman feels about herself inwardly and how she perceives the feminine' (Murdock, 1990, p.47). Leslie's femininity has been deeply compromised by the rejection of her father, the sexual abuse at the hands of her brother, and the violation by Irial. Arguably, she is even unintentionally betrayed by her best friend Aislinn who, it transpires, is queen of the faerie summer court. Having successfully kept this fact from Leslie, she too has been unable to protect Leslie from the attentions of Irial. Leslie then, must very much rely on herself and her own personal strength to confront her trauma and remove herself from the half-life she inhabits as a result of addiction and sorcery: 'The challenge for the heroine is not one of conquest but one of acceptance, of accepting her nameless, unloved parts that have become tyrannical because she has left them unchecked (Murdock, 1990, p.166).

In a sense, Leslie's quest comprises not only of escaping Irial's spell and confronting her traumatic past, but also of reconnecting with her femininity. There is also the fact that she must relinquish old relationships in the same way that an addict must remove themselves from the people and places associated with their dependence: 'That was Leslie's goal: getting things put to rights – her life, her future and if she could, things with those who mattered to her' (p.305). Of course, she must also acknowledge that recovery will not be easy but that she must go through its pain in order to once again become whole.

7.5: Conclusion

The three protagonists in the tattoo magic genre differ from characters in the social realism and fantasy genre in their stereotypical portrayal. Although Dacian and Dakota divert from the traditional heterosexual hero and heroine, their presentation is predictable. Their overt sexuality could be seen as either refreshing or expected, descriptions of their sexual exploits could be construed as being either appreciative or objectifying. In *Ink Exchange*, Leslie is objectified by her brother's friends as well as the other men she encounters in the story. There are, therefore, many contradictions in these novels. On the one hand, the characters appear to be strong, feisty, and determined yet on the other, they conform to traditional literary tropes. For example, Leslie's character development is impeded by her attraction to Niall and her obsession with Irial. Although she is a strong female protagonist who eventually overcomes the power Irial has over her, she is still rescued by a male character. In *Stolen Ink*, Dacian's relationship with Isaiah could appear in any social realism romance novel. Dakota is a strong female protagonist, yet she still manages to get captured by a male character. These three novels, therefore, appear innovative and risqué in their presentation of tattooing, sexual practice, and magic, yet when examined on a deeper level, merely conform to old clichés and stereotypical character presentations.

Chapter 8

Findings and Conclusions

8.1: Introduction

This chapter examines in detail the findings and conclusions of the study based on multi methods research strategies. It begins by presenting an outline of each chapter and then proceeds with a discussion relating to the overall aim and objectives of the research. The strengths and limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also addressed. This is followed by my personal reflections relating to my journey as a PhD researcher.

8.2: Overview of the Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to ascertain how tattooed protagonists are portrayed in young adult literature. From this aim came three objectives. These are listed below:

8.2.1: Objective 1

Find out how young adults perceive literary characters whose bodies have been tattooed. To answer this question, I interviewed twelve university students and gave questionnaires to eight younger readers. I then used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse their responses relating to reading choices, their perceptions of heroes and

heroines in literature, and their thoughts on the portrayal of tattooed protagonists. I was also able to access the skills I developed as a counsellor to conduct a deeper analysis of the responses to the questionnaires and interviews which enriched the quality of my analysis. That is, I was able to look beneath the surface of what I was reading in order to access less obvious feelings and thoughts which arose as a result of multiple readings of the responses. Readers' perceptions of tattooed protagonists were overall predictable with stereotypical associations – tattooed protagonists were considered to be rebellious trouble-makers - more prominent in fantasy literature as opposed to social realism. The textual analysis, however, revealed that tattooed protagonists did not, overall, conform to this stereotype. Certainly, there was more diversity or more precisely, more positive representation of tattooed protagonists than I was expecting. This discrepancy, however, may be due to three factors: firstly, respondents may have been recollecting books they read as children, possessing a lack of awareness of diverse representation within post-millennium publications. Literature published post-millennium contains more diverse representation than novels published prior to this date. Furthermore, on the whole, children's literature does not typically feature tattooed protagonists. Secondly, it may also be a result of personal reading choice. For example, tattooed characters may occur with more frequency in the fantasy or science fiction genres. They occur with markedly less frequency within the social realism genre. Thirdly, it may be that respondents were merely reiterating the social attitudes that have traditionally been perpetuated by popular media culture. Phrases such as 'not accepted by society' and stereotypical references to gang membership and bikers support this observation. Further consideration could be given to the fact that there are still places of work where tattoos are required to be covered up and a more

'traditional' image be maintained. Participants, therefore, were perhaps not expressing their own prejudices but were simply voicing those of a culture where historically, tattoos were not perceived in a Where rebellion did take place, this was due to fighting a worthy cause or for the personal safety of the protagonist. Some respondents claimed never to have read a novel featuring a tattooed protagonist which fits into the idea that despite a more relaxed social attitude towards tattooing, tattooed individuals largely remain marginalised and literature is moving at a slower pace than society in general. There were also predictable references to bikers and gang culture. Participants generally associated tattooed protagonists with stereotypical behaviour such as 'violent low-lifes', or 'a stereotypical bad person'. Tattooed characters were also considered to be 'tough and feisty'. Overall, I was not surprised by these responses although these were not the personal opinions of the readers themselves. They were merely expressing their thoughts on the overall *portrayal* of tattooed protagonists in literature and in the media as a whole. Older readers were more likely to focus on the negative portrayal of tattooed characters than younger readers who acknowledged that there is greater acceptance of tattooed individuals in society today than there was two or three decades ago. It is, however, important to acknowledge that due to the small number of respondents these results cannot be generalised.

8.2.2: Objective 2

The second objective explored **whether tattooed protagonists are portrayed in a negative, positive, or ambiguous way**. Arguably, owing to the fact that social attitudes to tattoos are changing, overall, the chosen novels do not portray tattooed protagonists

in a negative way. Even drug-addicted Angie in *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly* possesses a certain kindness as she enables Seymour to develop confidence and a sense of self-worth. Interestingly, tattooed protagonists have become more visible in recent publications and in more modern books they are less likely to be portrayed negatively. In at least three of the novels, it is those *without* tattoos who are to be feared or who behave badly – the Blanks in *Ink*, The Council in *Stolen Ink* and King Saran in *Children of Blood and Bone*.

The rebel trope is an important one and a character trait often associated with tattooing (Swami et al, 2015), and could be considered to be both a positive and a negative trait – trouble-making, subversive, or determined to make positive changes within a cruel society. Rebelliousness is a significant characteristic of all the protagonists to varying degrees. Even though it is somewhat clichéd, rebelliousness is what makes each character interesting. In some cases, it even saves their lives.

Although there were some stereotypical character portrayals – promiscuity, drug addiction, rebelliousness, the overall character portrayal was mostly positive. The characters had strengths and weaknesses – they were not entirely one dimensional. Some of the protagonists may indeed have possessed stereotypical characteristics but none of them conformed to the descriptions given by questionnaire and interview respondents. For example, there were no gang members, bikers, significantly heavy drinkers (with the exception of Dacian in *Stolen Ink*), or very tough street-fighting trouble-makers even in the social realism texts. In fact, all nine novels portray a diverse selection of characters in terms of race, sexuality, social background, and personal characteristics.

8.2.3: Tattoo Magic and Social Convention

Perhaps due to the infancy of its development, the tattoo magic genre, or at least the books selected for this study, presented clichéd characters and predictable themes. On a more positive note, the fact that tattooed protagonists have gone from being heavily marginalised to having a literary presence is in itself positive. However, the genre arguably could be developed further with protagonists who are more relatable and themes which are less predictable. The textual analysis of *Frost Moon* and *Stolen Ink* suggested that these texts could have been written by the same author since the story arcs are so very similar. It would be refreshing to read narratives featuring protagonists who behave in a less predictable fashion than either Dacian or Dakota.

Furthermore, on the surface, characters from the tattoo magic genre appear to be defying conventions in their diversity yet upon deeper examination they conform to the dominant conventional tropes. For example, although the sexuality of both Dacian and Dakota differs from that of the traditional heterosexual protagonists who up until relatively recently dominated young adult literature, both of these protagonists and all the peripheral characters portrayed in the tattoo magic genre are white. Moreover, although Dakota's appearance is unconventional with her tattooed body, mohawk and tall frame, she, Leslie, and Dacian all conform to the stereotypical trope of beautiful hero or heroine. A glance at the book jackets of the selection of tattoo magic narratives on Goodreads tells us that a large percentage of the protagonists featured in these stories can be described in the same way.

8.2.4: Tattoos, Tattoo Magic, and Power

The genre, however, is not without its merits. A theme relating to tattooing which has emerged in both the secondary literature and the textual analysis is that of personal empowerment. In the tattoo magic and the fantasy genre, power is linked to magic. In each of the tattoo magic narratives chosen for analysis, the power is associated with the tattoos themselves. The magic and subsequent power is also evident in *Children of Blood and Bone* although in this narrative, the power is possessed by the wearer of the tattoo as opposed to the tattoo itself. Power, however, does not only relate to magic. It can also be linked to agency, strength of character, and determination. Leslie's power eventually comes from her decision to free herself from the magic that binds her to Irial. Zelie, Leora, and Dakota's power comes from their decision to fight for what they perceive to be right. In real-world scenarios, the decision to have a tattoo after a traumatic event can be seen as a gesture of personal empowerment (Kang and Jones, 2007, in Strubel and Jones, 2017). There is also an element of power in choosing to mark yourself with a tattoo in order to challenge traditional beauty norms and ideals. Perhaps this is where the 'magic' lies. Each character featured in all nine narratives possesses a degree of personal power. Even Angie in the throes of drug addiction and personal conflict, has the power to bewitch Seymour and enable him to escape from his prison of self-doubt. Grief-stricken Green is able to use her power for growth. She re-kindles both her garden and her life after experiencing extreme trauma. Kellie's power is found when she realises that the relationship most important to her is the one she has with herself, and Nishat's power is evident throughout the text as with strength and

determination she fights to remain true to herself despite significant pressure from family and school to deny her sexuality. In short, reading about tattooed characters who are portrayed as possessing inner strength and determination to succeed and who are capable of acting responsibly can only be viewed positively since in the past such characters may have been marginalised, vilified, and ostracised.

8.3: Objective 3

The third objective was **to ascertain whether there are any differences in the portrayal of tattooed male and female characters.** Surprisingly, there didn't seem to be a great deal of difference in the ways in which male and female characters were portrayed. In the discourse analysis, regarding heroes and heroines, similar descriptors were used for each gender – 'resilient', 'brave', 'proactive'. We still, however, see references to the handsome hero and the beautiful heroine. Interesting also is the way in which a heroine is described as a 'female hero' by more than one respondent. Due to the fact that heroines are often associated with helpless damsels in distress, a female hero potentially generates images of a strong woman who has challenged this stereotype. When considering the heroine's journey, the female protagonists generally conformed to the theories of Murdock (1990) – that the journey of the heroine centres around an inner journey of spiritual growth after facing a crisis or conflict. The two male protagonists featured in *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly* and *Stolen Ink* differ in terms of age, background, and sexuality although their stories do conform to the absent parent trope discussed in chapter five (Campbell, 1971). Dacian can hold his own in a fight but Seymour at only eleven years old still has plenty to learn in terms of self-

defence. In terms of the female protagonists, Zelie is the only one who is trained to fight. Dakota has to learn how to protect herself and although Leora and Green do not possess combat skills, not every character needs these abilities in order to survive. The only significant difference in the portrayal of male and female protagonists acknowledged by respondents were that male characters with tattoos were 'tough' and 'hard' whereas female characters with tattoos were 'mysterious' and 'slinky'. Overall, participants did not perceive tattooed female characters to be portrayed more negatively than tattooed males or vice versa. Furthermore, female characters with tattoos or any other body modification were not considered to be more taboo or more physically unattractive than males. References to the body shape and type of the protagonists were more commonly made by respondents, although to a lesser degree in the novels. Insecurity relating to physical appearance was expressed by Kellie, Nishat and Leora, but it was not the main focus of the story. Respondents, however, observed that 'male bodies are meant to be strong and muscular' whereas 'female bodies are meant to be slim yet curvy and a size zero' acknowledging an awareness that traditional stereotypical notions of beauty still remain.

When considering each narrative from a feminist viewpoint, six of the novels feature dominant males. Even if they are not the main protagonist, they still present a strong force within the story – fathers, brothers, potential lovers, male-dominated political bodies. Kellie, Leora, Zelie, and Leslie are either controlled or influenced by dominant male characters. Dakota is pursued and captured by a male character and even Angie has been deserted by the father of her unborn child. However, heroines who are pursued or dominated still manage to outwit, escape, or confront their enemies. Kellie confronts her father, Dakota defeats her enemy, and Leora prepares herself to fight

against a corrupt system. None of these heroines are damsels in distress who require a male character to rescue them from peril.

Overall, it can be argued that protagonists have gone from the traditional representations of negative, out-dated portrayal of 'violent lowlifes' to possessing heroic qualities, intelligence, fortitude, and determination. Indeed, we see those without tattoos possessing unsociable, thuggish qualities. While some of the findings from secondary literature maintain that social prejudice still exists regarding tattoos, there is other, more recent research that acknowledges a shift in attitudes towards the practice. Tattooing has becoming more popular in mainstream society through media exposure and its increase in popularity within celebrity culture. Researchers such as Victoria Pitts (2003), Beverly Yuen Thompson (2015), and Margo De Mello (2000) have made important contributions in terms of normalizing tattooing. Society has shifted and so, it seems, has literature although as has previously been mentioned, at a significantly slower pace. Attitudes to tattooing are changing which is reflected in the ways in which tattooed characters are portrayed.

8.4: Limitations of the Study

In common with most research endeavours, this study has its limitations. To begin with, it only explores a very small selection of literature portraying tattooed protagonists. Furthermore, due to the challenges presented during the COVID-19 epidemic, there were fewer participants taking part in the study than I had initially

hoped for. However, this research has generated ideas which are worthy of further investigation. These will be discussed in section **8.7**.

8.4.1: Participant Recruitment

The number of participants I was able to recruit to take part in the study were fewer than I anticipated, and I had difficulty recruiting participants. My initial intention regarding recruitment was to contact a number of schools in the local area and work with focus groups. The situation with the COVID pandemic, however, resulted in me being unable to do this. When the pandemic restrictions were lifted, I contacted a total of eight schools by letter but received no responses, possibly due to the pressures and issues which arose as a result of the pandemic. However, this provided me with the opportunity to look at innovative ways to gather information and recruit participants. It also enabled me to develop skills as an interviewer and to move out of my comfort zone and engage with technology to aid me with the interview process. I was therefore able to conduct the interviews online but had fewer participants responding to the questionnaires than I had initially planned.

8.4.2: Interviewing

There were some issues and problems encountered regarding the interviewing and questionnaire process. These were as follows:

1. Some of the responses given on both the questionnaires and the interviews were very short, consisting of one-word answers or just ‘don’t know’ or ‘not

sure'. This may be due to the type of questions asked. Interview responses tended to be more elaborate and detailed, and it was easier to prompt the respondent during the interview process.

Questionnaire responses were, overall, shorter, possibly due to the fact they were written, and the respondents were younger than the interview participants. Furthermore, not everybody who took part in the questionnaire activity took the process seriously which meant that when I came to analyse the responses, I found that some were either facetious or illegible which was disappointing.

2. Not everybody who agreed to take part in the study was an avid reader of young adult literature. Due to the fact that it was so difficult to find participants, this wasn't initially a major concern. Not all the questions relied on an in-depth knowledge of the genre. I was more interested in respondent's opinions relating to character portrayal in general as opposed to their opinions relating to specific texts. However, more relevant data would have been collected had respondents read more widely in this area.

3. Some of the respondents had read young adult literature when they were younger teenagers but had since moved onto different genres. Their responses were interesting and valid, but they were not aware of how the genre has progressed over the past decade in terms of diversity. Anybody entering a branch of Waterstones (or any other bookstore) will be aware of the increasing number of books featuring protagonists of varying ethnicity, queer protagonists

and protagonists with disabilities and mental health issues. Arguably, there is now more diverse representation that there ever has been.

4. Rules surrounding social contact during the COVID pandemic meant that the interviews had to take place online as opposed to face-to-face. This presented its own set of problems. Most of the interviews ran smoothly, however, on more than one occasion, I lost the internet connection with my participant which proved frustrating and interrupted the flow of the meeting.

8.5: Contribution to New Knowledge

There is a plethora of literature available relating to tattooing as a practice within its social and cultural context. Furthermore, there is a wide variety of literature focussing on different aspects of young adult literature. There does not, however, appear to be any significant studies surrounding tattooed protagonists in young adult literature. This then, is my new knowledge contribution. Findings from this study suggest that although tattooed protagonists are currently more visible in young adult literature than in previous decades, they are very much confined to a fantasy setting. Research which focuses on tattooed protagonists gives them visibility and potentially decreases the stigma associated with the practice.

8.6: Personal Reflections

This study explored the portrayal of tattooed protagonists through a feminist lens and highlights the social changes relating to body diversity with particular focus on tattooed protagonists. Overall, I was surprised at the findings from my textual analysis. My assumption prior to embarking upon this research was that tattooed protagonists would be portrayed in negative, stereotypical ways. The exploration of tattooed protagonists through from a feminist viewpoint enabled me to critically examine authors' portrayals of female protagonists and also the ways in which male characters interacted with them. I have often felt irritated by predictable, air-headed female protagonists whose main function is to be 'saved' by the handsome chiselled-jawed action hero. Using a feminist approach to analysis allowed me to undertake an in-depth examination of tattooed protagonists in order to ascertain whether traditional tropes are still present in young adult literature or whether it has evolved and developed. Although some of the protagonists did exhibit characteristics which could be construed as being stereotypical, they were, on the whole, an interesting set of individuals whose positive portrayals resulted in them being likeable, relatable, and multi-layered. Findings from the critical discourse analysis backed up my initial assumptions that tattooed protagonists, when they appeared at all, were often presented negatively, conforming to traditional social stereotypes. Older readers, however, were more likely to make this observation than younger readers who were more aware of the greater availability of novels featuring more diverse characters and the shift in attitudes towards diversity.

8.7: Future Recommendations

This pioneering research provides the foundation for future studies relating to tattooing and tattooed protagonists. It would be impossible to analyse every single publication featuring tattooed protagonists but arguably, exploring literature of this nature could be an area of research in the future with the following topic in mind:

- Using focus groups consisting of a greater number of respondents could potentially generate a series of discussions relating to protagonists in literature in order to produce a much richer set of data for analysis. Furthermore, I feel that focus groups may potentially encourage greater rapport with the researcher than if a questionnaire only is used. Ideally, an alternative set of questions could be used perhaps with much more focus on tattooed protagonists as opposed to more generalised questions relating to literary characters.
- Research focussing purely on the tattoo magic genre with an in-depth critique from an intersectional feminist perspective would make a valid research contribution relating to tattooed female protagonists and the significance of their tattoos.
- Although tattooed protagonists are currently more visible, in literature, they are still more apparent in fantasy literature. This is a theme which could be developed for research in the future.
- Protagonists featured within this genre appear to be mainly white and able-bodied. Again, this is a theme which could be pursued further.

Since I have begun my research in 2019, there has been a greater availability of novels featuring more diverse characters. The absence of tattooed protagonists in a

social realism setting is somewhat disappointing yet not particularly surprising given that some stigma still remains regarding tattooing. I would, however, like to see tattooed protagonists featured more in social realism novels as opposed to largely being confined to a fantasy setting. I would also find it refreshing to see greater, positive representation of older tattooed women in fictional literature as a whole.

8.8: Conclusion

This research contributes to a rich tradition of research into body diversity and deviance. It has focussed on the representation of tattooed protagonists in young adult literature. Overall findings indicate that social and cultural attitudes towards body diversity are changing. This is also apparent in literature. We are moving away from heteronormative representations and the skinny, white heroine towards a more inclusive literary world. Tattooed protagonists, however, remain, on the whole, predominantly within a fantasy setting. The fact that tattooed protagonists have a place in literature at all, however, indicates a significant shift in attitudes towards tattooing. This can only be perceived as being a positive move towards acceptance and tolerance.

I would, however, find it refreshing to read about a literary character where their tattoos are not the main feature of the story; where they are more

commonplace and not confined to the realms of fantasy or associated with magic or sorcery. The presence of tattooed protagonists in a social realism setting would potentially result in even greater acceptance and a move away from prejudice, negative judgement, and social stigma.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Letter to school/college

Waterside Campus

University Drive

Northampton

NN1 5PH

Tel: 01604 735500

Date:

Kingsthorpe College

Boughton Green Road

Northampton

NN2 7HR

Dear Mrs Giovanelli

I am a PhD student at the University of Northampton researching the portrayal of heroes and heroines in young adult literature. My main focus is body image and the aim of my research is to examine whether males or females in popular fiction conform to social stereotypes regarding their appearance. I am also interested to find out if characters whose bodies are 'different' are portrayed in a negative or positive way.

In today's society, there is a large amount of pressure on teenagers and young adults to conform to a particular body type, shape or fashion. With the emergence of the 'selfie'

and the burden of having to look good at all times, it is of no surprise that incidents of eating disorders, mental illness and low self-esteem is increasing amongst both males and females.

Research such as this, therefore, can potentially make a useful contribution in aiding the understanding of issues surrounding body image and self-esteem. To help me with my studies, it seemed appropriate to ask a group of young adults about their reading preferences and the characteristics of heroes and heroines that they value and can relate to the most. I understand that due to the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, I cannot enter the school premises. For this reason, I wonder if you would be prepared for a group of students aged between 16-18 to answer a series of questions about their preferred reading choices in the form of a questionnaire. To avoid possible contamination, these questionnaires would be accessible online. Should you give consent for student participation, I would be grateful if you could inform me whether you would prefer further correspondence to take place by letter or email in order to ensure COVID safety. I would be grateful for your cooperation and hope that there will be enough interest generated for this to take place.

Due to the fact that I will be working with a vulnerable age group on a sensitive subject, I have sought and gained approval from the Ethics Committee at the university. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and participants will be provided with an information sheet outlining the aims of the study and their role within it. A copy of the information sheet is enclosed. The consent of both participant and the parent or guardian will be obtained in all cases before proceeding. Participants will be given the right to withdraw from the study any time before the submission date of this study. Any data provided will be confidential and anonymity will be maintained. No visual material in the form of film or photographs will be used.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact either myself or my supervisors at the email addresses given below.

I would be grateful for your participation and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Allyson Green B.A. (Hons.) M.A.

Allyson.Green@northampton.ac.uk

Sonya.Adermahr@northampton.ac.uk

Eunice.Lumsden@northampton.ac.uk

Appendix 2

Participant Information Sheet

The Representation of Bodies that Deviate from Accepted Social Norms in Adolescent Literature

Why have I been invited?

You are being invited to take part in this study on the portrayal of heroes and heroines in young adult literature relating to body image and body diversity. Before you decide whether to take part in the study, it is important for you to understand why the study is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the information provided and discuss it with a friend or family member if you wish. If you have any further questions or if there is anything you do not understand, please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

What is the purpose of this study?

The aims of this study are primarily to find out about the reading preferences of young adults in terms of which literary characters they admire the most and the reasons for their choices. Secondly, the study aims to ascertain how young adults respond to literary characters whose bodies are visibly different from the norm in terms of disability, weight, deformity or being tattooed and/or pierced.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because as a researcher focusing on young adult literature, I felt that it was appropriate to ask young adults about the types of books they like to read and the characters they admire the most.

Do I have to take part?

There is absolutely no pressure to take part in the study as it is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm that you understand what the project involves and are happy to participate. Participants who are under 18 will need consent from a parent or carer. If you decide to take part but then change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the study, however, once you have submitted your questionnaire responses, you will be unable to withdraw your data.

What will my participation involve?

Taking part in this study will involve answering some questions on a questionnaire about your reading choices and the characteristics you can relate to the most in your favourite literary heroes and heroines. To avoid possible contamination during the COVID pandemic, the questionnaires will be available online. Further details relating to this will be available at a future date.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Taking part in a study such as this provides you with the opportunity to offer your opinions and ideas about issues that are important to you in an environment where your thoughts will be respected.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages of talking part?

There may be some individuals who find issues about body image difficult to discuss because they may cause embarrassment and distress. For this reason, the questions asked will be focusing on characters in stories and will not be relating to personal experiences.

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any concerns about the way in which you have been treated during this study, please contact Prof. John Horton at John.Horton@northampton.ac.uk (Chair of Ethics Committee).

Will my information be kept confidential?

All the information collected for this study will remain anonymous and will be stored securely on a password-protected computer on the university's networked drive. This information will be accessed by the researcher only. The only personal information required on the questionnaire will be your age, gender and the subjects you are studying. No information which identifies you or your school will be used in the study.

Although the information collected during this study will be anonymous, anonymised data may be shared in the future.

What will happen to the results of this study?

The results of this study may be shared with other researchers or used for further research. Anybody who wishes to see their transcript may do so by contacting the email address below.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Northampton and the supervisors of the researcher. Their contact details are listed below.

Contact for further information

If you have any further questions about this study or your involvement in it, please contact me (the researcher) using the contact details below:

Allyson.Green@northampton.ac.uk

University supervisors:

Sonya.Andermahr@northampton.ac.uk

Eunice.Lumsden@northampton.ac.uk

Thank you for considering taking part in this study

Appendix 3

COVID-19 – How COVID-19 Affected my Research Progress

At the start of my study, I intended to recruit pupils from a secondary school or further education college in the East Midlands. Initially, it was my intention to hold a focus group in a school or college. I aimed to question them about their reading choices in a forum which would have been followed with a questionnaire which would have taken place online via JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee).

Due to the COVID-19 situation, however, it was necessary to make some amendments to the original plan as I was unable to access any educational establishment in person. Potential meetings, both the preliminary meeting and any subsequent communications, were held online as opposed to face-to-face on school, college, or university premises. Due to the situation created by COVID-19, it was not permissible to enter the school or college premises. Therefore, in order to avoid contamination and to preserve the safety of others, the questions which would have been asked during the focus group meeting were instead used during online interviews with university students. University participants were recruited with a flyer detailing the main aspects of the study which was sent online to students studying English. Instead of working with a larger group of students, therefore, interviews were conducted individually since at the time, this was deemed a more appropriate way of accessing data.

My plan to contact the school or college at the beginning of the academic year also needed to change. My original intention was to contact the relevant educational establishment and begin correspondence in September, however, to allow for a safe

return and the ensuing adjustments that needed to be made, this date was changed to the beginning of the winter term in early November.

Initial contact with secondary schools in the Northamptonshire area was be made by letter, however, although I contacted eight schools in the area, no replies were forthcoming. This resulted in me asking a small group of girls from the Girl Guide group where I volunteer to take part in the study.

Appendix 4

Consent form

The Representation of Bodies that Deviate from Accepted Social Norms in Adolescent Literature

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the information provided to me on the information sheet.		
I have had an opportunity to ask questions about this research.		
I understand that any answers given on the questionnaire cannot be withdrawn once the survey is submitted.		
I understand that if I feel that I am unable to continue to take part in the study, I have the right to withdraw.		
I agree to anonymised quotations being used in any academic presentations or publications of this work.		
I understand the limits to confidentiality in the project, for example, the researcher will let somebody know if a safeguarding issue arises.		
I agree to my data being used in any future work that expands on this project, for example, journal publications or further research.		
If I feel that I cannot continue with the study, I will contact the researcher by email within a month of receiving the questionnaire.		
I understand that I can decline to answer any questions.		

Signature of participant……

Signature of researcher……

Appendix 5

Interview questions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Here is a list of questions for you to consider. Please take some time to read through them before the discussion begins. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. Which book are you currently reading?
2. Are you reading it from choice or because it is required as part of your studies?
3. Are you enjoying it?

   If so, why?

   If not, why not?
4. What type of hero and/or heroine do you enjoy reading about the most?
5. What strengths do you admire most about a hero or heroine?
6. Which hero or heroine would you most want to be like?
7. Do you prefer heroes and heroines to be stereotypical 'perfect' characters or do you prefer them to be a bit more realistic?
8. Do you feel that a certain type of character is typically portrayed as a hero, heroine, or villain?
9. Do you prefer a fantasy setting or stories that take place in the real world?
10. Do you feel that it is important for authors to describe the physical characteristics of heroes and heroines or do you prefer to imagine what they are like for yourself?
11. What are your thoughts about characters who are physically different in terms of body size, disability, tattoos and piercings?

12. In your opinion, are tattooed or pierced characters more likely to appear in fantasy novels than in novels featuring real-world situations?

13. Do you feel that characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative or positive way?

14. Do you feel that characters with piercings are portrayed negatively or positively?

15. Do you feel that a varied section of society is represented in young adult literature in terms of race, disability, ethnicity, body diversity and sexuality?
16. If not, why not?

Thank you for taking part in this study

If you require copies of your transcript or have any queries relating to the study, please contact me at the email address provided below:

Allyson.Green@northampton.ac.uk

If you are concerned about or have been affected by any of the issues that have been referred to, a list of helpful services is provided below:

The Lowdown, Kingswell Street, Northampton, NN1 1PP - a counselling and information service for young people between the ages 11-25 based in Northampton – Helpline: 01604 622223; Enquiries: 01604 634385.

Body Image and Self Esteem for Teens:
https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/bodyimage.html.
This website provides lots of information on body image, weight and self-esteem.

www.youthaccess.org.uk
This is a website that offers information about counselling in the UK if you're aged between 12 and 25.

If you are feeling anxious or worried about any of the above topics, please do speak to a friend, parent or teacher about how you are feeling. Your GP may also be able to offer some advice and guidance.

Appendix 6

Questionnaire Questions

The following questions relate to the types of books you like to read and the heroes and heroines you admire in your favourite stories. Please answer them as clearly and honestly as you can. Remember – there are no right or wrong answers.

1. What type of books do you enjoy reading?

2. What themes interest you or are important to you?

3. What does the word 'heroine' mean to you?

4. What does the word 'hero' mean to you?

5. Do you have favourite literary heroes or heroines?

6. If yes, who are they?

7. What is the reason for your choice?

8. Which characteristics of your favourite literary characters do you most admire?

9. How would you describe a Hero…….

Heroine……

Villain……..

9. How do descriptions of male and female body shapes differ, if at all?

10. What type of characters are you able to relate to the most?

11. Are characters with tattoos often represented in young adult literature?

12. Are characters with piercings often represented in young adult literature?

Thank you for your participation

Appendix 7

Case Studies of Each Interview Participant

Name	Interview Number	Book Choice	Preferred Genre
Abby	1	The *Harry Potter* series by J.K Rowling (2001-2009)	Fantasy
Sarah	2	*A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride (2013)	Historical Fantasy
Jack	3	*Emma* by Jane Austen (1815)	Fantasy
Sue	4	*Not Here to be Liked* by Michelle Quach (2021)	Fantasy Realism
Naomi	5	*His Dark Materials: The Book of Dust* by Philip Pullman (2017)	Fantasy
Gabrielle	6	*The Man Who Died Twice* by Richard Osman (2021)	Fantasy Realism
Lucy	7	*The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins (2015)	Realism
Simon	8	*Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome (1930)	Realism
Petra	9	*Austerlitz* by W.G. Sebald (2001)	Realism
Penny	10	*Everything I Know About Love* by Dolly Alderton (2018)	Realism
Andrew	11	*The Atrocity Archives* by Charles Stross (2004)	Science Fiction
Ellie	12	Nothing Specific	Crime Fantasy

Note: To ensure anonymity participants' names have been changed.

Appendix 8

Case Study of Each Questionnaire Participant

Name	Age	Questionnaire Number	Preferred Genre	Preferred Themes	
Lizzy	13	1	Classics Romance	Romance Coming of Age	
Leah	12	2	Murder Mystery	Love Fantasy	
Rosa	13	3	Murder Mystery Romances	Family drama	
Louise	12	4	Murder mysteries	LGBTQ	
Sammie	12	5	Unsure	Animals	
Lily	11	6	Unsure	Challenge Puzzle Solving	
Jill	11	7	Adventure	Fighting Magic	
Molly	11	8	Fantasy	Magic Mystery	

Appendix 9

A Table to Show the Functions of Tattoos in Each Novel

Title of Novel	**Function of Tattoo**
Came Back to Show You I Could Fly	Rebellion/Attraction
Ink is Thicker Than Water	Permanence/Belonging
Henna wars	Cultural identity/Personal identity
Ink	Conformity/Cultural identity
Children of Blood and Bone	Cultural identity/Magic/Power
Green Angel	To help cope with grief/To reconnect with the body after trauma
Frost Moon	Personal identity/Power
Stolen Ink	Personal identity/Power
Ink Exchange	To reconnect with the body after trauma/Empowerment

Appendix 10

A Table to Show Character Comparison in Each Novel

Title of Novel	Gender (of main protagonist)	Race	Class
Came Back to Show You I Could Fly	Male	White Australian	Working Class
Ink is Thicker Than Water	Female	Anglo American	Middle Class
Henna Wars	Female	Muslim	Middle Class
Ink	Female	Anglo American	Working Class
Children of Blood and Bone	Female	African	Working Class
Green Angel	Female	Anglo American	Working Class
Frost Moon	Female	Anglo American	Middle class
Stolen Ink	Male	Anglo American	Working Class
Ink Exchange	Female	Anglo American	Middle Class

Appendix 11

Example of Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis of Interview 1

Quotation	Code	Theme
I've just finished reading Madeleine Miller's *Circe*. Well…the coming out of naivety and finding her own through being pushed away. As a woman anyway, you do think about the female narrative and how this should be different…women who have not been at the forefront becoming heroines.	**Coming out of naivety** **Female narrative** **Women who have not been at the forefront becoming heroines**	Heroine's journey Heroine's journey Marginalisation
When I was younger, you think of a hero or heroine as someone who's good.	**Good**	Social expectation Social stereotype
They're not necessarily right but they're doing it for the right reasons. Somebody a bit more approachable and relatable	**Approachable and relatable**	Challenging social expectations
…a bit like Medea. She's always been portrayed to be evil because she kills her kids and yeah…understandable. But I think, like, bad bitch energy. Like she kills the kids so Jason can't have an heir.	**Bad bitch energy**	Defying social expectations
In classic mythology, is anyone a doting mother? I highly doubted she wanted those children.	**Doting mother** **I highly doubted she wanted those children**	Social expectations Female role in society
…the evil stepmother trope and how that's likened to an ugly witch.	**Evil stepmother** **Ugly witch**	Social stereotypes

…we look at pretty women to be good and deformities to be negative because it doesn't fit in with how women are meant to look and even for men as well. Like you never really see a chubby hero.	**Pretty women** **Good** **Deformities** **Negative** **Chubby hero**	Social stereotypes Social expectations Social pressure Social expectations Marginalisation
There's more representation for chubbier women than there are for men.	**Chubbier** **Representation**	Defying stereotypes Marginalisation
I don't like over-explanatory authors that go into so much detail about protagonists' physical appearance.	**Over-explanatory** **Physical appearance**	Social expectation
When I was younger, I used to really like reading about characters with tattoos and piercings because I wanted to assimilate that. Now I'm older, I don't see them as important.	**Tattoos and piercings** **Assimilate**	Physical appearance Changing attitudes of reader
To find someone with tattoos and piercings made me feel really good to read about so I think it's really important that people with disabilities should be written in.	**Tattoos and piercings** **Really good to read about.** **Disabilities**	Diversity Inclusion Diversity Inclusion Marginalisation
I saw a book with a wheelchair on the cover and I thought that's so good…it's teaching younger children, not casting them (disabled people) away and bringing	**Wheelchair** **Younger children** **Disabled people**	Diversity Inclusion Education Marginalisation

them into the forefront of a narrative is important.		
I remember reading a trilogy…*Poison Study* or something like that and they all had tattoos to assimilate the tribe they were in. I can't remember a book that just has a general protagonist that just lists their tattoos but then I don't see how it would be particularly important either. The only one I can think of is if they've got tattoos and they're portrayed as a proper hard-arse. I can't even name a character.	**Tattoos** **Tribe** **General protagonist** **I don't see how it would be particularly important.** **Hard-arse** **I can't even name a character.**	Social stereotypes Marginalisation Ambivalence Social stereotype Marginalisation/Exclusion
I it's a woman and she's got tattoos, she's like mysterious, slinky, and seductive. It's never like some soft little woman reading in the corner.	**Mysterious** **Slinky** **Seductive** **Soft little woman**	Social stereotypes Social expectations
I can't recall a particular character I know who has tattoos. What I see in general media and what I've read, I would say probably negatively unless it is in a fantasy novel…everything is a bit more expressive in a fantasy world.	**I can't recall a particular character who has tattoos.** **General media** **Negatively** **Expressive**	Marginalisation Social conventions Physical portrayal
…young, white, that is particularly what is represented. And what I've noticed as well, is when it's a trio, it's	**Young** **White**	Social stereotype

always two men and a woman. It's never two girls and a boy. In a trio, a woman's allowed to be there but there's not allowed to be two of them…*Harry Potter, Phineas and Ferb*…two brothers and a sister.	**Two men and a woman** **Allowed** **Two brothers and a sister**	Social expectation Marginalisation Social expectation

Appendix 12

Recruitment Poster

Heroes, Heroines and Tattoos

I am a PhD student who is studying body diversity and its representation in young adult literature, with a particular focus on tattooed protagonists. I am looking for students in their first year at university who would be prepared to be interviewed about their reading choices and the characteristics they most admire in their favourite literary heroes and heroines.

The interviews will take place online and will last between forty-five minutes and one hour.

If you are interested in participating contact Allyson.Green@northampton.ac.uk

I would be grateful for your participation

Appendix 13

Table Detailing Questions Listed on the Questionnaire

Question	Purpose of Question
1. What books do you enjoy reading? 2. Which themes interest you or are important to you?	The first two questions introduce the subjects of reading and book choices. They were designed to ease the participant into thinking about their favourite books and why they are attracted to these themes.
3. What does the word 'heroine' mean to you? 4. What does the word 'hero' mean to you?	I was interested in finding out whether a younger age group would be more likely to give stereotypical descriptions than respondents from an older age group.
5. Do you have any favourite literary heroes or heroines? 6. If yes, who are they? 7. What is the reason for your choice?	Questions 5, 6, and 7 refer to the types of heroines and heroes participants enjoy reading about the most. I was interested in making a comparison between the preferences of older participants compared to the responses of younger participants.
8. Which characteristics of your favourite literary characters do you most admire?	The purpose of this question was to ascertain whether participants were more likely to focus on the physical characteristics of participants as opposed to personal aspects and character traits.
9. How would you describe a hero, a heroine or a villain?	The focus of question 9 is similar to the above - my interest centred around which aspects of a protagonist the participants would focus on – physical descriptions or personal characteristics.
10. How do descriptions of male and female body shapes differ, if at all?	This pays particular attention to my second research question which focuses on the portrayal of male and female characters. My focus here was centred around whether participants noticed any differences in their portrayal.
11. What type of characters are you able to relate to the most?	This question focuses on my interest in the types of characteristics participants consider to be important – whether that importance focuses upon physical appearance or personality.
12. Are characters with tattoos often represented in young adult literature? 13. Are characters with piercings often represented in young adult literature?	I was interested in finding out whether tattooed and/or pierced characters are more likely to occur in novels aimed at an older demographic and would be less likely to appear in books written for a younger age group.

Appendix 14

Table Detailing Interview Questions

Interview Question	Purpose of the Question
1. Which book are you currently reading? 2. Are you reading it from choice or as part of your studies? 3. Are you enjoying it?	The purpose of the first three questions was to introduce the topic, put the participant at ease and begin the conversation.
4. What type of hero and/or heroine do you enjoy reading about the most? 5. What strengths do you admire most about a hero or heroine? 6. Which hero or heroine would you most want to be like?	Questions 4, 5, and 6 introduce the topic of heroes and heroines and their purpose was to find out what kind of protagonist participants preferred to read about.
7. Do you prefer heroes and heroines to be stereotypical 'perfect' characters, or do you refer them to be a bit more realistic?	I was interested in ascertaining whether participants enjoyed reading about the stereotypical traditional heroine as a means of escapism or whether they could relate better to a more realistic, down to earth personality.
8. Do you feel that a certain type of character is typically portrayed as a hero, heroine, or villain?	The purpose of this question was to ascertain whether participants felt that 'good' and 'bad' protagonists conform to specific physical and personal stereotypes.
9. Do you prefer a fantasy setting or stories that take place in the real world?	Characters in fantasy settings are often more varied in appearance. My interest here was to find out whether participants' preference for a fantasy setting may influence their responses to questions 11, 12, 13 and 14.
10. Do you feel that it is important for authors to describe the physical characteristics of heroes and heroines, or do you prefer to imagine what they are like for yourself?	This question relates to and introduces the topic of physical appearance. My interest was to ascertain whether participants thought that an in-depth description of the main characters' appearance is a necessary part of the plot or if they felt that it is often an aspect that has too much focus, especially in the case of female protagonists.
11. What are your thoughts about characters who are physically different in terms of body size, disability, tattoos, and piercings? 12. In your opinion, are tattooed or pierced characters more likely to appear in fantasy novels than novels featuring real-world situations? 13. Do you feel that characters with tattoos are portrayed in a negative or positive way? 14. Do you feel that characters with piercings are portrayed in a negative or positive way?	Questions 11, 12,13 and 14 relate to the portrayal of characters with physical differences. The purpose of these questions was to find out whether participants' responses conformed to traditional notions relating to the appearance of a hero or a heroine or whether they felt that the portrayal of more diverse characters is an important and much needed development in contemporary young adult literature.
15. Do you feel that a varied selection of society is represented in young adult literature in terms of race, disability, ethnicity, body diversity, and sexuality? 16. If not, why not?	I was interested in finding out how young adults feel regarding diversity in contemporary young adult literature – whether they feel that they are represented or whether there is still a long way to go in terms of diverse representation.