

Identity and Authenticity:

**A Figurational Exploration of Tattooing Practices in Twenty-First
Century Britain**

Michael Rees

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Abstract

The body has become an increasingly important resource upon which individuals construct their self-identities. Whether it is through the clothes that we choose to wear, the hairstyles we adopt, or the size and shape of our bodies, consumer culture increasingly promotes the body as an entity of individual choice whose outward appearance reflects who we are on the inside. This thesis explores the relationship between the body and self-identity through an exploration of contemporary tattooing practices, and in so doing adds to the burgeoning body of work that has explored the relationship between the body and identity (i.e. Turner 1991; Giddens 1991; Shilling 2012), and the expanding corpus of literature that has explored tattooing (i.e. Sweetman 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Atkinson 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; DeMello 2000; Pitts 2003; Sanders 2008).

Data for this thesis was generated by conducting mixed-method ethnographic research in order to explore how individuals utilise tattooing as part of their individual body projects of self-identity. Adopting Norbert Elias's figurational – or process – sociology I explore how and why tattooing has become an increasingly sought after and acceptable form of corporeal alteration that has moved from the social margins to occupy a place of heightened respectability, and why individuals choose tattooing over others form of body project available to them. I propose that a key reason for tattooing's popularity in 21st century Britain is that it allows individuals to fulfil quests for authenticity that have become an increasingly central concern for contemporary citizens.

Concurrently, this thesis also explores the relationship between researchers and their research settings by examining the insider/outsider status of social researchers, and exploring themes of involvement, detachment, and reflexivity. It argues that the ideal of totally objective social research proposed by Weber is not obtainable, nor should it be. Instead, researchers should take into account their own biography and how this impacts upon the research process and the dissemination of findings, in order to produce object-adequate knowledge.

Keywords

the body; identity; tattoos; tattooing; Elias; figural sociology; process sociology; qualitative methods; reflexive sociology

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Introduction

It's considered normal now to go out for a day and see a hundred tattooed people walking down the street like an army! (Kate, 27)

While this statement, from one of the respondents for this research project, should be considered an exaggeration, it nevertheless highlights the perceived ubiquity of tattooing practices in twenty-first century Britain. A walk through the city centre of most British cities will reveal the frequent incidence of tattoos on the bodies of an increasing array of contemporary citizens, whilst the practice has become ever more visible on the bodies of – to use the term coined by Van Krieken – ‘celebrity society’, who have a profound influence on the cultures they inhabit (Van Krieken 2012; see also Nayar 2009). This thesis investigates how and why tattooing has seemingly become such a popular and acceptable form of corporeal alteration in twenty-first century Britain. In doing so it seeks to add to the burgeoning body of work that has explored the relationship between the body, society, and identity (e.g. Turner 1991; Giddens 1991; Falk 1994; Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner 2007; Shilling 2012), as well as the expanding corpus of literature that has explored tattooing (e.g. Sweetman 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Atkinson 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; DeMello 2000; Pitts 2003; Sanders 2008). Though academic attention towards tattooing has flourished in the past 25 years, much of this writing has failed to conduct empirical research into tattooing practices. This deficit is even more pronounced in Britain where the last major empirical investigation into tattooing practices was conducted 15 years ago by Sweetman (1999a, 1999b, 1999c). This thesis is an attempt to address this deficit and offer a more current perspective on the tattooing practices of individuals in twenty-first century Britain by exploring how tattooing body projects are utilised in the construction of individual identities.

Investigations into the relationship between the body and identity point to the post-Second World War growth of consumer culture, which emphasizes the consumption of goods to construct and portray one's self-identity, as having had significant impact upon the rise of the body as an indicator of the self (Falk 1994; Featherstone 2007; Shilling 2012). The virtues of the youthful, slim, and attractive

body are extolled by consumer culture and images of such bodies used to sell a vast array of merchandise from make-up and hair care products to cars and holidays. Various forms of media output provide a wealth of information on how to get the 'right' look with diets, fitness regimes, and cosmetic surgery all endorsed as means to get the right musculature, breast size, skin pigmentation etc. As a result the body is increasingly promoted as an entity of choice that individuals have personal control of with the message that we are under constant surveillance and we must look good; in the words of Foucault 'get undressed - but be slim, good looking, tanned!' (1980: 57). Whether tattooing can be considered a product of consumer culture has been heavily debated, with authors such as Turner dismissing the practice as 'a regular aspect of consumer culture' (2000: 40), and others such as Kosut (2006b) and Sweetman (2000) arguing that it cannot be completely subsumed as a regular aspect of consumer culture because of its permanence which jars with consumer culture's emphasis on the fluidity of fashion and identity. Though I too reject Turner's claim that tattooing can be considered a 'regular' aspect of consumer culture because of the association with social outsiders that the practice continues to hold, the increasing assimilation of tattooing into mainstream culture means that it can be considered as an aspect of consumer culture. Nevertheless, its place in consumer culture is contested and this thesis will explore the myriad ways that individuals utilise tattooing in the construction of their identity which both accepts and rejects this proposition.

This thesis originally set out to attempt to answer how and why tattooing has become such a popular form of corporeal alteration in twenty-first century Britain, and explore how individuals use this form of body project in the construction of their identity. However, early analysis of empirical data revealed the centrality of authenticity to respondents narratives and so it also seeks to contribute to the literature that has scrutinised the growing concern with quests for authenticity in contemporary society (e.g. Vannini and Franzese 2008; Lindholm 2008; Gianni and Williams 2009). Lindholm claims that authenticity is 'taken for granted as an absolute value in contemporary life' (2008: 1) and this concern with quests for authenticity has had a pivotal impact upon the construction of identity (ibid.;

Erickson 1995). Whilst some authors have addressed the relationship between tattoos and authenticity this analysis has been limited to particular subcultural groupings such as Straightedge (e.g. Williams and Copes 2005; Mullaney 2012) and Punk (Lewin and Williams 2009), or women (Riley and Cahill 2005). This thesis attempts to move past this limited analysis to offer a broader consideration of the importance of authenticity to the construction of identity and the role tattooing body projects play in this. To explore the dynamic interplay between the body, society, identity, quests for authenticity, and tattooing, I adopt Norbert Elias's figurational – or process – sociology (2000, 2012a). Elias developed his figurational perspective to overcome the duality of sociological thinking that has tended to think of the individual and social as two separate entities. Against this Elias proposes that 'individual lives are tied to others through extensive chains of interdependency – literally as a web of interconnected people' (Atkinson 2003a: xi); it is these 'webs' that form the figurations in which individuals are enmeshed. Interpreting tattooing practices in such a way enables me to overcome many of the shortfalls of the current theorising about the practice that will be identified in chapter two, and provide a more holistic understanding of tattooing practices in contemporary Britain.

Chapter Outline

In chapter one I provide a history of Western tattooing, demonstrating evidence of the existence of the practice can be dated back thousands of years. However, despite long historical evidence of the practice, the turn of the twentieth-century witnessed the development of what I term the modern tattoo era, and as a result the majority of this chapter will focus on the distinct, but overlapping periods that make up this era. I explore how the status of tattooing has been in flux since it was first 'rediscovered' in the West as a result of the voyages of discovery, most famously those of Captain Cook. Initially viewed as a practice of the 'primitive', tattooing was considered a cultural oddity and tattooed individuals from the West were able to make a living by displaying themselves as freaks in sideshows and fairgrounds; however, a paradoxical interest in the practice also developed amongst the upper classes as tattooing was adopted as a mark of distinction (Bourdieu

2010). The subsequent development of electric tattoo machines and 'flash' designs meant tattooing became more readily available and cheaper to obtain for the masses. As a result the practice fell into disrepute and became associated with social 'undesirables' (DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008). The practice retained this reputation for a long time, with psychological and criminological studies reporting links between tattooing and various psychotic or criminal behaviours helping to maintain its deviant status. It was not until the 'tattoo renaissance' of the 1970s onwards that the deviant status of tattooing came to be challenged as a result of political movements that used the body to 'do' identity politics and brought an increasingly heterogeneous clientele to the practice, including large numbers of the middle class and women. The final period focuses on contemporary tattoo figurations in which the practice occupies something of a middle ground between respectability and stigma. I explore these periods in more depth to examine the key processes that shaped dominant cultural bodily habitus of the time which inform understandings of tattooing, and highlight the competing definitions of tattooing present during each period which have had impacted upon the definition of the practice in contemporary Britain.

Chapter two offers a comprehensive review of the current academic literature that has examined tattooing processes. The practice has garnered considerable attention in anthropology, psychology, criminology, and sociology, but rather than review the literature by subject area I have instead organised the chapter by focusing on three distinct areas: tattooing as a mark of individuality, tattooing as a marker of group solidarity, and tattooing as a mark of resistance. Those studies that have proposed tattooing to be about the individual suggest that the desire to be tattooed is found within the individual (whether this is posited as positive or negative), or that tattooing allows individuals to assert their individuality. In contrast, those studies that have focused on tattooing as markers of group solidarity propose that tattooed individuals adopt the practice in order to foster in-group cohesiveness and/or to demonstrate commitment to particular social groupings such as tribes, gangs, and subcultures. In the last section I explore the literature that has explored tattooing as a mark of resistance, with particular

attention to how individuals and groups *purposefully* adopt tattooing as a marker of cultural dissent and political protest. By organising the chapter in such a way I examine the similarities and differences that exist within current social science research about tattooing. The chapter provides an analysis of why much of the current theorising about tattooing is limited by exclusively focusing one of the three areas discussed, resulting in inadequate analysis of the overlapping nature of these aspects in the lives of individuals who choose to become tattooed. The conclusion of this chapter maps out the research questions for this thesis identified by gaps in the current literature, and provides a preliminary case for adopting what I propose is the most appropriate theoretical framework for analysing contemporary tattooing practices – Norbert Elias’s figurational sociology.

In the third chapter I discuss the methods used in the collection and interpretation of the data presented within this thesis. Elias’s work has been described as ‘theoretical-empirical’ and he rejected the notion that sociological enquiry could be accomplished without conducting empirical research (Mennell 1992). Being an Eliasian inspired project I carried out empirical research in the form of mixed method ethnography to generate data for this thesis, and this chapter offers a consideration of how these methods most effectively enabled me to answer the research questions posed at the end of chapter two. Though the discussion in this chapter focuses on participant observation, interviews, and media analysis conducted, it is not only seeking to repeat what can be read in numerous methodological textbooks. Instead I broaden its scope and focus on issues of researchers insider/outsider status (Merton 1972), reflexivity (Bourdieu 2003, 2007; Davies 1999), involvement and detachment (Elias 2007), and the dynamics of disclosure (Song and Parker 1995), to analyse the construction of knowledge *between* researcher and respondents, the interpretation of the data, and the dissemination of research findings. The chapter also contains some of my personal biography in order to reflect on how my own status as a heavily tattooed, white, male researcher who sits across the borders of the working and middle class both contributes, and potentially constrains, the collection and interpretation of data.

Chapter four extends the theoretical framework mapped out at the end of chapter two by drawing on the ethnographic research conducted for this thesis to demonstrate the figural patterns that all individuals must go through in the process of becoming tattooed. This includes similar patterns of choosing tattoo designs, finding tattoo artists to apply designs, and the painful acquisition of such permanent marks which forms the first bonds of interdependency within tattoo figurations. In the second part of the chapter I consider how the bonds of interdependency with three key figurations – family, friends, and current or prospective employers – are a key consideration in individual’s decisions to become tattooed, and can be both constraining and motivating for those individuals choosing tattooing body projects. I also explore how the bonds of interdependency within figurations respondents are enmeshed within can be strengthened, weakened, or even broken altogether, as a result of tattooing body projects. In this chapter I also propose that Elias’s figural sociology, which is concerned with the interdependency between living human actors – ‘the dead do not exist’ (Elias 1994: 32) – can be usefully extended to incorporate the deceased. The chapter maps out in detail the theoretical position that I propose overcomes many of the issues of the current academic theorising about tattooing by demonstrating how individuals form figurations with *other* interdependent individuals, enabling us to dispose of simple explanations that focus exclusively on individuality, in-group cohesion, or resistance. It is this theoretical position that is used for the analysis of data presented in the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter five is principally concerned with answering how and why tattooing has become such a popular and acceptable form of corporeal alteration in twenty-first century Britain. Using Elias and Scotson’s (2008) theories of established-outsider relations I propose that the changing status of the practice from one associated to social outsiders to a more established form of corporeal alteration can be attributed to four inter-related developments: the increasing importance of the body as a site for constructing identity, the increased visibility of tattooing in consumer culture, processes of cultural diversity and globalization, and attempts to legitimise the practice as an acceptable art form. The body has, as discussed above,

become increasingly central to an individual's sense of self-identity and in this chapter I explore how the rise of normative body projects such as weight lifting, dieting, and cosmetic surgery, has led to an increased interest in the pursuit of 'non-mainstream' body projects such as tattooing (Myers 1992). For some, tattooing is utilised instead of normative body projects that they feel unable to partake in, whereas others incorporated tattooing into overall projects of the self that also involved more normative forms of corporeal alteration. Whichever the case, respondents were keen to stress that the rise of more normative forms of corporeal alteration has resulted in tattooing coming to be considered a more established form of body project. In exploring the increased visibility of tattooing in consumer culture, a process that I propose has been key to the redefinition of the practice, I reflect on how the growing numbers of celebrities and sports stars exhibiting tattoos, a theme that resonated throughout the empirical research, has introduced millions of people to the possibility of pursuing their own tattooing body projects. In the third section I examine cultural diversity and globalization to inspect how processes of cross-fertilization have called into question traditional Western discourse concerning the body and its display, and allowed for alternative definitions to be drawn upon in the pursuit of tattooing body projects. Finally this chapter investigates how the redefinition of tattooing as art in both popular and academic discourse has contributed to the practices shift from the cultural shadows to a form of quasi-normative identity construction.

Having examined how tattooing has become a more established form of corporeal alteration, chapter six seeks to answer how individuals utilise tattooing as part of the construction of their identity. Although more established, the practice retains a lingering association with deviance and the first part of this chapter draws on narratives from those respondents for whom tattooing was utilised in order to demonstrate commitment to outsider groups, or to resist the gendered appearance norms of consumer culture. In the second part of the chapter I explore those narratives that posit tattooing to be a normative form of corporeal alteration and utilise the practice to represent personal interests and beliefs, commemorate meaningful events or significant others, express individuality, or for the controlled

decontrolling of emotions. A key issue throughout the chapter will be demonstrating how Elias's figurational sociology detailed in chapter four, overcomes the limitations of most of the current theorising about tattooing to demonstrate how tattooing can be utilised as a form of deviance, acceptability, individuality, and group belonging for the same individuals, depending upon the figurations in which they are enmeshed at any given point. I conclude the chapter by exploring how there has been a general establishment of outsider practices which has allowed tattooing to straddle the contested boundary between deviance and acceptability more easily.

In the analysis of the empirical data generated for this these authenticity emerged as a central narrative and in the final empirical chapter, chapter seven, I examine how quests for authenticity have become a defining feature of contemporary social life, and how tattooing allows individuals to fulfil quests for authenticity. In the first part of the chapter I investigate how and why authenticity has become such a valued trait in contemporary society by tracing its development from sincerity and examining the prominent position the concept now possesses in both academic and popular discourse. I then offer a consideration of why authenticity has become such a valued trait in the construction of identities and how tattooing enables individual's to claim authentic identities by demonstrating a commitment to the self – a key aspect of authenticity (Vianni and Franzese 2008; Lindholm 2008) – that is more difficult to achieve than with non-permanent ways of restructuring the self. Having outlined the importance of authenticity and authentic identities in contemporary culture I address more specifically how authenticity operates within tattoo figurations as a result of the practice's continued assimilation into mainstream culture that threatens tattooing's status as a meaningful way to pursue quests for authenticity. In doing so I draw on subcultural capital (Thornton 2013) and propose the term figurational capital to conceptualise of the ways in which individuals enmeshed within tattoo figurations construct themselves as authentic members. In the final part of the chapter I consider the strategies utilised by tattooed individuals to construct their own quests for authenticity as genuine vis-à-vis both tattooed and non-tattooed others within their figurations.

Chapter 1 – The History of Western Tattooing

Tattooing is an increasingly popular cultural phenomenon; evidenced by the growing number of individuals choosing to go ‘under the needle’ and the large amount of popular media devoted to the practice. Globally distributed tattoo magazines; easily accessible TV programmes including *Inked*, *Tattoo Hunter*, and the *Ink* series which now includes Miami, LA, London and New York versions; and most importantly the internet, which grants individuals unprecedented access to hundreds of thousands of WebPages providing tattoo designs, information on the tattooing process, profiles of shops or artists, and forums where tattooed and non-tattooed individuals can share information, provide a seemingly endless array of information about the practice. Traditionally sociologists are concerned with investigating modern society (whether under the guise as ‘late modernity’, ‘organized modernity’, ‘disorganized modernity’, ‘high modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’) (Kilminster 2007), but we cannot understand sociological phenomena simply from its contemporary standing; instead we should ‘draw empirical evidence from a wide variety of historical and contemporary societies’ (ibid. 4). Thus, in order to answer one of the main research questions that concerns this thesis – how and why tattooing is such a popular phenomenon in twenty-first century Britain – we must recognise that tattooing is not a new phenomenon, and trace the historical development of the practice to examine how it has come to occupy its current position.

As Goudsblom has demonstrated, establishing sequential order is difficult, and ‘a characteristic feature of all chronologies ... is that they tend to be place-bound (1990: 69). Detailed below are the key periods in the development of tattooing in the West, each of which has had an *unintended* sociogenesis on current tattoo figurations (Elias 2000, 2012a; Atkinson 2003a). Exploring the social relevance of tattooing during each of these periods allows for an exploration of how the meanings ascribed to the practice are closely related to dominant cultural bodily habits and preferences of the time, and a recognition that competing definitions of tattoos are present in any historical era; it also allows for an exploration of the development of the practice and offers a preliminary analysis of its changing status

and current level of popularity.¹The periods presented below are chronological, and I have where possible provided approximate years that I consider these periods to exist, but they are not intended to represent isolated periods. There are characteristics from earlier periods that endure into later periods and so there is some overlap as evidenced by the years provided for each period.. By exploring the various meanings attributed to the practice throughout its history in the West, I aim to provide an insight into how we can utilise these various and competing definitions of tattooing to inform our understanding of the practice in the twenty-first century.

Pre Modern Tattooing

Archaeological evidence demonstrates that the practice of tattooing dates back to at least the late Stone Age. In 1948 a number of well-preserved human remains, encased in ice, were found by archaeologists in Siberia; these remains showed evidence of tattooing and dated to the fifth century BC. The human mummy 'Otzi', discovered in Northern Italy in 1991, also bore tattoos and lived between 3350 and 3100 BC. Likewise, extensively tattooed mummified remains representing Aztec, Inca, and Mayan culture, and dating from the first century A.D. have been found in Peruvian excavations. The purpose for these tattoos is not clear but it is speculated that they represented membership of specific tribal groups, similar to those used by the Picts and Celts in Europe, and more famously by island tribes of Polynesia such as the New Zealand Maori (Macquarrie 2000).

Evidence of tattooing also exists from the Greek and Roman Empires; however, the Greeks and Romans considered themselves too refined to use such practices to mark themselves decoratively, considering it barbarous, so it was used as a punitive measure. For example, words such as 'Stop me, I'm a runaway' were tattooed on slaves in Greece to discourage the very act of running away. A similar practice was adopted by the Roman army, as evidenced by the military writer Vegetius, who described how recruits would be 'inscribed with permanent dots in the skin', representing the names or numbers of their units (Jones 2000: 12; Durkheim 1995).

¹ A further analysis of the processes that have contributed to the changing status of tattooing is offered in chapter five

Additionally, both Jones (2000) and Gustafson (2000) provide examples of the forced tattooing of criminals and traitors by both the Greeks and Romans. Most commonly inscribed on the forehead – due to the face being considered a representation of the self – these tattoos served one of three functions: to name the crime committed, name the ruler offended by the crime, or to name the punishment for the crime committed.

This practice continued for some time but was changed by the first Christian emperor, Constantine, who ruled from 306 to 337, and issued a decree that declared criminals would be tattooed on the hands or calves rather than the face in order to ensure that, ‘the face, which has been formed in the image of the divine beauty [God], will be defiled as little as possible’ (quoted in Jones 2000: 13). Sometime later, evidence suggests that the practice was substituted altogether in favour of using inscribed metal collars (Thurmond 1994). Evidence also exists of Christians *voluntarily* becoming tattooed; for example Procopius of Gaza, writing in the fifth century, claimed, ‘many Christians chose to be marked on their wrists or arms with the sign of the cross of the name of Christ’ (Gustafson 2000: 29; Durkheim 1995: 234), and many authors cite evidence that early European pilgrims to Palestine became tattooed (for example Ebensten 1953; Durkheim 1995; Sweetman 1999a; Caplan 2000); these totemic body markings provided visible symbols of individual’s membership to the religious collective (Durkheim 1995). While early Christians approved of tattooed signs of the cross the practice later came to be seen as a sign of Paganism, and in order to distinguish Christians from outsider Pagan groups a new emphasis on the sanctity of the body as created by God was imposed. This resulted in Pope Hadrian banning the practice completely at a Church Council in Northumberland in 787² (Ebensten 1953; Parry 2006; Sanders 2008).

Pre modern tattooing was largely limited to specific groups: members of tribes; criminals and/or slaves that were forcibly tattooed; and Christians who voluntarily

² Despite banning the practice an exception was made for those Christians who already bore tattoos that celebrated Christ by declaring these virtuous, as long as no further marks were made after Hadrian’s decree

tattooed themselves to honour Christ, and so acted to signify membership of specific groups, allowing members to be easily identified. The pre-modern use of tattooing may bear little resemblance to the practice today, especially as regards the tattooing process and diverse clientele now associated with it, but, nevertheless, an effect can be recognised. By demonstrating tattooing as meaningful, historical cultural performance, those who choose to bear such marks have been able to reclaim or legitimate its contemporary usage (Caplan 2000); this has most clearly been demonstrated by gender, racial, and sexuality based political movements that have used the body – including tattooing – for doing ‘identity politics’ (Dunn 1998; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; see chapter two). Throughout the history of the practice tattooing has continued to be associated with particular social groups – sailors, bikers and criminals – for example, and many contemporary commentators continue to demonstrate how tattoos act to signify membership to particular groups, for example the middle class (DeMello 2000), tattoo collectors (Vail 1999a, 1999b), or subcultures (Vale and Juno 1989; Wojcik 1995; Atkinson and Young 2001; Atkinson 2003a, 2003b). The rest of this, and the subsequent, chapter will examine more closely how and why tattooing is utilised by myriad groups and individuals, but first I begin with an examination of how tattooing was reintroduced to the West.

Cook’s Pacific voyages and the ‘rediscovery of tattooing’ (1690s-1870s)

Both sexes paint their Bodys, Tattow as it is called in their language. This is done by inlaying the colour of Black under their skins in such a manner as to be indelible (Captain Cook’s First Voyage, quoted in Ebensten 1953: 5; Jones 2000: 1).

It is this commonly quoted statement that is associated with the beginning of modern tattoo figurations. Although evidence demonstrates the practice was found to some extent in the interim period (Gustafson 2000), the adoption of Christianity as an official religion throughout Europe meant that the practice largely disappeared before re-appearing in the eighteenth century following the European voyages of discovery by Captain Cook and others. Upon returning from their

voyages, Captain Cook and others transported tattooed natives from North America and Polynesia to Europe where they were displayed as cultural oddities. The first of these was Prince Jeoly, brought to Europe by Dampier in 1691, who later died in Oxford after contracting smallpox. Two North American 'Princes' also toured European fairs in 1723, and Captain Cook famously brought the South Sea Islander Omai to England in 1774, though his biography was somewhat unique as he was later returned home (Ebensten 1953). This represented a new dimension of tattooing in the West; whilst historically tattooing had been used as a mark of membership to specific groups, the transportation of natives to Europe and beyond – despite their markings being symbolically important in the tribal cultures from which they originated (representing the individual's tribe, social position, family etc.) – focused on the *display* of tattooed bodies. Paraded as oddities in carnivals and fairgrounds, these primitives stood in dramatic contrast to regimented cultural codes about the body emphasising modesty and humility that were ingrained in Western habituses at the time, and allowed the audiences to enjoy the radical 'self-expression, physical vanity, and exuberant sexuality' which they had denied themselves (Atkinson 2003a: 31; Elias 2000). These displays also served to enforce notions of Western cultural advancement and progress over so called primitive societies and to legitimate the imperialist agenda 'as the outwardly uncontrolled libidinal bodies of the 'backward' tribal cultures of the world articulated a brutality long overcome in Western [civilized] cultures' (Atkinson 2003a: 31; DeMello 2000; see also Elias 2000; Caplan 2000).

Though representing a cultural fascination to Europeans, the voyages had a damaging effect on the tribal cultures they encountered. The most widely known tribal group to use tattooing are the New Zealand Maori (see image one), who were known for their facial tattoos called the Moko. The heads of deceased Maori were kept by their tribes to preserve their memory and were also considered sacred as they were believed to contain the deceased's 'tapu', or magical quality. However, just a year after Cook's initial discovery of New Zealand, Europeans became interested in obtaining these heads as souvenirs, and a heads-for-weapons trade that lasted over 60 years began. It is speculated that during the tribal wars of the

1820s, such was the demand for these heads that non-tattooed captives were forcibly tattooed before being decapitated, with the heads sold to European traders (Gathercole 1988). Missionaries travelling throughout other parts of Polynesia, with the intention of 'civilizing' the tribal societies, similarly prohibited tattooing, along with other habits considered 'uncivilized' such as polygamy, leading to a rapid decline in its traditional practice (DeMello 2000; Kuwahara 2005). Western interest in tattooing during this period can best be described as a 'paradoxical mix of fascination, disgust, irreverence, and wonder' (Atkinson 2003a: 32) but it had considerable influence in re-introducing the practice to the West with large scale cross-fertilization taking place. Sailors of Cook's own ship, the Endeavour, were tattooed by natives of Tahiti and returned to Europe with these cultural artefacts, playing a major role in the re-introduction of the practice to mainstream Western figurations (DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a). Later voyages to the Pacific in the nineteenth-century noted that the earlier tattoo designs such as animals, plants, and geo-metric patterns had been extended and included insignia including rifles, cannons, and dates and words commemorating tribal chiefs. In Hawaii it is speculated that as a result of the introduction of guns, the protective aspect of tattoos was no longer needed and so tattoos – which continued to be utilised – became solely decorative (Kaepler 1988). As DeMello has stated, 'without this early cross-fertilization, it is doubtful that tattooing would have been re-established in Europe or seen as anything more than a primitive oddity' (2000: 46). With the rediscovery of tattooing, a new fascination had developed, and seeing an opportunity to make money from audiences willing to pay to view tattooed attractions, white tattooed performers began to display themselves.

Sideshow and Fairground Performers (1800s-1930s)

The display of tattooed 'primitives' in sideshows and fairgrounds were popular attractions throughout Europe and America for many years, but as audiences became increasingly familiar with these 'exhibits' their popularity waned; however, the fascination with tattooing, and crucially the willingness to pay to see tattooed bodies, did not. This resulted in increasing numbers of Westerners beginning to display their heavily tattooed bodies alongside other 'freaks' such as bearded ladies

and dwarves. Almost exclusively inventing narratives of capture and forced tattooing, these Western performers continued to rely on the 'association between tattooing and savagery in order to sell tickets', thereby reaffirming cultural stereotypes about tribal cultures and the primitive nature of the practice itself (DeMello 2000: 53; Atkinson 2003a). The first of these performers was Frenchman Jean Baptise Cabris, who was 'thoroughly tattooed in the primitive manner' (Ebensten 1953: 16). Cabris had been part of the crew of an English whaling ship that sank in the Marquesas who was rescued and taken in by the local natives with whom he lived with for approximately 20 years. Adopting the language and customs of the Marquesians he allowed himself to be tattooed in order to fully assimilate into the tribe and also married a chief's daughter. When a later Russian expedition arrived to find him in 1804 he was returned to Europe and made his way to France by way of appearances in fairs and markets where he displayed his tattooed body for money. Unlike his successors, Cabris's tale of tattooing – which set the pattern for future tattooed entertainers – was in fact true and he became the first, and only, example of genuine crossover between the 'savage' and 'civilized' worlds, though he never claimed the tattooing to be forceful (Ebensten 1953; Oettermann 2000).

John Rutherford, considered the successor of Cabris, was a Bristolian who displayed himself in England during the 1820s and 1830s. Exhibiting a moko – the traditional facial tattoo of the New Zealand Maori – Rutherford claimed to have been captured in 1816, forcibly tattooed, married to the chief's daughter and later became a chief himself until his escape. Although a moko normally took years to complete, the need to 'construct his vitae' to match the public's expectations meant Rutherford claiming he was almost killed due to how hastily the tattoo was applied, something that became a common narrative for tattooed entertainers that again relied on the assumption of primitiveness associated with non-Western societies. Such was Rutherford's popularity that in 1828 a number of English newspapers retold his story and his biography, entitled *The Great White Chief John Rutherford*, was published in 1830. Although Rutherford's story was popular among the fairground audiences it was unable to withstand scrutiny. Whilst Rutherford's face was

tattooed in the Maori fashion, the tattoos on this chest were of Fijian origin and the rest of his body Tahitian; it emerged later that he had not been taken forcibly but was one of many 'beachcombers' common in the Pacific at the time and was tattooed voluntarily (Oettermann 2000). Despite the suspicious narratives and obvious Western motifs that were tattooed on them, audiences flocked to see tattooed entertainers and by the 1850s a number of heavily tattooed individuals made a living by displaying themselves (DeMello 2000; Oettermann 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008).

American entrepreneur P.T. Barnum is the man credited with a turn to professionalism in the display of tattooed Westerners. Previously tattooed entertainers would display themselves in pubs, markets, or travelling fairs, but with the cultural fascination for tattooing at an all-time high Barnum moved tattooed entertainers into the dime museums and circus where they were paid exclusively for displaying their tattooed bodies.³ The most flamboyant and famous of this new breed of tattooed sideshow performers was an Albanian named Alexandrinos who performed under the names Constantine, Captain Constantine or Prince Constantine (see image two). Covered with almost 400 tattoos on all parts of his body except the soles of his feet, Barnum invited doctors on to the stage who would examine Alexandrinos, declaring him as 'one of the most extraordinary specimens of genuine tattooing they had ever seen' (DeMello 2000: 56). His narrative was similar to previous performers in that it was claimed he was captured and forcibly tattooed by 'Chinese Tartars' in Burma.⁴ His companions – numbering either two or three depending where the story was heard – are claimed to have both died from their ordeal. Alexandrinos displayed himself across Europe and in America and was said to earn one hundred dollars a week, a considerable amount in the late nineteenth-century (Ebensten 1953; DeMello 2000; Oettermann 2000). However, towards the turn of the twentieth-century, audiences became familiar tattooed entertainers, as they had previously with tattooed natives, and new

³ Previously tattooed entertainers had struggled to make a living solely from displaying their bodies and often took other work as well

⁴ Like Rutherford, Alexandrinos's narrative was unable to withstand scrutiny for the Burmese writing on his body was translated by experts and did not indicate any kind of punishment or kidnap

entertainment was needed to entice them. This involved the merging of acts as tattooed dwarves, lion tamers and sword swallows appeared. However, it was the tattooed females, promising exoticism and eroticism that took centre stage.

The most famous of the female tattooed performers were La Belle Irene (real name Irene Woodward) and Nandl (real name Frau Koritzky). La Belle Irene, credited with being the first tattooed lady, appeared in 1890 with a narrative that shared much with her male colleagues. It was claimed that as a result of living in the Wild West of Texas it was necessary for Irene to undergo considerable tattooing by her father in order to escape the attentions of the Red Indians; although another tale has her being captured by the Indians and tattooed as one of their own before being identified by American officers. Regardless of the truth, tattooed ladies such as La Belle Irene, Betty Broadbent, Serpentina, Lady Viola and Princess Beatrice (see images three and four) generated considerable interest by performing a 'double whammy'. As tattooing was typically associated with men, they challenged the cultural association between tattooing and masculinity – predating the women's movement by a considerable number of years (see chapter two) – yet at the same time also became a form of soft pornography. Stripping before audiences they would reveal titillating parts of their bodies such as bosoms and thighs, something not possible outside of the sideshow due to cultural norms regarding bodily display at the time (Atkinson 2003a; Mifflin 2013). Around the same time the world bore witness to the first tattooed couple, Frank and Emma De Burgh, an American couple who displayed themselves in Berlin in 1893. Mr de Burgh had a large scene of the crucifixion on his back whilst Mrs de Burgh had a recreation of Da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' on hers (see image five); both also bore tattoos with the other's name along with the words 'Forget Me Not' as a declaration of their love. In this couple we witness the first reported incidents of tattoos for commemoration as well as large scale 'back pieces', tattoos that remain popular in current tattoo figurations.

The final entertainer who offers some insight into the development of modern tattoo figurations is Horace Riddler, who performed under the stage name The

Great Omi.⁵ Riddler was an American displaying himself in 1922 who found that competition was too fierce for him to make a living solely on the basis as a tattooed entertainer. As a result he wrote to English tattooist George Burchett requesting that he be tattooed extensively with black lines all over his body, including his face, and travelled to England to acquire them. Along with other body modifications such as sharpened teeth and stretched ear lobes he took on the persona of The Great Om but it is the tale of Riddler's treatment in France serves as an excellent example of the periods' legacy on tattoo figurations. Hired by a French circus he wrote to Burchett to complain that he was billed as an animal and forced to sleep next to the circus Lions. He attempted to resign which was unsuccessful, and whilst unable to work 'they painted up a nigger with white paint and put him in my place' (letter to Burchett, quoted in DeMello 2000: 57). With neither a tattooed man, nor a black man, enough of an attraction in their own right anymore, both Omi and his replacement were displayed as a man/beast, somewhere between human and animal (DeMello 2000). This example exemplifies the way entertainers with tattoos, despite some earning considerable money from their occupation, were thought of and it is worth quoting at length from Atkinson when considering the effect of this period had on the conceptualization of tattooing as deviance:

Profane representations of the body allowed [audiences] to experience subversive pleasures with and tortures of the flesh without sacrificing commonly held cultural understandings of corporeal respectability. The presentation of alternative body styles and pursuit of libidinal body play at circuses and carnivals actually reaffirmed dominant cultural ideals about the sanctity of the body. Marked bodies were depicted as vicious, savage, and, in some cases, prehistoric and subhuman. The tattoo sideshow became a vehicle for exploring deviant yet exciting body practices, a means of engaging in forms of corporeal subversion strictly forbidden in everyday life. Importantly, though, there arose out of this period a widespread association between tattooing and disrepute (2003: 36)

⁵ The name was adopted in recognition of Omai who was brought to Europe and displayed by Captain Cook

The period during which tattooed entertainers were displaying themselves also bore witness to one of the most significant developments in tattoo figurations, the rise of the professional tattooist. Tattooed performers and tattooists existed in 'a state of symbiosis' with tattooists providing performers with an endless supply of tattoos and performers ensuring there was enough demand for tattooing to be financially rewarding as a permanent occupation (DeMello 2000; Sanders 2008). The first American tattooist was Martin Hildebrand, who claimed to have been working as early as 1846, while in Britain the distinction belongs to 'Professor' David Purdy who opened his first shop in 1870 (Ebensten 1953; Sweetman 1999a). Other well-known tattooists of the period include Bert Grimm, Charlie Barrs, Tom Riley and Samuel O'Reilly (Ebensten 1953; Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008). Samuel O'Reilly can be considered the artist who had the most significant effect on the figuration by inventing the electric tattoo machine in 1891, an innovation that led to a large increase in both the number of tattooists – because less skill was now needed and the tattoo could be inscribed much more quickly – and tattooees – due to the decreased cost and reduction in the level of pain in acquiring such a mark.

High Society (1860s-1900s)

Whilst tattooed entertainers were displaying themselves as cultural oddities, a paradoxical interest in the practice developed among the nobility, particularly in Europe. The popularity of the practice among the nobility appears to have begun with Edward VII, who was tattooed in Jerusalem in 1862, and his sons, the Dukes of Clarence and York, who were tattooed at his behest in Yokahama (Sweetman 1999a; Sanders 2008). Accounts of the time suggest that the trend was motivated in part by a form of primitivism; imbuing the bearer with the primitive strength of savage societies – an ideal referred to as the 'noble savage' – and putting 'one's self in sympathy with Nature, and to protest against the sickly conventionalities of civilization' (New York Times, January 30, 1880, quoted in Parry 2006). The following quotation from an unnamed English countess was characteristic of upper class sensibility concerning the practice during the period: 'we pinch our feet like the Chinese and torture our poor waists with steel corsets; why should be not

emulate the Indians and tattoo ourselves?’ (Parry 2006: 96). Another suggestion, forwarded by Ebensten offers another reason, claiming that European princes who spent their youth aboard naval ships ‘acquired tattoos to prove that they were as ‘good fellows’ as any ordinary sea-going men...that they were not remote from their subjects and enjoyed similar tastes’ (1953: 23; see also Parry 2006: 91). The list of royals and nobility choosing to become tattooed includes Czar Nicholas II of Russia, King George of Greece, King Oscar of Sweden and Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany (Ebensten 1953; Parry 2006; Sanders 2008) and in order to keep up with the latest trend other members of court followed suit: ‘society men in England were the victims of circumstances when the Prince of Wales had his body tattooed. Like a flock of sheep driven by their master, they had to follow suit’ (McAllister, quoted in Parry 2006: 102). In this quotation we may recognise many of the processes Elias himself discussed in *The Court Society* (2005) as relates to the necessity of courtiers needing to follow the trends and fashions set by the nobility.

Although most popular among the European elite the trend crossed the Atlantic as the following quotation from the December 12th 1897 edition of the *New York Herald* demonstrates:

Have you had your monogram inscribed on your arm? Is your shoulder blade embellished with your crest? Do you wear your coat-of-arms graven in India ink on the cuticle of your elbow? No? Then, gracious madame and gentle sir, you cannot be *au courant* with society’s very latest fad (quoted in Parry 2006: 103)

On both sides of the Atlantic the social elite, aware of the practice’s increasing popularity among the ‘low herd’ of society, took care to ‘identify themselves with their inferiors in the general spirit of the thing, not in detail’ (Parry 2006: 93). Ensuring that their marks acted as signifiers of class distinction they ‘insisted on different designs. They were obstinate about paying much higher prices to the tattoo-masters...They ordered their own coats of arms tattooed upon their skin, or the names and emblems of their exclusive clubs, or reproductions of money-bills, or scenes of fox hunts in full cry’ (ibid.; see also Elias 2005 and Bourdieu 2010). With

the invention of the electric tattoo machine allowing members of lower social classes to acquire tattoos more cheaply the social elite turned in increasing numbers to the Japanese masters – known as Hori – who continued with the hand method of applying tattoos, as a result the social elite could continue to use their tattoos as signs of distinction not only due to the more expensive method of hand tattooing, but also the large expenses occurred in travelling to Japan. Of particular importance was the admission by Samuel O’Reilly – the inventor of the electric machine – that the work being produced by the Japanese masters was ‘more artistic than the product of the best electric technique’ (Parry 2006: 100).

However, at the turn of the century tattoos fell out of grace with the social elite, which according to Ebensten (1953) led to a great number of the upper classes that had chosen to become tattooed beginning to hide their tattoos due to embarrassment. It was at this time a number of medical and media reports began to emerge that emphasised the unclean nature of the practice and the risk of communicable diseases. Similarly, reports from psychological and criminological texts claimed an association between tattoos and criminality and/or the mentally unstable, further casting the practice into disrepute:⁶

the taste for this style is not a good indication of the refinement and delicacy of the English ladies, for the custom is held in too great honour among criminals! We feel genuine disgust! O Fashion, you are very frivolous; you have caused many complaints against the most beautiful half of the human race (Lombroso 1896, quoted in Parry 2006: 102)

Though this quotation is directed towards upper class women who had tattoos similar sentiments were felt among all the social elite (Ebensten 1953; Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000; Parry 2006). With increasing adoption of the practice among working-classes and the subsequent abandonment by the social elite reports such as these increased, and tattooing increasingly came to be seen as practised only by the undesirable members of society.

⁶ a detailed analysis of psychological and criminological theories of tattooing is offered in chapter two

'Low Herd' (1900s-1950s)

Tattooing had been practised amongst the working-classes since its rediscovery during the Pacific voyages, evidenced by the large number of sailors who chose to be tattooed. Likewise, having come into contact with tattooed performers at circuses and fairs, some of which had tattooists travelling with them, other working-class individuals chose to adorn themselves with tattoos (Ebensten 1953; Parry 2006). However, with technological innovation leading to the cheap and relatively easy application of tattoos, the number of working-class individuals choosing to become tattooed since the turn of the twentieth-century grew immeasurably. Having been abandoned by the social elite tattooing became clearly defined as a working-class practice, associated with 'carnival workers, servicemen, criminals, social outcasts, and pseudo-tough guys (Atkinson 2003a: 36), with Ebensten claiming, 'of working-class men, at least, a very large percentage are tattooed ... [and] tattooing today is often considered 'not very nice' and somewhat vulgar' (1953: 65-66). Tattoos during this period consisted of badge like designs, including such motifs as military insignia, hearts, banners and roses, arranged on the body in a haphazard manner with no obvious relation (Rubin 1988; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008).

The tattoo studio, once found in upmarket suburban areas such as Mayfair in London, was relocated to the 'slummy or industrial section of the town', and became characterised as 'strictly functional and rarely spotless', with the typical studio described thus:

the photographs, pictures and newspaper cuttings are dimly seen, the glass in the dark frames is grimy, the floor upswept, the ancient distemper on the ceiling is peeling off in large flakes. The white pseudo-medical coat of the tattooist is seldom snow-white, the instruments, the colours, even the bottles and jars of antiseptic lotion and the wad of cotton wool are not always so scrupulously clean as to inspire real confidence. Everything, above all, is very old: the tattooist himself, his designs – most of which have remained unchanged during this lifetime – the pictures, charts and

decorations on the walls, the dragons and quaint type lettering on the shop window and door (Ebensten 1953: 68-69)

Society tattooists whom had catered for the social elite such Sutherland MacDonald and Tom Riley had been lauded for their skill but the tattooists whom catered for the new working-class were also condemned by Ebensten:

the average tattooist is a man of little imagination or artistry. He is often a retired sailor with a little drawing ability who has been tattooing his mates at sea for many years with a small tattooing outfit...The ordinary tattooist does not move with the times but nostalgically remembers his profession's past days of glory, making no effort to do anything that might bring about a return of the vogue for fashionable tattooing (1953: 70-71)

These declarations effectively demonstrate how the practice quickly fell into disrepute, yet the popularity of tattooing during this period remained high among the working-classes, so much so that DeMello characterised this period as the 'Golden Age of Tattooing' (2000). During this period further important technological developments also occurred within the figuration. Building upon the designs of Samuel O'Reilly, more precise and durable needles were invented and another tattooist, Lew 'the Jew' Alberts – a former wallpaper designer – developed the first sheets of standardised tattoo designs, commonly known as flash, around the turn of the century. These flash sheets flourished with tattooists selling or exchanging sheets with each other, vastly increasing the circulation of tattoo designs, and allowing the working-class clientele to choose a tattoo with little thought. Furthermore, the means of making acetate copies of these designs which could be transferred to the skin also developed during this period, further lowering the skill levels needed to be a tattooist. The lack of thought needed in choosing a design – with lack of insight being a supposed hallmark of the masses – and the lower levels of artistic skill needed by the new tattooists allowed the practice to be further defined as working-class.

Times of war were particularly lucrative for tattooists with members of the armed services flocking to get images of patriotism or 'forget-me-nots' dedicated to loved

ones they were leaving behind. Likewise, working-class occupational designs such as a mechanic's hammer or a barber's razor were popular and confirmed individual's membership not only to their occupation, but to their social class (Parry 2006). DeMello has characterised this period as the one in which tattoos were least stigmatised, especially in America where they represented a sense of jingoism that was regarded as a working-class expression of patriotism. However, as Atkinson correctly identifies, 'the membership base cultivated during this era and the eventual formalization of the tattoo parlour as a gathering place for marginal members of society firmly entrenched associations between tattooing and those lacking social grace' (2003a: 38). After World War Two, knowledge of the Nazi's forced tattooing of prisoners of war meant the popularity of the practice waned among the working-classes too and this allowed for its adoption by a number by marginal and deviant cultural groups as a way to deliberately signify disaffection, and the erosion of its legitimacy as a 'quasi-normative form of group expression' (ibid.).

Adoption by Social 'Undesirables' (1950s – present)

The period after World War Two witnessed a rapid expansion of the middle classes who 'busied themselves with marrying, having children, and moving to the suburbs', this expansion of the middle classes meant that cultural codes regarding acceptable bodily appearance which emphasized modesty and the sanctity of the body once more came to the fore (DeMello 2000: 67). As a response to this a number of marginal (sub) cultural groups, who's membership was outside of this middle class expansion, began to use drawn on the deviant association of tattoos as a form of resistance and defiance to these emerging values; most notably bikers, gang members and prisoners. The use of tattooing as a symbol of social protest or political dissent is grounded in the history of prison tattooing; forced tattooing to denote criminals is an ancient one as evidenced by the practice's use by the Greeks and Romans discussed above, and evidence of penal tattooing can be found in countries including Britain, France and Russia as recently as the nineteenth-century. Tattooing criminals acted as a control mechanism for socially disruptive bodies by removing them from the general populace and marginalizing them with lifelong

marks of stigma (Goffman 1963; Foucault 1995; Atkinson 2003a). However, many of those involuntarily receiving tattoos began to resist their labelling as discredited social actors and sought to reclaim their bodies. The first evidence of this appears in Japan where the criminal underclass known as the Yakuza responded to being tattooed words such as 'pig' or 'dog' by completely tattooing their bodies with an bodysuit known as Irezumi to cover these stigmatising marks. Similarly, in late nineteenth-century France Lombroso viewed sentiments such as 'Death to all French Officers', 'Death to the Police' and 'Rather die than reform' tattooed on prisoners as specific strategies of resistance (Scutt and Gotch 1986: 109).

More recent evidence also demonstrates the use of tattooing amongst prisoners that set the foundation for what DeMello has termed the 'rebel era' of tattooing; a survey carried out in Illinois in 1958 for example demonstrates evidence of anti-authoritarian tattoos including 'Fuck you, cops' and 'I hate cops' (ibid. 110), while French and English prisoners often tattooed dotted lines around their necks, writing 'cut here' in mockery of the institutions control over their lives (Caplan 2000; Atkinson 2003a). Estimates for the number of tattooed prisoners during this period stand at about 50 percent in both England and the United States, with tattoos most commonly found serving to denote gang membership (through gang names, mottos, or symbols), or feelings of imprisonment (such as spider-webs on elbows, tear drops under the eye, and justice shown holding lop-sided scales as a representation of what is considered the unfair nature of the legal system) (Scutt and Gotch 1986; DeMello 1993, 2000; Atkinson 2003a). Tattoos within prison served as a method of creating specific identities and associations within the institution and acted as subcultural codes of resistance shared among the groups members: 'their bodies could not be freed in a literal sense but could be freed symbolically through bricolage' (Atkinson 2003a: 39). Prison tattooing developed its own distinct style of blue or black, fine line, single needle, designs, as a result of the techniques⁷ employed in the tattooing process and as prisoners bearing such

⁷ limited access to necessary equipment meant tattoos were applied by hand or using tattoo 'guns' (an intentionally menacing term enforcing associations with criminality) made using radios, guitar strings, pens and electric razors, and ink was limited to blue or black, acquired from pens or soot from burning carbon-based objects (Govenar 1988).

marks were released prison tattoo styles and imagery 'hit the street' and influenced dominant tattoo styles and practices (Govenar 1998; DeMello 1993, 2000).

Around the same time as tattooing was increasing in popularity in prisons biker gangs, most famously the Hell's Angels, adopted tattooing as a signifying practice of their own subculture. Biker tattoos bore many resemblances to prison tattoos both in style and the meaning structures given to the practice. This is not surprising as a number of bikers had, at some point, spent time within prison, with many receiving their first tattoos whilst serving a prison sentence (DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a). Biker imagery was very different from the traditional working-class tattoos; where working-class tattoos had largely been used as a symbol of patriotism or devotion to loved ones, biker tattoos were laden with antisocial sentiment. Classic tattoos include Harley Davidson logos, biker club logos, marijuana leaves, skulls and other motifs associated with death, and logos such as 'FTW' (Fuck the World), 'EWMN' (Evil, Wicked, Mean, Nasty), 'Born to Lose', and 'Ride to Live'. Biker tattoos, which remain popular in current tattoo figurations, are located on areas of the body that will be visible such as the arms, back, hands, neck and head (but rarely on the legs as these are covered by jeans or leather trousers) as they serve as a form of public commentary: 'for motorcycle-gang members, highly visible tattoos [are] both an encoded language of rebellion articulating disaffection with broader society and a lexicon of symbols instantly distinguishing motorcyclists from others in society' (Atkinson 2003a: 40; see also Eldridge 1992; DeMello 1995; 2000). An important outcome of biker's preoccupation with tattooing that had an important influence on tattoo figurations was the negative exposure received in the media; in America especially moral panics concerning the social perils posed by biker gangs developed during this period (Katz 2011). Based largely on cultural stereotype and exaggeration, media accounts of biker gangs defined them as outlaws who terrorised the law abiding public and tattoos were publicized as an identifiable aspect of biker culture. Being associated with outlaw bikers and criminals in the public's eye, tattoos became firmly entrenched as the mark of the outsider.

It was not just those supposedly associated with criminal activity that used tattoos during this period as other subcultures including youth gangs, Rockers, Modernists,

and Punks, appropriated tattoos for their own purposes (Hebdige 1979; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008).⁸ Partly used as a way of rejecting class-based social norms, values, and beliefs, and partly as a way to signify memberships within these subcultural groupings, these myriad groups engaged in ‘social critique, commentary, and rebellion through their corporeal manipulations’ by developing ‘alternative ways of expressing the (sub) cultural significance of tattoos’ (Atkinson 2003a: 41). Utilizing the image of otherness, prisoners, bikers and marginal subcultures became the new tattooed savages, and the legacy of this period firmly entrenched associations between tattooing and deviants, criminals, and the socially marginal; so much so that deviance and tattoos were synonymous during this era, an association solidified in the media, scientific journals and in the popular imagination (DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008; see chapter two). However, from the 1970s onwards social and cultural changes concerning the body redefined the acceptability of tattooing as a new wave of more acceptable members of society challenged the practice’s association with the socially marginal.

The Tattoo Renaissance (1970s – 1990s)

The 1970s to early 1990s witnessed what many authors have called a ‘renaissance’ in the popularity of tattooing, characterised by increasingly heterogeneous clientele, including larger number of women and individuals from higher socio-economic status, and increasing numbers of professionally trained fine art artists choosing to become tattooists (Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008). These important developments were largely brought about as a result of political movements that used the body for ‘doing’ identity politics. The racial, sexual, and gender-based movements that had begun to gather momentum in the 1960s were in full swing and challenged dominant social constructions of race, gender and class, commonly constructed around notions of the ‘natural’, or biological, body. Identity politics is defined as ‘the process of aligning oneself with others who intersubjectively share feelings of marginality and oppression within a figuration’ (Atkinson 2003a: 42; see also Dunn 1998), and so, like the marginal subcultures before them, these highly politicised groups used tattooing as a form of

⁸ An analysis of the use of tattoos by subcultural groups is offered in chapter two

protest aimed at encouraging society to reconsider the conservative and oppressive ideologies prevalent during the period. The group most at the forefront of challenging these ideologies and bringing about vast change both outside, and within, tattoo figurations, is women.

By engaging in identity politics, the women's movement of the 1970s and 80s used the body as a site of agency, liberation and sexual exploration. Although there are no definitive figures on the numbers involved in the practice, evidence demonstrates a significant increase in the number of women in tattoo figurations during this period (Wroblewski 1992; DeMello 2000; Mifflin 2013). The following quotation best demonstrates how women's identity politics centred on the body and how some women came to adopt tattooing in opposition to dominate constructions of females as powerless:

With the sexual revolution [that begun] in the 1960s, when women began casting off their bras as they had their corsets a half-century earlier, tattoos were rescued from ignominy and resurrected in the counter-culture by women who were rethinking womanhood. The arrival of the Pill in 1961 had given women new sexual freedom; a little over a decade later legalized abortion secured their reproductive rights. Not surprisingly, the breast became a popular spot for tattoos – it was here that many women inscribed symbols of their own newfound sexual independence (Mifflin 2013: 56)

The adoption of tattooing by ever increasing numbers of women had a twofold effect. Firstly, through their use of tattooing, women challenged and undermined cultural constructions of femininity and secondly, they challenged cultural associations between tattooing and the social underbelly who had become associated with the practice. Members of peace movements, hippies, and gays (especially kinky gays) also began to tattoo their bodies in increasing numbers (DeMello 2000). Utilising them as signs of rebellion, tattoos including peace symbols, mushrooms, marijuana leaves and zodiac signs began to appear within tattoo figurations alongside traditional working-class and biker/gang/prison imagery. New tattooed 'role models' also appeared as international stars such as

Janice Joplin, Joan Baez, Peter Fonda, and Cher, publicly became tattooed. This had a dramatic effect with Joplin being characterised by tattoo artist Lyle Tuttle as 'the best advertisement for tattooing that could ever be written' (interview by DeMello 2000: 76). As sentiments of 'self-exploration, physical experimentation, and mind expansion' propagated by liberation movements became ever more prevalent during the era, 'dabbling in and with the socially avant-garde – including tattooing practices – became chic for the middle and upper classes' (Atkinson 2003a: 44; see also DeMello 2000). The increasing heterogeneity of the tattoo consumer led to a radical shift in the nature and social practice of tattooing as demand for more personal, less offensive, and one-of-a-kind tattoos was generated. Supplying these designs were a new wave of predominately art school trained tattooists.

American artists such as Cliff Raven, Don Ed Hardy and Lyle Tuttle are most associated with leading the emergence of avant-garde tattoo artists and promoting innovations including new designs, new artistic techniques, and more hygienic working practices, both in the United States and beyond (Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000); although Dutch tattooist Henk Schiffmacher, known as Hanky Panky, was also highly influential (Vale and Juno 1989). Many of these artists had experience in traditional art mediums and turned to tattooing as a result of dissatisfaction with the conventional art world and the limited opportunities for pursuing successful careers this insular world presented. Fuelled by the new tattoo consumers desire to produce unique pieces, the avant-garde artists experimented with new colours, shading techniques, and fine line, highly detailed images. Key to this was the knowledge these artists had of the 'physiological and social principles pertaining to corporeal movement, aesthetics, and display' and a willingness to 'listen to their clients', who had ever increasing input in their tattoo designs (Atkinson 2003a: 45; Vale and Juno 1989; DeMello 2000; Sanders 2008). These artists also explored tattoo styles from other cultures including Japan, New Zealand, Africa and Hawaii, as well as emerging styles such as hentai/anime (Japanese animation), gothic, fantasy and graffiti. With a more informed clientele with higher disposable incomes, artists moved their studios once again into the fashionable areas of cities and could concentrate the majority of their efforts on custom designs

utilising their artistic talent, with little to no tattooing of standardised flash designs which came to be considered as dispensed by those with low artistic talent and chosen by working-class individuals without aesthetic tastes.

The influx of art trained individuals into tattoo figurations led to the larger art world taking notice of the practice, and tattooing came to be increasingly shown in museums and art galleries as it was redefined as art itself (Sanders 2008). The new artists entering tattoo figurations refused the moniker 'tattooist' used by previous generations, instead defining themselves as tattoo artists. The tattoos they produced were presented as art and 'subjected to critical discussion by academics and critics/agents of the traditional art world' (Sanders 2008: 19). The tattoo artists themselves also crossed the boundaries between tattoo figurations and the traditional art world by displaying traditional art mediums as well. Ed Hardy for example displayed 'drawings, watercolours, and prints in galleries on La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles and [participated] in group exhibitions that were national in scope', as well as speaking at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1966 on 'tattoo as an American art form and its relationship to pop art' (Rubin 1988: 242). Mike Malone, a professional photographer and tattooist, helped to organise the Museum of American Folk Art tattoo exhibition in New York in 1971 and some 10 years later Lyle Tuttle established the Tattoo Art Museum and Hall of Fame in San Francisco; Tuttle was also interviewed by mainstream magazines Time and Life, leading to increased cultural diffusion of the practice as more mainstream audiences became familiar with the practice again.⁹ Authors including DeMello and Atkinson have credited the increasing number of art-school trained artists entering tattoo figurations as undermining the apprenticeship system; however, while increasing numbers of artists are undertaking self-training, research conducted for this thesis and content analysis of tattoo media demonstrates that the apprenticeship narrative remains prominent.

Accompanying the artistic developments was a rise in the professionalism of the practice. Much of the disreputable reputation of tattooing that developed

⁹ A more in-depth discussion of the impact of the redefinition of tattooing as art is offered in chapter five

stemmed from the association with poor sanitation and unhygienic working practices. In New York for example, tattooing had been banned due a link between incidences of hepatitis being transmitted via infected tattoo needles (DeMello 2000). In order for the practice to survive, and in light of the new consumers being drawn to it, health regulations needed to be improved, and two artists were at the forefront of this change: Lyle Tuttle and 'Doc' Spider Webb. Working with their respective Departments of Communicable Diseases (Tuttle in San Francisco and Webb in San Diego), these artists improved the sanitation of the practice and introduced better sterilization techniques ensuring each client would be tattooed with new, sterile needles, and ink would be administered for each client individually in sterile containers. Technological innovation also made sterilization easier to achieve with the widespread use of the 'quick-change' tattoo machine allowing the needle and tube holding it to be easily removed from the tattoo machine to be sterilized separately. Prominent artists of the period, including Tuttle, Webb, Sailor Jerry Collins, and Don Ed Hardy, travelled and shared information on tattooing techniques and processes with one another in order to improve the practice, information that had been closely guarded by previous generations. These trips included not only visits to other tattoo artists and shops in America but to Europe and the rest of the world. For example, Ed Hardy began annual working trips to England in 1979, and Bob Roberts tattooed in Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, Ostend, and elsewhere for a 6 month period in 1982, and through these trips artists help to spread the new professionalism to other Western countries (Rubin 1988; see also Sweetman 1999a whose respondents confirm the slightly later influence of the tattoo renaissance in Europe). Finally, this period also witnessed the first tattoo magazines and conventions.

The world's first tattoo convention was held by the North American Tattoo Club in 1976, and the International Tattoo Artists Association quickly followed in 1977. It is however, the 1982 Tattoo Expo, staged on the Queen Mary cruise ship in Long Beach, and organised by Ed Hardy, which had the most considerable influence on tattoo figurations. Unlike the conventions that preceded it, Tattoo Expo included educational lectures and slideshows, enabling further disseminating information on

good working practices; a standard in tattoo conventions held all over the world today (Rubin 1988; DeMello 2000). Hardy also used Tattoo Expo to launch his magazine TattooTime. TattooTime was also not the first tattoo magazine published (the International Tattoo Artists Association and National Tattoo Association had been publishing their own for a few years prior), but it was the first published with the specific intent of correcting the 'negative, overly sensationalistic view of tattooing held by most mainstream North Americans' (DeMello 2000: 80). DeMello credits Tattoo Expo, TattooTime, and other work documenting tattooing practices by Hardy as helping to make tattooing palatable to the middle classes whose interest in the practice increased dramatically during this period, although the extent to which tattooing became a *predominately* middle class practice has been overemphasised by DeMello.

Contemporary Tattoo Figurations (1990s – present)

The periods described above have had unintended sociogenesis on current tattoo figurations with the practice's polysemic nature highlighted by the varied ways individuals utilise tattooing that will be discussed throughout this thesis. Throughout its history the practice has been one of competing discourses, many of which continue to influence contemporary understandings of tattooing as these competing definitions provide individuals with a plethora of narratives to draw on in their use of the practice. The period since 1990s has been termed by Vail (1999a, 1999b) and DeMello (2000) as the 'second renaissance', and by Polhemus (1994, 1996) and Atkinson (2003a) as the 'supermarket era', with evidence demonstrating tattooing is a more popular phenomenon than during any previous period, and the practice establishing itself within mainstream culture, highlighted by the use of tattooed models in advertisements and the increasing number of *visibly* tattooed TV, film and sport icons;¹⁰ however, I propose that contemporary tattoo figurations are primarily concerned with quests for authenticity (see Taylor 2007). As the body has become increasingly important to the construction of identity tattooing has become one of many corporeal modifications individuals can make to their bodies

¹⁰ A theoretical analysis of the impact of tattooing's appearance in mainstream culture is offered in chapter five

in order to construct their sense of self-identity; a key determiner of this is whether an individual can be considered authentic. We are sold the virtues of authentic cashmere, implored to drink 'the real thing' by Coca Cola, and search for authentic experiences by travelling to different cultures. In conducting empirical research for this thesis it became clear that identity has not escaped this emphasis on authenticity. I will explore throughout this thesis the various competing meanings attributed to tattooing practices but central to all narratives were quests for authenticity in contemporary society and the final chapter will explore in more depth these quests for authenticity operate both within, and outside of, tattoo figurations and as a result has, I contend, become the defining feature of contemporary tattoo figurations.

If quests for authenticity can be proposed to be a defining feature of tattoo figurations it is also evident that tattooing has become an increasingly global(ized) phenomenon, dominated by choice; choice of whether to become tattooed in the face of less stigma; choice of artist; choice of tattoo styles etc. (Atkinson 2003a). The number of tattoo artists that an individual can choose from is rapidly growing; in Canterbury, a town with approximately 40,000 residents, where the majority of the research for this thesis was conducted, there are 5 tattoo shops in the city centre alone. Additionally, individuals are increasingly willing to travel, not only to different cities but to different countries – facilitated by decreased flight costs – to visit known artists, many of whom now specialise in particular styles. Fuelling this knowledge about tattooing is the interplay between three main sources: magazines, TV, and the internet. The two main tattoo magazines in the UK are *Skin Deep*, first published in 1994, and *Total Tattoo*, first published in 2005. Aimed at similar audiences these magazines include articles on tattoo artists and shops, worldwide conventions, and usually an interview with a (female) cover model, as well as occasional pseudo-academic articles. In 2005 the popular TV shows *Inked* and *Miami Ink* first aired, the latter of which was followed in 2007 by *LA Ink* and *London Ink* and in 2011 by *New York Ink*. Individuals can also access an unprecedented number of web pages dedicated to tattooing or tattoo artists, with social networking sites such as Facebook providing the front line of information.

Taken together, magazines, TV shows and the internet, have demystified the practice of tattooing, with individuals easily able learn about the tattooing process, healing techniques, tattoo styles and the artists that cater for these style, reviews of artists etc. As a result, 'tattooing has emerged out of the social shadows and into popular culture' (Atkinson 2003a: 48; see also DeMello 2008; Sanders 2008).

Paralleling this increased cultural popularity has been a burgeoning interest in the practice within academia. Beginning with Clinton Sanders', *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, in 1989 (revised and expanded edition published with Vail 2008), a number of academics from outside psychology and criminology, who have promoted tattooing as a more normative form of corporeal alteration, have taken an interest in the practice, and there has followed many books dedicated to the practice (for example DeMello 2000; Featherstone et al 2000; Atkinson 2003a), as well as numerous articles (for example Vail 1999a, 1999b; Atkinson and Young 2001; Atkinson 2002, 2003b, 2004; Irwin 2003; Kosut 2006a, 2006b). A full literature review is offered in the next chapter but the growing academic interest in the practice, from a number of disciplines, highlights its cultural diffusion and the extent to which it has come to be viewed as a topic for serious academic consideration. The increasing popularity of the practice evidenced in both popular culture and academic discourse continues to alter the structure of tattoo figurations in unintended ways and it is impossible to predict the future course these figurations will take. Tattooing today is undoubtedly utilised by a greater variety of people for a greater variety of reasons, but the practice has always been influenced by dominant figurational constructions of the body and the degree to which the practice is defined as deviant within a larger cultural context.

Despite the current level of popularity the legacy of the periods discussed above continue to influence contemporary tattoo figurations. The tattoo renaissance improved the artistic quality of the practice – and it continues to increase – dramatically; this period also made the practice more palatable to a heterogeneously diverse clientele that continues to witness high numbers of women and individuals with higher socio-economic backgrounds choosing to become tattooed. Despite this, the practice continues to retain an aura of deviance

and marginality, respondents for this study repeatedly emphasised that although the practice is more established there continue to be those – notably those they considered as holding more power within their figurations – who associate the practice with the social underbelly, whilst some media reporting continues to draw associations between tattooing and deviance. Marge DeMello (2000) effectively demonstrates how tattooing has become more acceptable in middle class figurations but in overemphasising the middle class nature of the practice she ignores that tattooing remains a legitimate way of indicating membership to working-class, subcultural, and deviant groups. Groups including punks and biker gangs continue to thrive and utilise tattoos as symbolic signs of membership; likewise, new movements such as straightedge use tattooing as a highly literal form of communication and symbolic protest against what they view as the hedonistic values of mainstream society (Atkinson 2003b; Mullaney 2012; see chapter two). Finally, gang members – particularly in America – continue to use tattoos as a form of unity and representation, a highly symbolic and visual marker of belonging to a deviant, and possibly criminal, group that can be read by law enforcement officers and other gangs, and can cost an individual their life (Jankowski 2003; Riley 2006). The continuing use by deviant groups, and more importantly the continuing association between tattoos and deviance or criminality by some members of society, means that, for now at least, the practice has not been fully accepted and assimilated into mainstream popular culture and continues to have a lingering association with deviance (Atkinson 2003a).

Chapter Two – A Review of the Current Literature and the Preliminary Case for Figurational Sociology

From the dermatologist's point of view tattooing is a self-inflicted skin disease; from the point of view of a psychiatric specialist it is masochistic self-punishment; while the sociologist of criminality sees it as a voluntary act of social self-stigmatization (Gell 1993: 37)

Although somewhat over-simplified, this quotation represents the various ways tattooing has been interpreted within different academic disciplines. This chapter provides an overview of the literature surrounding the practice that has emerged from several disciplines as an attempt to elucidate why it is that tattooing has been historically characterised as a practice of the socially marginal, and why it has gained a level of social acceptability in contemporary society. Rather than organise the chapter on the basis of the disciplines that have focused attention on tattooing, I have instead chosen to order it by concentrating on the motivations for tattooing forwarded by theorists in their consideration of the practice. Although the disciplines may themselves be considered distinct there is a great deal of overlap between them in their analyses of the practice. The chapter will first explore the individualistic arguments forwarded in psychological and criminological studies that discuss tattooing in terms of an individual prognosis of psychological deficiency and/or propensity towards crime, before examining more recent sociological theories that have adopted a more sympathetic approach to tattooing and attempted to elucidate how tattoos are implicated in the construction of individual identities. Secondly, it will consider the arguments that propose tattooing is adopted by different groups of individuals in order to demonstrate – or provide – in-group loyalties. Within this context, anthropology, the first discipline to study the practice, demonstrates how tattoos are used in 'non-modern' societies to identify tribal membership, roles within the tribe, and provide rites of passage. Cultural criminology focuses attention on how different criminal groups use tattoos as marks of membership to criminal gangs, or foster community within the identity stripping environments of incarceration, and finally, sociological theorists have demonstrated how tattooing is most often used in asserting loyalty to various

subcultures and attendant lifestyles; an analysis of the appropriateness of subcultural theory for researching tattooing practices more generally will also be offered in this section. In the concluding part of the chapter I explore the arguments of those theorists who have proposed that tattooing serves as a marker of resistance to mainstream cultural values or norms. Although many psychological and criminological studies propose that all individuals who choose to be tattooed are resistant to the norms of society, the focus of this section will be on the sociological and cultural theories that have explored how tattooing as adopted by specific individuals as a means of demonstrating *purposive* resistance against mainstream cultural values where these are considered male, white, and middle-class. These three approaches are by no means isolated – studies that focus on the individualistic nature of tattooing often claim that the individualistic aspect is a result of resisting mainstream fashion trends for example – but they are distinct enough to be considered separately and doing so allows for an exploration of the differences and similarities across disciplines.

Tattooing and the Individual

The theories from psychology, criminology, and sociology, concerning the individualistic nature of tattooing could be considered divergent when approached at face value. Most, but not all, psychological and criminological literature casts tattooing in a negative light, focusing on the supposed psychological deficiency of the bearer and/or propensity towards crime. In contrast, sociological studies often, but not always, reject this negative view of tattooing and claim to be arguing against the assessments forwarded by psychology and criminology by focusing on the more positive aspects of the practice and attempting to posit it as normative (i.e. non-clinical) phenomenon. Nevertheless, while these approaches may be at odds with one another regarding how they understand the practice, they each emphasise the individualistic nature of the practice, either by proposing that the desire to become tattooed is found within the individual (whether this is considered positive or negative), or by focusing on how tattoos may allow the bearer to assert their individuality. This section will explore some of these theories as well as offering some criticisms and shortfalls of the approaches.

Psychology and Criminology

In examining the literature that posits tattooing to be a marker of individuality I wish to first consider the criminological and psychological literature which typically discusses the practice in terms of an individual diagnosis of (various) psychiatric conditions, or propensity towards crime. It is impossible to discuss the criminological or psychological literature on tattooing in isolation due to the high level of cross over between the disciplines in their consideration of the practice, as well as the number of psychological texts that use incarcerated populations as their sample group. In 1876 criminologist Cesare Lombroso published *The Criminal Man*, in which he claimed tattooing to be an 'atavistic manifestation, mostly confined to the lower classes or prostitutes ... [and] an expression of degeneracy' (quoted in Palermo 2004: 10), and in 1896 he went on to publish *The Savage Origin of Tattooing*. Sweetman also cites an un-credited publication from 1894 which reviews the psychological and criminological significance of tattoos and describes those individuals who wear them as 'restless and neurotic, insubordinate, and prone to exaggerated excitability' (1999a: 49). These early works established a long legacy of criminological and psychological literature which continues to argue for an association between tattooing and various forms of social deviance. Although more recently there have been increasing numbers of studies, particularly from sociological or cultural studies, that account for tattooing as a normative practice the criminological and psychological literature represents the largest body of work on the subject, and has had an enduring effect on the larger public's negative view of the practice.

This body of literature either attempts to draw a link between criminal behaviour or psychiatric conditions and tattooing per se, or focuses on the number or designs of tattoos as signs of an individual's psychosis or propensity towards certain crime. For Lombroso, criminality was a trait that was inborn in individuals, and could be recognised through various physical and biological qualities, even in those who had committed no crimes. These 'criminals' for Lombroso, like the 'savages' of tribal societies, had not reached the necessary evolutionary stage of development to be considered a member of 'civilized' society, and this explained both groups use of

tattooing. Of course, in Western society tattooing is not obligatory for social reproduction, and so the reasoning for these individuals adopting tattooing was located in a psychological deficiency: criminals had an 'irresistible disposition to become tattooed' according to Lombroso (quoted in Gell 1993: 12). Cataloguing the designs of 5000 criminals whom he studied, Lombroso claimed moral deficiency not just in the decision to become tattooed, but also in the imagery chosen by the criminal. By (over)emphasizing radical/anarchist political slogans, loyalty to criminal organizations, honour among thieves and sexual themes he claimed a fatalistic ethos present in criminal man as demonstrated through their tattoos (Gell 1993; Parry 2006). A contemporary of Lombroso, Adolf Loos was similarly condemning: 'a man of this century who tattoos himself is a criminal and a degenerate ... I have found the following law and present it to mankind: the evolution of civilization is tantamount to the removal of ornament from objects of use' (1998 [1908], cited in Gell 1999: 15). It would be easy to dismiss the writings of Lombroso and Loos as being somewhat antiquated and out of touch with contemporary uses of tattooing. However, these writings are important for two reasons. Firstly, the thoughts of these authors highlight 'a point of view on tattooing which is explicitly (rather than implicitly) European, middle-class, and disapproving', and secondly, they express a 'rationale behind the negative image enjoyed by tattooing in educated circles in *contemporary* Western societies. Tattooing is archaic; and it runs counter to a very basic idea in western thought ... that the human body, unadorned, is beautiful' (Gell 1993: 13-15, my emphasis). As we shall see below, this is evident in more recent studies that continue in their attempts to demonstrate tattooing to be associated with psychiatric conditions including personality disorders and schizophrenia; risky behaviours including drug taking, suicide, and sexual deviance; or as a practice associated with self-harmers.

In arguing the case for tattooing to be associated with various psychiatric conditions several authors have claimed that just having tattoos is a sufficient indicator of neurosis. Hamburger and Lacovara, for example, claim tattooing to be associated with an 'impoverished ego structure...[and] various neuroses and personality disturbances'(1963: 1208), whilst Newman also claimed a correlation between

individuals with tattoos and criminal behaviour in his study of the relationship between tattoos, crimes, and psychiatric diagnosis (1982; see also Manuel and Retzlaff 2002). Other authors have dismissed the possibility of tattooing per se acting as a sign of psychiatric conditions but instead propose the analysis of tattoos themselves as a diagnostic technique. Ferguson-Rayport et al catalogued the content and location of psychiatric patients' tattoos and proposed that these could reveal the inmates' 'basic attitudes and traits' (1955: 128), and Birmingham, Mason and Grubin (1999) claim those inmates with visible tattoos (for them defined as tattoos on the hands, neck or head) to be significantly more likely to have schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders. Palermo's appraisal of Ferguson-Rayport et al's paper is particularly concerning as he claims without justification that 'even though done almost 50 years ago, [it] appears up to date, and certainly remains an invaluable tool for the field of forensic assessments even at present' (2004: 12). Whilst the majority of the psychological and criminological studies have been negative in their view of tattooing, some authors have taken a less condemnatory view of the practice. Popplestone proposes that tattooing may act as a form of exoskeletal defence – which is 'any modification or enhancement of the body that subsidizes the psychological integrity of the person' – for those individuals who bear them, by 'emphasizing the body's sexuality, and equipping the body with indices of invulnerability' (1963: 16; see also Hawkins and Popplestone 1964). Though I find Popplestone's suggestion that bearing a tattoo provides the ability to 'display an aggressive potential, a warning to the beholder that the bearer is dangerous' (ibid. 18) problematic as it reproduces earlier prejudices that associates tattooing with 'tough guys' (Steward 1990; Parry 2006), he nevertheless argues persuasively for tattooing to be considered a normal, non-clinical phenomenon and effectively demonstrates a link between tattooing and individual identity formation. These findings are repeated in a more recent paper by Grumet who argues that 'of all the various motives for bearing a tattoo, the quest for personal identity is central' (1983: 483).

Several authors have also posited a link between tattooing and individuals partaking in risky behaviour including sexual deviance, drug taking, and suicide.

Albert Parry proclaimed 'the very process of tattooing is essentially sexual. There are the long sharp needles. There is the liquid poured into the pricked skin. There are the two participants of the act, one active, the other passive', going on to consider how the practice was one for, among others, prostitutes and perverts (2006: 2). This was furthered by Bromberg who suggests that the incidence of male tattooees being accompanied by male friends represented 'the influence of a latent homosexual factor', once more associating the process itself as being sexual as 'expressed in the very symbolism of the tattooing needle and the fluid, the infliction of pain by an older man... [and] the fact that the repression against homosexuality is weakened by alcoholic intoxication'¹¹ (1935: 229). More recently, Caplan, Komaromi and Rhodes paper *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Tattooing and Bizarre Sexual Practices* argues on the basis of a *single* case that tattooing and 'bizarre' sexual practices are both compulsive behaviours 'associated with the subject's obsessive-compulsive disorder' (1996: 379). Others have also argued for a correlation between tattooing and drug and/or alcohol abuse or non-normative behaviour patterns. A study of 860 participants by Braithwaite et al (2001; see also Raspa and Cusack 1990) at a substance use and HIV risk reduction intervention, for example, claimed a correlation between tattooing and 'deviant' behaviours such as the consumption of alcohol or marijuana. This is somewhat akin to finding sweets in a sweet shop and the authors fail to demonstrate any meaningful correlation between tattooing and alcohol or marijuana use other than the fact that some users also have tattoos. More worryingly, Roberts and Ryan (2001) reported that the 5% of just over 6000 respondents to an adolescent health survey who had a tattoo were 'more likely to join a gang, engage in sexual intercourse, skip or fail in school, or exhibit violent behaviour than non-tattooed peers' (Palermo 2004: 13), yet there is no justification for this claim which is virtually impossible to substantiate with data gleaned from a longitudinal survey. Finally, Dhossche, Snell and Larder's 2000 paper, *A case-control of tattoos in young suicide victims as a possible marker of risk*, concludes that tattoos are 'possible markers for lethality

¹¹ Bromberg's quotation is also worrying in its inference that a link between alcoholic intoxication and tattooing is obvious and does not need any qualification

from both suicide and accidental death in young people, presumably because of shared risk factors, such as substance abuse and personality disorder' (165).

Other literature has attempted to posit a link between tattooing and self-harm; either as distinct practices that are associated closely with one another, or as tattooing itself being a form of self-harm. Stirn and Hinz (2008) conducted 432 anonymous questionnaires of individuals with body modifications (tattoos and/or piercings) and claimed a high incidence of self-injury among participants, 27% of whom admitted to self-cutting during childhood with 13% of these ceasing self-cutting once they began tattooing or piercing, something the authors attribute to body modification acting as a substitute for self-harm. Stirn and Hinz's paper can be complemented for not claiming that *all* body modifiers are self-harmers: 'in the large *majority* of cases, BMs are not related to *any* psychological or suicidal abnormalities' (2008: 332 my emphasis) yet they still propose that modifications can act as a diagnostic tool, particularly when there are 'unusually large surfaces of the body' tattooed (ibid.), whilst failing to recognise that large scale tattooing, common in modern tattoo figurations, can lead to the diagnosis of pathological conditions, even where none exist, as a result of professionals ability to label others. Sheila Jeffreys paper, *Body Art and Social Status: Cutting Tattooing and Piercing from a Feminist Perspective* (2000), goes further than this by claiming that *all* body art is harmful cultural practice and mutilation which acts as a form of patriarchal control over women and queer men. Jeffreys argues persuasively as to why tattooing (and other body art) *could* be considered as enforcing patriarchal power relations but she approaches the subject 'not with the question 'What does body art mean for the people involved? But with the question 'What particular pathologies do these people have?' (Riley 2002: 542; see also Van Lenning 2002) and so fails to offer any account of agency in modificatory practices. Favazza's inclusion of tattooing in his chapter of *Bodies Under Siege: Self-Mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry*, entitled 'The Skin', is particularly problematic. The majority of this chapter is given over to the analysis of self-cutting yet includes an early section that gives some brief historical and academic consideration to the practice of tattooing. However, nowhere in this chapter is

there any discussion on the potential relationship between tattooing and self-harm; it is included as if it is obvious that tattooing and self-cutting are similar conditions and that considerations regarding the latter should automatically apply to the former. As Cummings states, Favazza's 'necessarily vague statement that tattooing may be associated with 'increased levels of psychopathology'' (2001: 305), only serves to enforce the insufficiency of his argument.

The vast majority of the psychological and criminological literature suffers from methodological problems and researchers who are generally unfamiliar with the practice and/or show bias against those who choose to undergo this form of corporeal alteration. The first and most obvious issue is the use of psychiatric patients or prison inmates as research samples with findings generalized to the wider population. The research may well reflect accurate representations of tattooing as it is used by those who are imprisoned in one way or another, but there is an overwhelming failure by researchers to substantiate claims with non-incarcerated control groups. The unquestioning reliance on official statistics is also dubious; for example, Manuel and Retzlaff's (2002) paper draws inferences from standardized test administered to inmates upon incarceration and again after two years, and from these ascribe various psychopathologies to research subjects. The researchers themselves had no contact with research subjects meaning that they were unable to questions individual's on their own motivation for becoming tattooed; this reflects a more general problem present in the literature in which authors ascribe qualitative meaning, and diagnostic inferences, to individuals with whom they have had no contact. By accepting the official documentation regarding inmate's tattoos and psychiatric assessment, researchers establish patterns that are highly misleading as the presence of tattoos may well have contributed to the diagnosis, a problem perpetuated by continual reporting of these patterns. What is being demonstrated is 'the tendency for those in positions of authority to *label* tattooees as criminals, psychopaths or whatever, *not* a direct link between tattoos and any 'underlying' criminal or psychopathological tendencies' (Sweetman 1999a: 59-60, original emphasis). Finally, much of this research reflects the subjective and obvious bias of researchers, many of whom appear to hold an underlying prejudice

against tattooing (Sweetman 1999a; Kosut 2006a; Adams 2009). This bias is sometimes obvious, Goldstein's statement that most 'tattooed persons are simpleminded' (1979: 883) for example, yet for the most part the researchers personal prejudices are 'hidden beneath a veneer of illusionary objectivity' (Sweetman 1999a: 58).

This literature also reflects the researcher's unfamiliarity with tattooing; for example, Briggs states that 'the appearance of multiple tattoo marks which differ greatly in motivation, which have no symmetry, and which have no apparent connection with the other, is *always* diagnostic of a *severe* psychoneurosis' (1958: 1039), while Newman (1982) divided tattoo designs into five categories such as 'love-sexual' (e.g. hearts) and 'aggressive' (e.g. skull and crossbones) based on their content. To categorise tattooing in such ways is to overlook two important aspects of the development of tattooing in western society discussed in chapter one; firstly what Briggs categorises as haphazard multiple tattoo marks is known as 'The International Folk Style' (Rubin 1988; DeMello 2000) and was typical of tattooing during the period he was writing. Secondly, it ignores that tattoo designs – though to a lesser degree nowadays – are chosen from flash sheets which present the potential client with a limited array of designs to choose from; therefore an individual's tattoos may reveal less about their internal motivations and more about the design choices available at the point in history when the design was inscribed. Finally, the often forwarded proposition that tattoos are spontaneous and ill thought out decisions ignores that the vast majority of tattoo artists work on an appointment system, with highly acclaimed artists having waiting lists that can stretch years in advance, and that the adoption of large scale custom work requires planning and consultation between artist and client with the tattoos applied over several sittings.

Moreover methodological issues and unfamiliarity with the practice plague much of this literature by far the biggest concern is that it either fails to distinguish between cause and effect, or reports the association between tattooing and criminality or psychiatric conditions as if it were a causal relationship with no empirical proof (e.g. Post 1968). In the analysis of alcohol and marijuana consumption (Braithwaite et al

2001) or the supposed correlation between tattooing and risky behaviour (Dhossche, Snell and Larder 2001; Roberts and Ryan 2001), for example, authors consistently fail to explore the relationship between the individual's own motivation for becoming tattooed, *and* their potential psychiatric diagnosis or deviant behaviour, as two distinct but overlapping aspects of social life, preferring instead to posit a causal relationship without empirical evidence. As a result the large majority of this literature tends to assume there is an obvious link between tattooing and deviance as if tattoos automatically appear on the bodies of criminals or individuals with psychiatric conditions, or that an individual, having obtained a tattoo, suddenly develops a propensity towards crime or some psychiatric deficiency (Sweetman 1999a, Atkinson 2003a). In drawing such inferences, these theories overemphasize the individual and fail to take into account the groups contexts – i.e. figurations – in which these individuals are enmeshed. Furthermore, they fail to address how the burgeoning popularity of tattooing and its increasing redefinition as a normative means of bodily expression have led to upsurge in interest in the practice. By removing the social and communicative aspects of tattooing from analyses this literature leaves us with a 'strikingly unflattering and empirically unfounded discussion of tattooing as an outward signifier of pathology... [and] severely limits a broader understanding of tattooing as a culturally meaningful practice' (Atkinson 2003a: 55).

Sociology

As tattooing flourished and was adopted by an increasingly large and heterogeneous clientele following the tattoo renaissance of the 1970s onwards discussed in chapter one, an expanding number of social researchers became interested in the practice. Rather than viewing tattooing as somehow problematic, sociological researchers have approached tattooing as a more normative phenomenon (i.e. non-clinical and not automatically associated with psychological deficiency) and attempted to elucidate the reasons why the body has become such a popular 'object' on which to construct ones identity, along with an analysis of accompanying socio-cultural changes that have led to tattooing becoming an increasingly accepted and sought after form of body modification. Many social

researchers have conducted ethnographic research with tattooed individuals in order to explore their motivations for pursuing tattooing body projects; as a result these studies are able to offer more informed (that is empirical) observations of tattoo figurations. Many of these authors also admit to their own involvement in the practice (including Vail 1999a, 1999b; Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008; Lodder 2010; present author) and so are familiar with the processes involved in acquiring a tattoo, living with tattoos, and tattoo figurations more generally. A number of these studies draw on Shilling's (2012) proposition that the body is typically treated as a project upon which an individual can construct their own identity. As such, these studies attempt to demonstrate how individuals may transform the exterior surfaces of their body in order to project a reflexive sense of sense (Sweetman 1999b).

The quest for individuality is most commonly fulfilled in two inter-related ways; firstly through the simple act of having undergone this form of corporeal alteration; and secondly, through the choice of design that is unique to the individual. It is difficult to find statistics for the percentage of the population that bear tattoos with estimates varying widely but even if the numbers are swelling, as evidenced by our increased familiarity with the practice and its extensive use in fashion and marketing, tattooed individuals still appear to be a minority, albeit a large one. As such, 'simply having tattoos... differentiates [individuals] from the mainstream and contributes to *their* image of *themselves* as being unique' (DeMello 2000: 161, my emphasis; see also Sanders 2008: 45 and Atkinson 2003a). Though this uniqueness may be diminishing with the burgeoning popularity of tattooing, choosing a unique design remains a fruitful way of establishing individuality. As elucidated by Sanders in the first edition of *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing* (1989), a book published in the early years of what has been termed the second tattoo renaissance, an increasing number of clientele had started to request one off custom designs. The reasons for this are twofold; firstly an increasing number of 'regular' artists, some with fine art degrees, were entering the figuration and bringing new creativity and motivation to pursue one off designs, and secondly, the expanding heterogeneous clientele demanded a greater variety of designs, often

created in co-operation between artist and client, accounting for the individual biography of the customer, and the contours/size/shape of their body. This was particularly true of women and middle-class tattoo enthusiasts who wished to move away from traditional masculine designs to ones 'softer' and more aesthetically pleasing to their sensibilities (Sanders 2008; DeMello 2000). Evidence of this trend exacerbating was demonstrated by a number of texts published around the turn of the twentieth-century (e.g. Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a) and has reached a point today where a large majority of tattoo studios no longer carry traditional flash sheets (see chapter one), or if they do these are designed for inspirational purposes and artists will only tattoo custom designs.

This is not to say that flash designs have been completely abandoned and they are still applied in some studios, often as a way of apprentices to learn the practice, but they are commonly looked down on by established tattoo artists because of their lack of artistic quality, and by clients because of their lack of uniqueness and individuality. Of course, it is not impossible that another individual could have the same custom tattoo as another person if they, or an artist, decided to copy the design.¹² Although this is rare, what 'makes the tattoo unique (and therefore represents the uniqueness of the self) is the fact that while anyone could have selected the particular image in the process of self-redefinition, these individuals view their tattoos as unique because *they* chose the tattoo and attributed a highly personal meaning structure to the mark' (Atkinson 2003a: 202-203, original emphasis). In this respect, individuals most commonly choose designs that symbolize important personal involvements, hobbies, occupational activities, favourite sports teams, favourite musical artists or bands etc. and so tattoos are 'employed as symbolic representations of how one conceives of the self, or interests and activities that are key features of self-definition', with the tattoo itself 'having impact on their definition of self and demonstrating to others information about their unique interests' (Sanders 2008: 46-51). It is in these ways that

¹² While rare, a number of legal cases have been brought in recent years over ownership of tattoo designs. See for example the legal battle over ownership of a tattoo on Miss K Middleton (<http://www.deadlinenews.co.uk/2011/09/15/legal-battle-over-copyright-of-kate-middleton-tattoo/>) or the case brought against the film *The Hangover Part 2* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/may/25/hangover-part-ii-2-tattoo>)

individuals with tattoos are involved in the search for individuality, or distinction (Bourdieu 2010), which is increasingly prevalent in twenty-first century consumer society. While social researchers have attempted to promulgate the practice as normative rather than a sign of pathology or criminality, tattoos are still not fully assimilated within contemporary culture due to their permanence. Nevertheless, there are parallels with more mainstream forms of body modification:

the popularity of tattoos has paralleled a general cultural preoccupation with the body that has led to widespread obsessions with diet, exercise, and plastic surgery. Further, tattoos are able to carry the symbolic weight they do only because by modifying the skin they become a *culturally recognized* vehicle for talking about the self (Rosenblatt 1997: 310, my emphasis)

It is important to recognise then, that there are continuities between the way individuals use tattoos to assert individuality and more accepted mainstream practices.¹³ As such, tattooing supports dominant discourses about using the body to do identity-work by conforming to established cultural codes regarding the body and its presentation. It is in this way that tattooing can be 'be justified by enthusiasts as part of a private question for individuality' (Atkinson 2003a: 199).

Whilst these arguments forward a number of valid and relevant arguments concerning the ability of tattoos to be markers of individuality they can be criticised for overemphasizing this position. Sociologists are researchers of the social and similarly, tattooing itself is a social and communicative act. Although tattoos may be considered as markers of individuality by those who bear them we should always remember that individuality can only be asserted in relation to the social, i.e. in interdependencies with others; locating the 'I' can only be done through a recognition of the 'we', 'other', 'them', 'us', 'their' etc. against which the 'I' can be contrasted (Elias 2012a; Mennell 1992). This is regularly demonstrated by the narratives of respondents in these studies:

¹³ The relationship between the rise in more accepted forms of body modification and tattooing is examined in more depth in chapter five

After three years of pretty intense training, and a shitload of money, I got my pilot's license and was able to take my first solo flight... how few people know how to fly a plane, it makes you feel like one in a million... I have a cartoon drawing of a plane with a cigar hanging out of the propeller as my gift to me (Gwen, 27 in Atkinson 2003a: 202)

Having a tattoo changes how you see yourself. It is a way of choosing to change your body. I enjoy that. I enjoy having a tattoo because it makes me different from other people... I am unique (unnamed in Sanders 2008: 51)

Being tattooed' separates me from anybody else. No one else has anything like what I have. I feel a little bit different from Joe Shmoe on the street (Dani D. in DeMello 2000: 161-162)

These comments are typical of respondents who wish to assert that their tattoos mark them as individuals but statements such as 'you feel like one in a million', 'it makes me different from other people', and 'no one else has anything like what I have', demonstrates the inherently social nature of the practice as individual's strive to differentiate themselves from other individuals within their figurations. This is not to suggest the quest for individuality is unable to be fulfilled for those who adopt tattooing in this way – as Atkinson states, 'if this outsider form of body modification can be articulated as part of one's pursuit of a genuine (i.e. personally meaningful) way of expressing the 'inner self', then the practice may be wholly justified' (2003a: 199-200) – but we must recognise that this quest for individuality should be placed within wider social contexts and dismiss the overemphasis placed on the notion of individuality by many social researchers who adopt this approach.

Tattooing as a Marker of Group Solidarity

A number of disciplines have argued that tattoos serve as markers of group solidarity tying individuals to distinct societies, tribes, or other forms of social groupings. Group solidarity is accomplished by having tattoos that share similar themes – as with members of punk and straightedge subcultures for example – or through the duplication of identical markings employed by differing tribal groupings and some criminal gangs. This section will explore the views forward by theorists

in anthropology, psychology, criminology, and sociology, which propose tattoos to be markers of group solidarity. Although originating from different disciplines the theories forwarded by researchers in these disciplines share similarities in their emphasis on how tattoos are utilised to foster in-group cohesiveness and/or demonstrate commitment to particular social groupings.

Anthropology

As a discipline 'fundamentally concerned with the relationship between culture and nature' (Turner 1991: 2), the body has been accorded a place of central importance in anthropology since its inception as 'an important surface on which marks of social status, family position, tribal affiliation, age, gender, and religious condition can easily and publicly be displayed' (ibid. 6). As a highly visible trait, tattooing attracted the attention of numerous early anthropologists who demonstrated the social and political importance of the practice in non-modern societies (Van Gennep 1960 [1909]; Levi-Strauss 1963, 1969; Douglas 1966). Levi-Strauss states of the indigenous people of New Zealand: 'the purpose of Maori tattooing is not only to imprint a drawing onto the flesh but also to stamp onto the mind all the traditions and philosophy of the group' (1963: 257). This point is reiterated by Alfred Gell in his study of tattooing across Polynesia who states, 'tattooing practices played such an integral part in the organization and functioning of major institutions...that the description of tattooing practices becomes, inevitably, a description of the wider institutional forms within which tattooing was embedded' (1993: 1). Tattooing in these societies served a number of important functions, including rites of passage (most commonly into adulthood), membership of specific tribes or communities, indication of status within a tribe, or ones family. This is most clearly demonstrated by the facial tattooing – known as the moko – of the New Zealand Maori: 'temples tell your rank or position in life. Cheekbones: the lines of your rank; where you came from, who your father was ... the tribe you came from or your family group, rank or social status (Vale and Juno 1989: 144). However, the importance of tattooing in representing these functions is only successful through their recognition within the cultural figuration to which these individuals belong, as Turner states:

traditional society was defined in terms of the existence of a dense network of solidarity and commonality, a shared culture and system of rituals, and the dominance of collective over individual arrangements (Turner 2000: 42)

As such, anthropology demonstrated how tattooing acted as a marker of in-group cohesiveness and mutual identification in non-modern or tribal societies where it was often obligatory, could be read unambiguously, and reproduced solidarity and commonality as part of what Turner, drawing on McLuhan (1964), characterises as the thick/hot membership of these societies.

Whilst a legacy of academic attention towards tattooing was established early by anthropology more recent cultural anthropological texts (for example, Rubin 1988; Thomas, Cole and Douglas 2005; Kuwahara 2005) have continued to examine the practice, often interpreting the tattooing cultures of traditional tribal societies following Western intervention in their lives. Kuwahara's, *Tattoo: An Anthropology* (2005), for example, examines the tattooing practices of modern day Tahiti, exploring its relationship to gender, ethnicity and youth, some 150 years after French colonisers had attempted to suppress the practice. Two books from 1979, Robert Brain's *The Decorated Body*, and Victoria Ebin's, *The Body Decorated*, are also noteworthy and demonstrate how tattooing is 'a redesigning body project orientated toward linking the individual to larger cultural webs... [and] a normative corporeal practice in many non-Western cultures' (Atkinson 2003a: 51). Finally, Rubin's edited collection, *Marks of Civilization* (1988), is one of the most comprehensive texts that considers tribal tattooing and attempts to demonstrate both the global and historical pervasiveness of the practice. The anthropological literature demonstrates the similar tattooing experiences that exist throughout the world in varied and unconnected tribal cultures, and importantly they support the interpretation that tattooing can be viewed as a normative cultural phenomenon. However, although providing insightful information on the tattooing practices of these cultures they tell us little about the practice in contemporary Western culture apart from the notion that tattoos communicate group membership. As such, they should be considered limited when considering the practice from a contemporary Western perspective.

Psychological and Criminological Studies

Although most of the psychological and criminological literature tends to explain tattooing as a result of an individual prognosis of pathology some of this literature has attempted to explore the relationship between tattooing and in-group cohesion. This literature also tends to be less condemning than others that attribute tattooing to individual character flaws. As Sanders explains:

the literature that focuses on incarcerated tattooed persons or that posits a relationship between criminal behaviour and tattoo possession tends to be less strident and condemnatory ... it is more common ... for the research with incarcerated persons to stress the importance of the tattoo as a symbolic affirmation of valued associations and identities or as a response to the prison experience itself ... the primary theme that runs through most of the studies of tattooed prisoners is that being tattooed is a functional response to the 'identity stripping' experienced by all those thrust involuntarily into the depersonalized environment of the total institution (2008: 39-40).

This assessment can be considered a little generous in its claims that the primary theme running through these studies concerns inmates functional response to identity stripping – there is still a great deal of criminological literature that views tattooing as problematic – but it raises an important issue present in the more positive criminological literature, which is a focus on the way that tattoos can act as symbols that strengthen the chains of interdependency among incarcerated individuals and/or gang members. A number of authors (Burma 1959; Taylor 1968; DeMello 1993, 2000; Govenar 1988; Phelan and Hunt 1998) have thus moved beyond attempting to demonstrate an association between tattooing and criminality *per se* in order to elucidate the reasons why tattooing is so popular among those individuals who also happen to be involved in criminal or deviant activities. In consideration of imprisoned individuals, several authors have focused on how these individuals use their tattoos in order to create a sense of community that is otherwise denied to them. For example, Phelan and Hunt demonstrate that

'the clothes, hairstyles, jewellery, eye wear, and other adornments...available to those on the outside' are not available to imprisoned individuals, therefore 'the body is the primary material used to convey self-definitions to others' (1998: 292). This is re-iterated DeMello in her consideration of the 'loca' tattoo 'which gives the name of the convict's neighbourhood of origin ... these tattoos are extremely important in prison, as they serve as a reminder of the community to which the displaced convict belongs' (DeMello 1993: 11; see also DeMello 2000), thereby re-affirming interdependencies within their figurations, both those 'on the inside', and the outside. Taylor's earlier study of girls in borstals also noted this communicative aspect: 'their tattoos made them feel good, gave them a permanent record of their girlfriends, demonstrated their love, [and] *united them with a group*' (1968: 176, my emphasis).

DeMello (1993, 1995), Govenar (1988) and Phillips (2001) have taken their consideration of the practice out of institutionalised settings in order to examine more generally how the practice is used among (criminal) gangs. Gang tattoos mark an individual's membership to a particular gang and can be read by those within the gang, and by rivals, who have the necessary knowledge to interpret the designs (where they are coded). The extent and placement of tattooing often represent the individual's commitment to the gang with a high number of gang tattoos, or tattoos placed in very visible places such as the face, demonstrating a high level of commitment to the gang lifestyle (Miller 1995). Tattooed gang members are often shunned not only by 'regular' society but also by established members of tattoo figurations as they represent the 'shadier' side of the practice, and enforce its continued association with deviance (DeMello 1993, 2000; Phillips 2001). Nevertheless, these studies are important as they go beyond the limited assertion that tattooing is adopted by gang members because they are criminals and explores the importance of the practice in fostering a particular group identity; that is, the strengthening of the chains of interdependency within their figurations through the corporeal act of tattooing. Furthermore, by allowing tattooees their own voice in the research these studies are able to elucidate why it is that tattooing

is such a popular form of identity formation amongst the other opportunities available to them.

Sociological Studies

Anthropology has demonstrated how tattooing was adopted in specific ways by various tribal societies as a marker of group solidarity (Rubin 1988; Vale and Juno 1989; Turner 1991; Gell 1993), and until its spread to wider clientele during the tattoo renaissance, Western tattooing was also associated with particular social groupings as elucidated in the previous chapter; firstly with sideshow and fairground supporters, later with soldiers and sailors, and finally with so called undesirable groups such as bikers and gangs. More recent sociological and cultural research has continued to demonstrate how tattooing remains a popular way of marking group solidarity among deviant groups such as bikers and gangs (DeMello 1993, 1995a, 2000; Miller 1995), as well as focusing attention of specific subcultures who use tattooing to assert group loyalties, including Goths (Kosut 2000, Hodkinson 2002), Straightedgers (Atkinson 2004; Mullaney 2012), Metalheads (Arnett 1996), and Punks (Hebdige 1979; Vale and Juno 1989; Baron 1989a, 1989b; Wojcik 1995). These studies often focus on the ability of tattooing to represent cultural 'noise' (Hebdige 1979), or 'dirt' (Douglas 1980), as well as the importance of the practice in fostering in-group loyalty to the subculture itself, and to attendant lifestyles. This body of literature forms the largest sociological consideration of tattooing yet is varied in the myriad ways it addresses the practice. I wish to begin this section by offering a consideration of the group who has received by far the most academic attention for its tattooing practices: modern primitives.

Modern primitivism was founded on the West coast of America in the late 1970s by Fakir Musafar and a group of like-minded friends who sought to mimic the body rituals of tribal societies, including large scale tattooing, scarification and flesh hook suspensions; Musafar claims modern primitives – also known as neo-primitives – to be individuals who 'respond to primal urges and do something with the body' (interview in Vale and Juno 1989: 13). In 1989 Vale and Juno's *Re/Search12*:

Modern Primitives (here on just *Modern Primitives*) was published, with the authors claiming, 'amidst an almost universal feeling of powerlessness to 'change the world,' individuals are changing what they *do* have power over: *their own bodies*' (4, original emphasis). Fakir Musafar has argued that the modern primitive *movement* followed the publication of this book: 'the role models and archetypes ... found in *Modern Primitives* encouraged a whole new generation of people to use their bodies for self-expression ... the modern primitive movement had been born' (Musafar 1996: 327). However, I propose that this eulogising claim should be dismissed and that the book is best thought of as a native metacommentary, reflecting a particular point of view of a relatively small subculture within the figurations of individual's interested in body modification. Nevertheless, the movement has received considerable academic attention with numerous scholarly articles (Eubanks 1996; Rosenblatt 1997; Klesse 2000; Turner 2000; Atkinson and Young 2001; Cummings 2001), and most books or theses on tattooing devoting at least part of their attention to the movement (e.g. Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008; Lodder 2010), to the extent that some authors have conflated modern primitivism as representative of body modification culture as a whole (e.g. Turner 2000). While the extent and importance of this subculture has, I argue, been largely overstated, studies of modern primitivism have successfully brought the practice of tattooing to academic attention.

Individuals who identify as modern primitives forward many motives for engaging in the subcultures body rituals, including spirituality, rites of passage, fun, sexual enhancement, the importance of pain, aesthetics, group affiliation and shock value (Vale and Juno 1989; Myers 1992; Rosenblatt 1997; Klesse 2000). Key to these motives is a rejection of modern society and a commitment to sexual freedom and bodily expression, coded in a longing for the 'authentic primitive' (Klesse 2000):

Including tattooing as part of a homology of style, these individuals (with a core membership in the sixteen- to thirty-year old age range) ask to be treated as modern tribalists of the urban jungle. Rejecting both the traditional Western image of the marked individual as deviant and the often dehumanizing way in which individuals are treated in modern urban life,

they intend to capture the spirit of acceptance that tribal cultures exhibit towards tattooing (Atkinson 2003a: 100)

This quotation highlights much of the philosophy of modern primitives who claim to adopt 'primitive' body rituals to reconnect themselves with their inner selves and with an authentic past that, for those that identify as modern primitives, is missing in modern society. As Musafar claims: 'in pure, 'primitive' societies there is no cruelty, ugliness, no possessive attitudes, no sexual violence and no transgression' (Vale and Juno, 1989: 21; *BP & MPQ* 1 [2]: 4), a fallacious claim that will be addressed below.

The reasons that modern primitives propose for their tattooing (and related practices) are varied yet whilst a concern with expressing 'cultural disaffection', and an attempt to recover and express the self through the revival of non-Western body techniques are prominent concerns, what unites adherents of modern primitivism is an overriding concern between the self and the social whole:

the intense individual act of getting tattooed or pierced... for modern primitives has also the meaning of *creating collectivity* ... James Myers (1992) has researched contemporary forms of radical body modification in the San Francisco bay area. He concludes that modern primitivism is so popular with contemporary body modifiers because they recognize a need for initiation rituals. People look for communal rites, which are perceived as being absent in Western culture (Klesse 2000: 22, original emphasis)

Furthermore, as Rosenblatt claims in his discussion of the movement; 'tattooing is both a public and a private act. When people talk about their tattoos, about getting tattoos, and about living with tattoos, they move back and forth between what it means to them and the reactions other people have to their being tattooed' (1997: 306). These quotes clearly demonstrate how modern primitivism can be characterised as the study of a particular social grouping by exposing how members attempt to connect themselves to one another by drawing on traditional tribal tattooing (and related techniques). Furthermore, much of the corporeal alteration undergone by these individuals is undertaken within a group context as a

communal rite, and/or at studios that specialise in primitive forms of body modification and are operated by other modern primitives (Vale and Juno 1989; Myers 1992; Rosenblatt 1997).

The criticisms of the modern primitivism movement are twofold. The first concerns the philosophy of modern primitivism's adherents which is based on an unquestioning cultural appropriation of non-Western body practices as something 'pure', coalesced around a reliance on the concept of an 'authentic primitive society', and the notion that the body is something over which every person has control (Eubanks 1996). A number of authors have been condemnatory in their analysis of the philosophy of the modern primitives:

The 'primitive' in the discourse of modern primitivism is a catch-all without any geographical and historical specificity, a homogenizing fantasy. Modern primitives seem to be more interested in the bodily practices of the 'primitive models' than in a thorough exploration of other societies' philosophies ... [and] is deeply informed by the ambivalences of stereotyping and racialized representation ... Images and representations of cultures labelled 'primitive' are conjured up in order to exploit them in a personal identification strategy (Klesse 2000: 31-34)

In adopting such a philosophy the modern primitive movement denies the cultural context and history of the myriad of tribal cultures and offers members of these cultures no agency; their body markings become nothing more than commodities (Eubanks 1996). This unquestioning and romanticized philosophy also reaffirms dualisms such as self/other, modern/primitive and nature/culture which lie at the heart of the Western ideology, and attempts to connect with an 'authentic primitive culture' affirms the West's conception of a linear and single history rather than recognizing the multiplicity of histories that exist. Finally, at the heart of modern primitive philosophy is the notion that 'marking one's own body is a free and radical gesture against [the] working of power' (Eubanks 1996: 75; see also Pitts 2003), based on another romanticized vision that the body is an unmarked surface upon which culture can be inscribed and over which everybody has control.

Conceptualizing the body in such a way ignores that the bodies of women and people of colour are already marked as outsiders and thus subject to the powers of sexism and racism, whilst also assuming that the body is something that can be discussed outside of culture: 'a clear manifestation of the West's construction of the nature/culture dichotomy as a rigidly separated and almost wholly antagonistic' (ibid. 76). The cultural appropriation of these practices has also been questioned by the very individuals that modern primitives seek to mimic:

We, the members of OPACT (Original People against Cultural Theft), respectfully ask that you desist in your promotion of our symbols, scripts and images by those who have no connection to our aboriginal societies. While you insist that you are merely honouring us, you are displaying a blatant disrespect in regards to how important these symbols and images are to us. The many thousands of young Americans who brand themselves with the marks of people from distant lands have never earned the right to bear them. The so-called tribal tattoo movement has represented Borneo warrior tattoos as just another design... Please think about what you are doing when you appropriate these practices. We also have to ask the question: Who gave you the right to profit from that which is not yours? We call for a boycott of all tattoo shops, henna parlours and fake spirit leaders/healers. Leave the original people alone. We want no part of your materialistic outlook. Stop the wholesale abuse of indigenous peoples ('Cultural Theft', *Skin & Ink* 1999:7, quoted in Cummings 2001: 308-309)

The second criticism of modern primitivism is that, despite the large amount of academic attention this movement has received, it is, I argue, a small and esoteric subculture and should not be conflated with as representing all tattoo figurations as some authors have done (e.g. Turner 2000).¹⁴ Much of the overemphasis as to the size of this subculture is to be found in the misreading of *Modern Primitives* (Vale

¹⁴ Whilst Turner does not refer explicitly to modern primitives he does refer to contemporary tattooing as 'contemporary primitivism' and dismisses the practice as ironic, thin and cliché because of the 'meaningless' nature when adopted by non-tribal individuals, a contention he can only arrive at via the assumption that contemporary body modifiers are unsuccessfully attempting to reproduce the social significance of non-modern practices (see Lodder 2010: 27).

and Juno 1989). Despite claiming to be 'an anthropological enquiry into a contemporary social enigma' (ibid. back cover), 'many of the contributors to *Modern Primitives* do not refer to themselves as modern primitives but share some sensibilities with some aspects of the agenda of this particular network' (Siorat 2005: 208). Contained within the book are 24 interviews yet only two of those – Fakir Musafar and close friend and fellow founder of modern primitivism Jim Ward – explicitly discuss their practices in primitivist terms. Several tattoo artists within the book discuss being inspired by tribal aesthetics but do not claim an involvement with modern primitivism itself while others distance themselves from it or define their relationship in completely contrasting terms: 'I don't think they are primitive' (Genesis P. Orrige in Vale and Juno 1989: 178). Others, such as Sheree Rose or Raelyn Gallina, 'hold a liberated, queer and resolutely modern model of empowered female sexuality' (Lodder 2010: 24), at odds with the so called 'primitive' philosophy.

Because of this misreading of *Modern Primitives*, and the accompanying scholarly articles that have already been discussed, the extent of the modern primitive movement has been considerably exaggerated. Though I do not wish to completely disregard the subculture as existing anywhere outside of San Francisco as Lodder (2010) has done – Sweetman (1999a), and Atkinson and Young (2001), find individuals with involvement in the movement in Britain and Canada respectively for example – I do propose that modern primitivism should be considered a small esoteric subculture which does little to reflect the tattooing narratives of the large majority of tattoo enthusiasts. As Sweetman claims, though it is true that 'certain 'hardcore' body modifiers have naively appropriated non-Western forms of body modification in the belief that this somehow lends greater authenticity to such practices' (1999b: 182), very few individuals – just one of the respondents of this research – relate to their tattoos in these ways. As such, studies of modern primitivism tell us little about tattooing more generally and are only informative in demonstrating how modern primitives use tattooing in order to exhibit affiliation to the group itself; as such they share many similarities with the studies of other subcultures that will be discussed below. This is not to say that

modern primitivism has had no effect tattoo figurations at all. Many people were most likely introduced to tattooing (and related modifications) through *Modern Primitives* and associated publications such as *Body Play and Modern Primitives Quarterly*, and respondents for the current research project did regularly discuss the popularity of tribal tattooing in the mid-1990s to early 2000s, demonstrating the scale of the *imagery* associated with this movement.¹⁵ Nevertheless there is little empirical evidence to suggest the large scale adoption of modern primitivism as a label of self-identity (Lodder 2010).

Having examined the subculture that has received the most considerable academic attention I wish to focus briefly on some other subcultures whose tattooing practices have come under the academic lens. Unlike modern primitivism which has been studied exclusively for its body modification activities, these studies have tended to focus more generally on the subculture under consideration and thus tattooing is just one aspect of their homology of style. Nevertheless, the number of subcultures which use tattooing as part of their identity formation is extensive and includes, but is not limited to, biker gangs (DeMello 1993, 1995a, 2000; Miller 1995), Goths (Kosut 2000, Hodkinson 2002), Straightedgers (Atkinson 2004; Mullaney 2012), Metalheads (Arnett 1996), Punks (Hebdige 1979; Baron 1989; Wojcik 1995), Psychobillies, Riot Grrrls, and Ravers (Atkinson 2003a). I do not intend to focus on these studies in detail, but rather explore the similarities exhibited by these subcultures in their use of tattooing before moving on to consider whether subcultural theories are appropriate for the study of tattoo enthusiasts as a whole. The first similarity of all these disparate subcultures is that they can all, to greater or lesser degrees, be considered as oppositional cultures and often adopt tattooing as part of this oppositional identity. Subcultural theory demonstrates how subcultures commonly engage in social resistance against dominant middle-class values and use provocative and morally challenging styles as a form of creating cultural 'noise' (Hebdige 1979). Not only do these styles challenge dominant sensibilities about the presentation of the body but they also

¹⁵ A further discussion of the influence of tribal imagery is offered in chapter five

serve to create in-group cohesiveness, due to its permanence tattooing is a particularly effective strategy as a primary mark of thick/hot loyalties (Turner 2000).

Subcultural membership is often divided between authentic and inauthentic members (Hebdige 1979; Fox 1987; Muggleton 2000) and tattoos frequently symbolize members of the former group. Fox (1987), for example, observes how true 'hardcore', that is authentic, punks, demonstrate commitment to the lifestyle and the group by making severe and long lasting alterations to their body such as highly visible swastika tattoos. Likewise, Arnett, observes how for 'proper' Metalheads, as opposed to 'poseurs', 'multiple tattoos are obligatory' (1996: 71) and he describes many of the tattoos sported by individuals he uses as case studies. Finally, Atkinson (2003b; see also Wood 1999, 2003; Mullaney 2012) has demonstrated how Straightedge subculture is considered hierarchical with those considered the more committed members having the most extensive, most visible, and most overtly political tattoos. In all these examples tattooing serves not only to create cultural dissent by jarring with middle-class sensibilities about the body and its display, but also to demonstrate commitment to the subculture itself, and attendant lifestyles. Although only one aspect of the homology of styles adopted by various subcultures, the permanence of tattooing tends to demonstrate a higher level of commitment – or figurational embedness to use the terminology utilised in this thesis – as it cannot be cast off as easily as clothing, or modified as easily as hairstyles. These studies can inform us about how different subcultures use tattooing as part of their identity, but are subcultural theories appropriate for the study of *all* those individuals who choose to be tattooed?

Several authors have suggested that those who bear tattoos can, or should be, considered a distinct subculture or community in their own right (Rosenblatt 1997; Vail 1999a, 1999b; DeMello 2000; Irwin 2000, 2003; Cohen 2000; Sanders 2008) but there are problems with this proposition. The first comes from the contested nature of the terminology itself. The beginnings of subcultural theory can be traced to the Chicago School studies of the 1920s and 30s which discussed how the urbanisation characteristic of early twentieth-century United States led to disenfranchised youth forming delinquent subcultures. Later work, drawing on

Becker (1963) and Goffman (1959, 1963), expanded subcultural studies to include not just deviant subcultures, but also mundane and everyday cultures, including Little League softball teams (Fine 1987), construction workers (Haas 1972), hockey teams (Faulkner 1974; Ingham 1975), occupational settings (Fine 1996; Trice 1993; Haas and Shaffir 1987), and political parties (Grills 1994). In the UK, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was established in 1964 and theorists from the school proposed that subcultures arose as a result of class inequalities with members engaging in social resistance against dominant middle class values. Directing attention towards emergent subcultures of the 1960s and 70s including Punks, Teddy Boys, Mods, and Rockers, CCCS researchers often focused on the styles adopted by subcultural members through processes of bricolage that supported socially challenging ideology (Hebdige 1979: 101). These are just a handful of the studies that have focused on subcultures but they illuminate the contested nature of the term, it is clear that there is no accepted definition of subculture or standard analytical criteria for applying the concept and the extent to which subcultural theory remains a useful framework for studying modern society has also been questioned (Muggleton 2000).

A second problem is that analyses of subcultures focus on the shared meanings and ideologies of specific groups, something not applicable to tattoo figurations. Although all members of tattoo figurations have undergone the corporeal act of tattooing and therefore demonstrate at least some interest in the practice, these individuals are from a wide variety of social backgrounds and lifestyles; whilst many – although by no means all – share certain sensibilities centred on the artistic and meaningful nature of the practice, their interpretations of tattooing are wide and varied. Furthermore, subcultural membership is typically viewed as central to members' sense of self-identity with their lives often organized around the ideologies and activities of the subculture, something which cannot be readily applied to all members of tattoo figurations. Related to this is that subcultural theory tends to conceptualise of subcultures in 'rather tidy conceptual terms', rendering them as 'identifiable, distinguishable, and authentic social conglomerations' (Atkinson 2003a: 104). By doing so, subcultural theory tends to

emphasize class and youth based subcultures at the expense of other subcultural formations and the CCCS, by conceptualizing subculture around notions of style, is also guilty of failing to explore 'social interaction and processes of constructing meanings in everyday life [and] subcultures are nothing more than an arrangement of signs' (ibid.). Subcultural theory can tell us much about the way that myriad different subcultures use tattooing – as evidenced by the discussion of some of these above – but it is insufficient for studying tattooing more generally. However, some studies choose to focus attention on a small subset of tattoo enthusiasts – those they term collectors (Vail 1999a, 1999b) or elite members of tattoo figurations (Irwin 2003) – a consideration of which is offered to consider whether they can illuminate an understanding of tattooing more generally.

The studies by Vail and Irwin focus a distinct subset within tattoo figurations and so, like those who study modern primitives, focus specifically on body modification practices. Vail claims that most studies on tattooing have tended to overlook those individuals for whom tattoos represent a 'master status or identity' (Vail 1999b: 264) and aims to rectify this through his own research. Similarly, Irwin chooses to focus attention on what she considers 'elite' members of the tattooing world which includes tattoo collectors and tattoo artists (most of whom are also collectors). For Vail tattoo collectors are those who 'become heavily tattooed, as differentiated from those who acquire and wear only a few tattoos' (1999b: 261), and in particular are those who bear 'fine art tattoos', although he never makes explicit what this term defines; Irwin is much clearer in this respect by claiming elite tattoos sought by collectors to be the 'best, most expensive, and prestigious tattoos available' with expensive overseas trips often necessary to obtain work from highly recognised artists (Irwin 2003: 30). Both of these authors, in different ways, draw upon deviance theories in order to interrogate the practice of tattooing. Vail draws on Matza's (1982) discussions concerning how individuals' learn to become deviant through processes of affinity, affiliation, and signification, and usefully applies these theories to demonstrate how individuals learn to become collectors as opposed to individuals who simply bear tattoos. He also effectively demonstrates how the 'ever-malleable nature of social meaning and aesthetic values' (1999b: 262) means

the interpretation of tattooing as a socially disvalued form of corporeal alteration is challenged as it becomes discussed and displayed as art (see also Lodder 2010). Both authors also discuss how the burgeoning popularity of tattooing has meant that bearing only one or two small, discrete, designs is no longer considered non-normative yet large scale tattooing, and tattooing of 'public' skin,¹⁶ is still considered to be outside conventional appearance norms, and Irwin (2003) builds on this to claim that tattoo collectors occupy a dual status of negative and positive deviants. Collectors, for Irwin, are negative deviants because of the scorn they often face in conventional society yet they construct themselves as 'high culture icons' or 'popular celebrities' within the tattooing subculture (her terms) meaning they are also positive deviants due to the high status and prestige they garner within this culture. Irwin's paper, like Vail's work, is useful in the way she unveils the relative nature of norms concerning appropriate bodily appearance according to factors such as concealability, social context, and gender. However, there are a number of criticisms that can be made of both authors.

Firstly, by focusing a particularly small and esoteric group of tattooed individuals they fail to enlighten us much about tattooing more generally. Vail in particular is guilty of this, yet despite his assertion that his claims are representative of collectors only, a number of them *do* speak more generally, for example: 'collecting tattoos involves more than changing the refractory characteristics of skin pigments. It also involves changing the ways that others view the person 'inside' that embellished epidermis. When people choose to become tattooed, they make a statement about who they are, both as individuals and as members of social worlds' (1999b: 264). Whilst I have no wish to dismiss this statement which is itself accurate, this is not specific just to those who 'collect' tattoos and represents the altered interdependencies of the vast majority individuals who choose to undergo this form of alteration. This is also true of Irwin's statement that 'tattoo collectors and artists are proud of their tattooing and willing to show their most recent or 'best' pieces' (2003: 35), a contention also not unique to collectors as evidenced by the pride in unveiling of tattoos by respondents for this study. Finally, the

¹⁶ This is the hand, neck, and face, which cannot be covered by conventional clothing.

contention of both authors that collectors start with one tattoo and then build their collections subsequently is a common experience for tattooed individuals who do not identify as collectors. Both Vail and Irwin also demonstrate a concerning bias towards those individuals who bear 'fine art tattoos' without explaining what is distinct about fine art tattooing as compared to those, for example, who may be heavily tattooed with non-fine art tattoos; this bias seems to result from their own identification with this form of tattooing, Vail as a tattoo collector (1999a), and Irwin as the wife of a fine art tattooist (2003).

Tattooing as a mark of resistance

Many of the psychological and criminological studies already discussed in this chapter propose that individuals who voluntarily chose to be tattooed live outside the norms of conventional society and should be considered resistant to social norms, whilst the adoption of tattooing by working-class figurations and so-called 'social undesirables' discussed in chapter one was also considered to be resistant to mainstream middle class values concerning the body and its display. As Turner states:

Tattooing during the period of nation formation was often part of an oppositional culture in which working class males expressed their class solidarity or occupational solidarity through body marks. State strategies of governmentality interpreted tattoos as part of the culture of the criminal or underclasses. Body marking was now used for classification and stigmatization (2000: 45)

However, it is not until the tattoo renaissance and the adoption of the practice by groups 'doing' identity politics (Dunn 1998; see also chapter one), that researchers began to explore how individuals have *purposefully* adopted tattooing as a form of cultural dissent and political protest. In this section I offer a review of the large body of literature – almost exclusively from sociological and cultural researchers – that has explored tattooing as a mark of individual and/or group manifestations of resistance. Though individuals may utilise tattooing as markers of individuality or group-belonging as already discussed, the studies discussed below have largely

focused attention on the deliberate adoption of tattooing as an oppositional act against mainstream culture norms (where these are seen as supporting white, male, and middle class values). Most notably, a number of authors have devoted attention to the use of the practice by women (Tseelon 1995; Mifflin 2013; DeMello 2000; Pitts 2003; Sanders 2008), gay and queer individuals (DeMello 2000; Pitts 2003), and Straightedgers (Wood 1999, 2003; Atkinson 2003a, 2003b; Mullaney 2012). Before exploring some of these studies I wish to discuss the extent to which tattooing per se can be considered as resistant.

As a practice involving the breaking of the skin in a non-medicalised setting, close personal contact with a non-intimate, bleeding, and pain, tattooing contradicts the prevalent view in contemporary figurations that the body should be an unmarked surface and pain something unnatural that should be avoided wherever possible. Despite this, numerous theorists have demonstrated how invasive plastic surgery, dangerous dieting regimes, the wearing of makeup, and constricting clothing are pervasive in Western society as hegemonic ideals of the youthful, slim, and attractive body are continually promoted as something for which we should all strive, particularly for women (Bartky 1988; Grosz 1994; Tseelson 1995; Gimlin 2002). Why does tattooing, which in these terms could be considered similar to other body techniques of contemporary consumer culture, so often face objection? Sweetman, argues the reason for this to be twofold; firstly, tattooing ‘arguably move the body further away from, rather than closer towards, the hegemonic Western ideal of the youthful, slim and *unmarked* body’ (1999b: 166, original emphasis), and secondly, the process of tattooing transgresses ‘a fundamental tenet of modern individuality – that of the foreclosed and bounded self’ (ibid. 178) – what Elias terms *homo clausus* (2000), or ‘closed personality’ (van Krieken 1998), in which individual bodies are considered as self-contained units – through the temporary opening up of the body by needles. Finally, the permanence of tattooing also raises conflicts with the fleeting nature of fashion and the supposed fluidity of identity (Falk 1994; Entwistle 2000) in contemporary consumer culture by permanently committing the bearer to a particular narrative. However, there are a

number of ambiguities in considering tattooing, per se, as being a form of resistance.

Firstly, despite contentions that tattooing moves individuals bodies away from hegemonic ideals of consumer society the increasing popularity of the practice, and its continued appropriation in fashion and advertising, means the extent to which it can be considered resistant is contested. As more individuals choose to undergo this form of corporeal alteration, especially those in the public eye such as sports stars and musicians, and as tattoo enthusiasts and tattoo artists increasingly campaign for the practice to be viewed as a normative form of corporeal alteration and a legitimate art-form, pro-tattooing ideologies increasingly enter our collective and individual habitus (Elias 2000; Atkinson 2003a); as a result it is not so easily identified as a mark of outsider groups (Elias and Scotson 2008; chapter five). Furthermore, though tattooing may challenge the notion of the body as *homo clausus* by rendering it temporarily open through the insertion of ink with needles, most tattoo narratives *do* subscribe to the notion that pain is something to be avoided. For some, the pain of acquiring a tattoo is of central importance, particularly for those who identify as modern primitives (Vale and Juno 1989; Myers 1992, Rosenblatt 1997), and some respondents for this study did state it could be cathartic or discussed how the pain of acquisition stopped everybody from getting one, thereby rendering tattoos more unique. Nevertheless, for most individuals, the pain of tattooing was something to be endured rather than enjoyed, and overwhelming emphasis was placed on the importance of the finished product as aesthetically pleasing and/or meaningful. Finally, while the permanence of tattooing may challenge dominant ideologies of fashion as being fleeting, many who acquire tattoos do consider them fashionable, obtain designs considered fashionable, and/or chose to be tattooed in places that are easily concealable to allow them the opportunity to change their style and only reveal their tattoos in appropriate settings. As a result, characterising tattooing per se as being resistant is difficult in most cases. The adoption of tattooing as a form of resistance by certain groups, although still contested, is less disputed.

By far the most attention has been given to the resistant potential for tattooing when adopted by women (e.g. DeMello 1995, 2000; Mifflin 2013; Sweetman 1999a, 1999c; Braunberger 2000; Jeffreys 2000; Riley 2002; Van Lenning 2002; Pitts 2003; Atkinson 2002, 2003a; Harlow 2008; Sanders 2008). The arguments over the extent to which tattooing offers women the potential to resist dominant patriarchal values are diverse and wide-ranging. As such, what is offered here is a brief discussion of how tattooing can serve as a method of resistance for women, along with an overview of some of the ambiguities encountered. Although evidence of tattooed women has been found both historically and cross-culturally, the wide-spread adoption of the practice by women in the West coincided with the period from the 1960s when women's movements were engaged in identity politics aimed at overthrowing oppressive, patriarchal values, and the body was used as a site of agency, liberation and sexual exploration (Wroblewski 1992; DeMello 2000; Mifflin 2013):

Tattooed women overstep the physical boundaries of their bodies by permanently modifying them, and they overstep the boundaries of femininity by embodying a formerly masculine skin ... Out of bounds and openly mocking categories of class and gender, the tattooed female body represents a critique of middle-class values ... rejecting middle-class assumptions about the body, and in particular, female bodies... this choice is, I argue, *a political as well as a personal statement* ... tattooed female bodies are an attempt to liberate the objectified body, literally inscribing it with alternative forms of power (DeMello 1995: 77-79, my emphasis).

For DeMello, female tattooing is a deliberate strategy adopted by some women to resist gendered norms of appearance as they concern the supposed modesty and unmarked nature of female bodies. This is done in two ways, firstly by transforming the surface of the skin with tattoos, and secondly by operating to control the male gaze.

In the discussion above it was noted that tattooing per se went against the hegemonic Western ideals of the unmarked body but women are under increased

pressure to conform to these ideals as compared to men (Grosz 1994; Gimlin 2002); as such just having a tattoo is more easily considered a subversive or resistant act for women as the passive, docile, body of a woman is given 'voice' through the inscriptions on (in) her skin (see Harlow 2008). Further to this, tattooing has traditionally been associated with men and continues to carry masculine connotations (DeMello 2000). By choosing to mark themselves in such a supposedly masculine way, women are seen to be inverting traditional roles of male/female, masculine/feminine, nature/culture etc. (Sweetman 1999c); this is particularly true of women who choose overtly masculine designs such as panthers and large tribal tattoos. By subverting gendered appearance norms through the acquisition of tattoos women's bodies become a literal site of resistance to – rather than a location of – patriarchal power (Bartky 1988; Grosz 1994). Several authors have also proposed the adoption of tattooing can serve as a form of resistance for women by reclaiming the female body from (patriarchal) oppression, typically after abusive relationships or rape (Gallina 1989; Vale and Juno 1989; Myers 1992; Pitts 2003; Sanders 2008), or following motherhood (Sweetman 1999c); for these authors the body is literally and figuratively reclaimed by women who are victims of oppressive partners or rapists, or because of priority given to children, through the act of tattooing. Finally, by tattooing their bodies, 'women can be said to control and subvert the ever-present 'male gaze' by forcing men (and women) to look at their bodies in a manner that keeps them in control' (DeMello 1995: 74). However, as was the case with tattooing per se, the resistant potential for tattooed women is ambiguous.

Though women may subvert gendered norms of appearance by tattooing their bodies, an alternative interpretation is that they are also reinforcing these norms by emphasising the dichotomous nature of male/female, masculine/feminine; this is emphasised by the adoption of tattooing as a sign of masculinity by female to male transsexuals (Sweetman 1999c). This is not to say that masculine norms of appearance cannot be subverted, as evidenced by the 'camp appropriation of 'traditional' tattoo motifs into gay iconography...a parody of straight masculinity that subverts and undermines the conventional associations and connotations of

[tattooing]' (ibid. 65). However, evidence demonstrates that individuals differentiate between masculine and feminine designs with women typically choose the latter in order to make themselves more beautiful and/or sexy, and so that their femininity and heterosexuality are not at risk (DeMello 1995: 76; see also Sweetman 1999a, 1999c; Atkinson 2002, 2003a; present study); as such women arguably move themselves closer to, rather than further away, from hegemonic ideals of feminine beauty in their adoption of tattooing body projects. Adopting tattooing as a strategy for controlling the 'male gaze' is also difficult; as Seaton states:

the tattoo is animated not only by the movement of the skin or the tension of contradictions which it embodies, but by the spectator's active gaze; a gaze which not only receives passively that which is projected, but which actively contributes to that which is already there (1987: 51)

Furthermore, tattooing the body may have the effect of drawing the gaze to the female body rather than acting to control it. As with tattooing per se, the reading of women's tattoos as resistant is problematic, in part because of the polysemic nature of such forms of body modification (Blanchard 1994; Atkinson 2003a), but also because the tattoos themselves are only one feature of an individual's homology of style which demonstrates the:

difficulty of assessing the subversive or resistant potential of *any* form of body modification in isolation when the way it is read will depend in part upon the tattooee or piercee's *overall* appearance – or the syntagmatic relationships between the tattoo or piercing and those other features that contribute to the body modifier's look as a whole – *as well as* the attitude that the observer bring to bear upon the corporal ensemble in question (Sweetman 1999c: 71, original emphasis)

Though analysing tattooing per se, and female tattooing, as resistant is beset by ambiguities, the analysis of straightedge tattooing that I will focus on next is far more straightforward. The term straightedge refers to individuals who have chosen lifestyle choices counter to what they perceive as the hedonistic values of modern

societies (Wood 1999, 2003; Atkinson 2003a, 2003b; Mullaney 2012). Typically this involves refusal to eat meat, partake in recreational drug use, drink alcohol, smoke, or have promiscuous sex, and straightedge individuals often deem those who do not ascribe to their values as being morally inferior. Considering straightedge a cohesive subculture is difficult as there are a number of subgroups within this figuration; this includes those who have incorporated vegan or animal liberation ideologies into their lifestyles, hardcore members who claim absolute purity and shun the use of over the counter and prescription drugs as well as natural stimulants such as caffeine and chocolate, and a small subset of militant members (termed hate-edgers) who aggressively promote the straightedge lifestyle through violence against non-members. However, despite this diversification, all straightedgers utilise tattooing as a key component of their homology of style (which is usually considered as similar to punk – see Wood 1999, 2003) and their tattoos not only act as an identifying marks of group membership discussed above, but as highly visible political statements. Some of these statements, which serve as ‘public beacons of identification’ (Atkinson 2003b: 210), may only be able to be read by those who have the necessary knowledge; this includes tattoos such as ‘X’, ‘XXX’ or ‘sXe’ which serve as signifiers of a straightedge identity. However, a number of tattoos employed by straightedgers are more overtly political and placed in highly visible locations intended to be read by the general public, these are ‘constructed as a form of resistance to the supposed moral laxity and physical weakness prevalent’ in modern society and examples include ‘poison free’, ‘100% pure’, ‘pray for fools’, ‘curing addiction’, and ‘fuck your falsehood’, which are often entwined with ‘classic North American tattoo icons such as hearts, banners, sparrows, flag, and daggers’ (ibid. 212-213).

The analysis of straightedge as an oppositional culture and the adoption of tattooing as a specific device for displaying resistance by straightedge individuals is unambiguous. Unlike tattooing per se, and female tattooing, the politicised slogans members of straightedge culture choose to have tattooed upon their bodies, such as poison free, fuck your falsehood etc., are very difficult to mis-interpret, and leave little room for ambiguities. Studies of straightedge successfully demonstrate how

resistance can be 'played out through the body in 'here and now' micro-sociological contexts of interaction' (Atkinson 2003b: 201) rather than through the analyses of large oppositional movements, and Atkinson (2003a, 2003b) has also fruitfully combined Elias's theories of civilizing processes to demonstrate how straightedge can be read not only as resistant, but also as a lifestyle that 'hyperbolically embraces rather than rejects dominant social codes about the body' (2003b: 203). However, whilst this provides a useful framework for exploring smaller scale, and more personal, resistance and pays attention to the ways in which tattooing may paradoxically be considered resistant whilst also adhering to dominant social codes about the body, we should be careful about applying the study of straightedge individuals more generally to tattoo figurations. Straightedge is a very small subset of tattoo figurations as a whole and the movement is far more prominent in North America and Canada than in Great Britain. Additionally, as has already elucidated and will be developed throughout this thesis, the extent to which tattooing can be considered resistant is increasingly challenged as the practice enters mainstream habituses; as a result, the resistant potential of straightedge tattooing may be diminished as figurations become familiar with tattooing.

Research Questions and the Preliminary Case for Figural Sociology

The current literature about tattooing successfully illuminates how tattooing is implicated in the quest for individuality, the fostering of in-group loyalties, and/or the resistance to mainstream cultural values; but there are several shortfalls. By largely focusing on just one of these areas researchers have been unable to examine how these factors may overlap in the lives of individuals who have chosen to become tattooed. There is also little account of why individuals choose tattooing body projects amongst the plethora of options available in the structuring of their identities. Finally, the present literature has presented a compelling case for the increasingly levels of acceptability and popularity of tattooing but failed to sufficiently examine the processes that have been responsible for this. It is these shortfalls that form the main research questions for this thesis:

- How do individuals interpret their tattooing practices and how does this interpretation differ dependent upon the figurations in which they are enmeshed?
- How and why do individuals choose tattooing amongst the range of body project available to them?
 - What is attractive about permanent means of restructuring the self?
 - Why choose a practice that is not yet fully accepted over ones that are, such as dieting or weight lifting?
- How and why has tattooing become an increasingly popular and acceptable form of corporeal alteration?
 - What processes have led to the increased popularity and visibility of the practice?
 - To what extent is the practice an accepted form of corporeal alteration?

To answer these questions I draw on Atkinson (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) and propose that we reconfigure our understanding of tattooing practices in the UK around Elias's notion of figurations. Elias figurational sociology¹⁷ was his attempt to overcome what he perceived as one of the overarching problems of sociological enquiry; the tendency to treat the individual and the social as if they were two independent, rather than interdependent, entities. Figurational sociology 'points to how social life is best conceived of as a grid of interrelated actions and processes, and how individual lives are tied to others through extensive chains of interdependency – literally as a web of interconnected people' (Atkinson 2003a: xi). The chains of interdependency within figurations can be intimate or detached and are not limited by physical proximity; they can also shorten or lengthen through an individual's life course as their involvement within figurations fluctuates, or may break completely as individuals die or leave figurations in which they are

¹⁷ Elias himself later changed this term and came to write of process sociology as he considered figuration too static, similar to terms such as 'society', 'individual', and 'social' which he was attempting to overcome. I have chosen to continue using the term 'figuration' as it easier to discuss tattoo figurations than tattoo processes which suggests the actual act of acquiring a tattoo. Nevertheless I still subscribe to the processual nature of figurations.

enmeshed. Figurations have a relative independence from individuals in the singular but not from individuals in the multiple (Shilling 2012) with the most basic figuration consisting of just two people. However, the concept can be used equally well to discuss larger social groupings from families, teams or subcultures, to countries, continents, and even the population of the world which may be considered a global figuration. In consideration of the current project, those with tattoos are thus connected with all other tattooed individuals as a result of their shared form of corporeal alteration. This is not to claim that all tattooed individuals are a homogenous group that can be considered as a subculture or community in their own right, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, and as a result I stress the plural by discussing tattoo figurations, but nevertheless, all tattooed individuals can be seen as forming the basic chains of interdependency as a result of certain and at least minimally shared experiences of body modification.

Key to Elias's concerns, and crucial to the current enterprise, is the body itself, which he views as an unfinished biological entity (Shilling 2012), and the issue of how sociogenetic changes (changes in society) are reflected by psychogenetic changes (changes in individual habituses). Elias's most famous work, *The Civilizing Process* (2000), demonstrates these concerns effectively. While human societies are constantly undergoing process associated with civilization or decivilization, and there is no start or end point to these processes, the era between the medieval period and court absolutism witnessed an acceleration of changes in modes of bodily expression that Elias examined via accompanying changes in the indicators of altercations in manners and thresholds of shame and embarrassment. During this period natural functions of the body came to be managed and organized, aided by technological developments such as the enclosed lavatory, and the body became subject to expanding taboos, particularly in relation to nakedness and natural functions. This separation of the body from nature helped to provide the basis for differentiating between individuals on the basis of their physical worth and their manners and dispositions came to be taken as markers of their value (Shilling 2012). These codes of behaviour moved from being imposed through the direct sanctions of others to becoming internalised by the properly 'civilized' member of

society who demonstrated shame when they transgressed these codes of behaviour and embarrassment for others whom transgressed them; in Elias's terms, the sociogenesis of manners was accompanied by on-going psychogenetic developments in the individual. Accompanying these developments in manners was the need for individuals to exert a higher level of foresight than in previous eras by anticipating the consequences of their actions, controlling outbursts of emotion and developing a higher level of mutual identification with others.

Finally, Elias stressed the need for sociological enquiry to view phenomena as the result of long-term, and often unplanned, developments rather than as static social 'facts'. In this context Elias' sociology is a historical sociology, although he would reject this terminology as it implies the possibility and legitimacy of a nonhistorical sociological and argued that it should be assumed that all sociology is undertaken historically (Van Krieken 1998). Regarding the historical and usually unplanned nature of sociological phenomena it is worth quoting Elias at length:

It is simple enough: plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way. This basic tissue resulting from many single plans and actions of men can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created. From this interdependence of people arises an order *sui generis*, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it. It is this order of interweaving human impulses and strivings, this social order, which determines the course of historical change; it underlies the civilizing process (quoted in Van Krieken 1998: 49-50)

In consideration of the current project, it is not enough to attempt to elucidate why it is that tattoos are so popular in contemporary Britain; the long term developments concerning the importance of the body as a signifier of the self, the changing rules regarding the acceptability of bodily display, the development of consumer culture, and the relationships of power between established and outsider groups that have led to campaigns for tattooing to be considered a legitimate form

of art and of bodily expression, must be examined. These points will be developed throughout this thesis.

Elias's body of work is broad and encompasses a large amount of sociological investigation. As such, what has been mapped out here is necessarily brief. However, I have outlined the main elements of Elias's figurational sociology that I argue allows for a more thorough investigation of twenty-first century tattooing practices in Britain. By adopting a figurational approach the altered chains of interdependency that individuals face as a result of their corporeal modification can be investigated without resorting to an inadequate conception of tattooing as *either* an individualistic act, *or* a maker of group solidarity, *or* a marker of resistance, as much of the current research surrounding the practice has done, or conflate the large numbers of tattoo enthusiasts as belonging to a distinct community or subculture. Adopting 'an analysis of tattoos as *concurrent* markers of independence (qua individuality) and interdependence (qua group affiliation)' allows for a more thorough exploration of the '*processes* through which tattoos become reflective of specific personality structures toward, and cultural sensibilities about, the body and its modification' (Atkinson 2003a: 5, my emphasis). In chapter four I offer a more in-depth analysis of the utility of Elias's figurational sociology for investigating contemporary tattooing practices by examining the similar figurational patterns encountered by tattooed individuals in the corporeal process of acquiring a tattoo, the basic chain of interdependency between tattooed individuals. I also explore how interdependencies with three key figurations – family, friends, and employers (or prospective employers) – affect, and are affected by, the individual's choice to undergo this form of corporeal alteration. Before this, the next chapter discusses the methodology for this research project in order to elucidate how the data for this thesis was generated.

Chapter Three – Methods

In developing the theories that formed what would come to be known as figurational or process sociology Elias did not construct ‘flimsy scaffoldings of abstract concepts...but rather [used] empirical evidence and theory like bricks and mortar’; as a result his work can be thought of as ‘theoretical-empirical’ (Mennell 1992: 94). To analyse the relationship between micro and macro social figurations, and on-going processes of sociogenesis within, and between, figurations, Elias used what would now be termed a mixed methods approach consisting of maps, local landscapes, survey data, interviews, and historical books amongst others (Mennell 1992; Kilminster 2007, 2011; Baur and Ernst 2011). This thesis adopts this approach by conducting a mixed method ethnographic study of tattooing to answer the research questions for this thesis and overcome the shortfalls in the current theorising about the practice identified in the previous chapter. Although tattooing has received considerable interest within academia there has been a paucity of *empirical* investigation exploring tattooing practices in Britain (the most notable exception being Sweetman 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) and this thesis also addresses this deficit. To be able to explore these questions it was necessary for me to submerge myself in tattoo culture to gain the insights of the members who form tattoo figurations – tattoo artists, tattooed individuals, and the media (in particular media focused specifically on tattooing). Therefore, a mixed-method ethnography consisting of participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and media content analysis was chosen as the most effective means of obtaining as much information concerning the practice; offered below is a consideration of why these methods were chosen, and how they most effectively allowed me to answer my research questions.

However, this chapter is not just seeking to repeat what can be read in numerous methodological textbooks; instead the chapter will also focus on issues of researchers’ insider/outsider status (Merton 1972), reflexivity (Bourdieu 2003, 2007; Davies 1999), the detour via detachment (Elias 2007), and the dynamics of disclosure (Song and Parker 1995), to analyse the construction of knowledge *between* researcher and respondents, the interpretation of the data, and the

dissemination of research findings. By doing so I advance the claim that sociological investigation and discourse cannot be conducted completely objectively as Weber proposed with the ideal of 'value freedom', nor should it be, and that what is represented in any piece of sociological literature, the current work included, should only be considered one interpretation of social life. This is not to state that value-freedom itself is not possible within sociological research but that it should be achieved in the sense that 'one ought not to praise or blame the phenomena to be described, or, in other words, that one ought to refrain from any valuation' (Kilminster 2007: 111), rather than taking a completely objective position within the research process, something that is not possible. Instead, social researchers should attempt to achieve what Elias has termed 'object-adequate' or 'reality congruent' knowledge (2009: 27. 54) which builds upon previous research in order to attempt to construct an accurate a picture of their object of study as possible; this is achieved, for Elias, by taking a 'detour via detachment' which is discussed in more detail below.

This is not to dismiss this, nor any other sociological writing, as irrelevant, nor is it to say that I have not undertaken this thesis with rigorous theoretical and epistemological thoroughness, but rather to draw attention to the fact that social science is not testable in the same way as natural sciences, and to acknowledge that my personal biography and theoretical interpretation of the data are important aspects to consider in relation to the conclusions that I draw from the data that is presented within this thesis. In what follows I first offer a discussion on subjectivity, reflexivity and the detour via detachment in social research, before a description of my personal biography and its impact on the research process. The remainder of the chapter is divided into what may be more recognisable as a traditional methods discussion – focusing as I will on access, participant observation, interviewing, and the dissemination of findings – but issues of reflexivity, and involvement and detachment, that impact on my role as researcher will remain key in these discussions. As Elias himself did (Mennell 1992), I welcome, and indeed encourage, further comparative and developmental investigations into tattooing practices both

in the UK and further afield to develop knowledge about contemporary tattooing, the construction of identity, and quests for authenticity.

Insider/Outsider Status, the Detour via Detachment, and Reflexivity

Merton's well known paper *Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1972) examines the extent to which insiders – that is those who share the characteristics of the groups they are studying – and outsiders – that is those who do not – could research and effectively generate knowledge about groups to which they did, or did not, belong. The strong form of the insider doctrine claims that insiders have monopolistic access to particular kinds of knowledge about their group(s) unable to be obtained by an outsider, whilst the weaker form claims a privileged access to knowledge which is easier and less risky to attain than it would be for outsiders. The outsider doctrine by contrast claims that knowledge about groups cannot be developed by insiders because of, at worst, bias, or at best, an inability to sufficiently detach oneself in order to be objective about the group being studied. However, as Merton rightly points out, we are rarely, if ever, completely insiders or outsiders because of the variety of socio-cultural factors that can both coalesce and diverge: '[we] typically confront one another *simultaneously* as insiders and outsiders' (Merton 1972: 22, my emphasis). Although Merton presents his argument in structural terms there are a number of parallels with Elias's theory of involvement and detachment (2007) which demonstrates that researchers are enmeshed within the figuration they are researching for at least the period they are researching it:

while one need not know, in order to understand the structure of molecules, what it feels like to be one of its atoms, in order to understand the functioning of human groups one needs to know, as it were, from inside how human beings experience their own and other groups, and one cannot know without *active participation and involvement* (Elias 1956: 237; quoted in Dunning and Hughes 2013: 159, my emphasis)

Yet obtaining the necessary detachment required to advance the scientific understanding of society may be difficult, particularly when the researcher is

emotionally bonded to the figuration(s) being studied and Elias advocates that competent social researchers should be able to take a 'detour via detachment' in order to develop object-adequate knowledge.

Elias utilises the terms involvement and detachment at the expense of more familiar terms such as subjective and objective in order to 'avoid the associations contained in those [latter] terms of psychological and social attributes being separate entities' (Kilminster 2007: 103). As with all of his work Elias was dedicated to stressing the processual nature of sociology and so these terms should not be considered as dualistic and were chosen as they were 'probably the closest available, when placed at either end of a continuum, that could convey the manifold ways in which people relate to each other as a whole people, a principle basic to Elias's sociological work' (ibid.). Similar to Merton's claim that we can be both insiders and outsiders Elias emphasized that we could be both involved and detached at the same time; as he commented in an interview with the editors of *Theory, Culture and Society*:

It's difficult to see that involvement and detachment are not separate. I am, as you can see, very involved in what I am doing indeed, but it does not in any way lower my self-control because what I do would be worthless if I allowed my involvement to colour or taint the results of my thinking (1985: 96 – 7)

Thus though I am very involved in what I am doing as a result of my long history within tattoo figurations it is imperative that I do not allow this involvement to negatively affect either the research or dissemination of my findings. Writing of Elias's theory of involvement and detachment Dunning and Hughes claim 'a greater or lesser capacity for detaching oneself cognitively (rationally) and affectively (emotionally) from a given situation or bodily state is a property of all human beings, part of the condition of being human' (2013: 141). But this capacity for detachment must be fulfilled as effectively as possible for social researchers to ensure their 'findings correspond as far as possible to the structure and qualities of

the research objects themselves rather than to their own personal fantasies and feelings' (ibid. 159); in other words to maximise the degree of object adequacy.

Whilst Merton is more focused on the insider/outsider debate as it relates to social research and the generation of knowledge as a whole, Elias demonstrates the balance of involvement and detachment present during the research *process*. Considerations of insider/outsider status and involvement/detachment are important for the research presented throughout this thesis and for the discussions of reflexivity in the current chapter. As a heavily tattooed researcher I am permanently bounded within tattoo figurations even though other aspects of my socio-cultural make-up may diverge from research participants, I am an 'involved insider'. As discussed below, this has helped a great deal during the research process by granting me a level of researcher credibility and facilitating easier access into the research environments. It should also be noted that I have a vested interest in pursuing lines of enquiry that postulate tattooing to be a normative, non-deviant, form of corporeal alteration and that those bearing such marks should not automatically be considered discredited social actors as has been common in much of the theorising about the practice (see chapters one and two).¹⁸ Nevertheless, though I could never be considered completely an outsider, I do consider myself an accomplished enough sociologist to be able to take the necessary detour via detachment and present the knowledge in this thesis in a fair and balanced way:

sociological understanding involves much more than acquaintance with. It includes an empirically comfortable comprehension of the conditions and often complex processes in which people are caught up without much awareness of what is going on. To analyse and understand these requires a theoretical and technical competence which, as such, transcends one's status as Insider or Outsider. The role of social scientist concerned with achieving knowledge about society requires enough detachment and

¹⁸ This is not to say that there are not those who are tattooed whilst also criminal or deviant members of society, but that individuals should not be labelled as such *solely* because they have chosen to be tattooed

trained capacity to know how to assemble and assess the evidence without regard for what the analysis seems to imply about the worth of one's group (Merton 1972: 41)

As this quotation demonstrates, being a member of the figuration that you are researching does not mean that it is impossible to detach oneself and analyse the research findings in an unbiased way. This is what many methodological texts label objectivity (Bryman 2012; Punch 2013) and for many years it was assumed that social research should only be conducted objectively so as to avoid the researcher influencing the research. However, more recent work – particularly from feminist researchers – has demonstrated the impossibility of conducting completely objective social research, the researchers' involvement in the figuration is necessary for the social research to take place and thus they will experience the patterns they are researching whether directly or indirectly. As Bourdieu states: 'nothing is more false, in my view, than the maxim almost universally accepted in the social sciences according to which the researcher must put nothing of himself into the research' (2003: 287). Thus, whilst researchers cannot, and arguably should not, be completely objective they should be 'reflexively aware of their own habitus, such as their own predispositions, knowledges and competences when undertaking research, in order to produce... honest and open research' (Dean, 2013).

Reflexivity in the context of social research refers to contemplative considerations of 'the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research' and is particularly salient in ethnographic research that requires the involvement of the researcher in the figurations being studied (Davies 1999). By being reflexively aware researchers we must take into account how socio-cultural factors such as age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs etc. affect the relationship between researcher and those being studied. Furthermore, we must take into consideration how our involvement – our speech, mannerisms, actions, reactions, etc. – in the research setting contributes towards the construction of observations and the generation of knowledge. However, whilst being reflexively aware, this chapter, and this thesis, is not concerned with

presenting an auto-ethnography; the empirical research conducted for the thesis is the focus of the theories presented within. Nevertheless, as an engaged and responsible sociologist it would be remiss of me to leave unacknowledged my place in the research process; I share the lived experience of being tattooed with my respondents and so I understand the pain and uncomfortableness of acquiring a tattoo, the subsequent aftercare procedures, the necessary negotiation with primary figurations such as family and employers, and I am familiar with the jargon surrounding tattooing. As such there was an understanding between us and if I asked certain questions about tattooing – How do you deal with the pain? What did your parents say? – respondents often used phrases such as ‘you know how it is’ or ‘I’m sure you’ve had this but...’. Likewise, my familiarity with what ‘sleeves’¹⁹ or ‘new school designs’ were meant valuable interview time was not taken up exploring these issues and assured respondents that I understood what they were trying to explain. But in most cases I also know more than respondents, at least sociologically speaking; I know how to connect what respondents told me to social theories concerning the body and identity, how to make the connections between their explanations and the figurations in which they were enmeshed, and I possess the knowledge to critically evaluate the research findings and present them as a theoretical argument which the reader is now consuming. Thus what is presented here is a combination of knowledges, both researcher and participant, and in analysing the knowledge and stories of the participants I must also analyse my own. What follows is my story, aimed at putting something of myself into the research and demonstrating not only how I ‘arrived’ at the research setting but how this story impacts upon the knowledge generated in the thesis.

The Impact of my Personal Biography

I was born in 1982 and until I moved away to begin my undergraduate degree in 2004, when I moved into student accommodation, I had lived in council or social housing for my entire life. We lived in the poorer areas of first Cwmbran and later

¹⁹ Tattoo sleeves are designs that start at the shoulder or hip and occupy the entire length of the arm or leg to the wrist or ankle. Designs which stops at the elbow or knee are known as half sleeves and those that stop halfway between the elbow and wrist or knee and ankle are known as three-quarter sleeves.

Cardiff, areas with high levels of unemployment and crime. Those who were employed were invariably employed in manual occupations and social life often focused around the local pubs. 'Grafting' for what you earned was considered important and many of those whom were unemployed made money on the side through various cash in hand temporary employment. The areas where I was brought up were considered working-class and as a result I too could be thought of as, and indeed consider myself to be, working-class. Despite this my parents were both educated and my father, despite his father being a dock worker, managed to obtain a Master's degree in Physics. Although mostly unemployed throughout my life until his death in 2003 he did work as a supply teacher when I was younger and my mother worked in various secretarial roles for the NHS, occupations that don't fit quite as neatly into the working-class whom we considered ourselves as belonging to. My parents invested in me as much as they could as I was growing up; I was always encouraged to read and when in primary school I was also encouraged to play music which I did in the school brass band, playing a tenor horn until I went to high school and the instrument – on loan from the school – had to be returned. I was fortunate in that my parents were able to get me accepted to what was considered a good school in Cardiff due to my mother's attendance at the local church. During my school years I mixed – not always well – with children from middle and upper class families, whose parents who were doctors, teachers, and solicitors. Although leaving school with just three GCSEs at the level of C²⁰ or above my subsequent enrolment in college to study further GCSEs then A-levels, and my later attainment of a first class honours degree and a Master's degree seemingly place me within the middle class by virtue of achievement. I feel this ambiguous class status has served me well during the ethnographic research conducted for this thesis.

The respondents encountered during the research process were themselves from a variety of class backgrounds and as a result of my 'dual-status' as both working and middle class I was able to converse with respondents in appropriate ways,

²⁰ In the UK a minimum of four GCSEs are needed to study Advanced-Level subjects and gaining three GCSEs would be considered low attainment.

emphasizing my own status as either working or middle class where this was most advantageous. For example, when one 56-year-old respondent declared that it was only the working-class who got tattoos when he had acquired his in the 1970s I enquired whether he still considered himself very working-class despite now owning a successful company. When he responded affirmatively I admitted similar feelings of considering myself to be working-class despite my perceived social mobility as a PhD candidate. This led to a discussion about the changing nature and appropriateness of tattooing based on class divisions and facilitated a noticeable openness during the rest of the interview as the respondent appeared to be comforted that I had a similar class history to him despite other differences such as our age. Similarly, during an interview conducted with another PhD candidate who was also writing a thesis that explored the body and identity we were able to converse in more theoretical language due to our shared knowledge pool that arose as a result of our cultural capital as young educated adults with shared research interests. This ability to communicate comfortably with individuals from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds was beneficial as it allowed me to converse with respondents in familiar language and relate to similar experiences. This is not to say that I was able to do this with all respondents, and I did not at any point deliberately mislead respondents, but during the research I deliberately sought out commonality during interviews as a tactic for ensuring respondents felt comfortable with me as a researcher and with sharing personal information. However, the most important aspect of my biography for conducting the research was my status as a tattooed researcher, a commonality I shared with all respondents.

I was first tattooed in 1999 when I was 17 and several more tattoos followed in quick succession before I embarked on a half sleeve tattoo aged 18 and subsequently a full sleeve tattoo aged 19. I was first drawn to the practice because I considered myself to be somewhat alternative to the mainstream – an ‘outsider’ – and although becoming more popular at the time, tattoos were still considered somewhat unusual and taboo. By the time I began my undergraduate degree aged 22 I had a considerable portion of my upper body tattooed along with smaller tattoos on my legs. After completing my undergraduate degree and finding

employment I was tattooed further so that I now sport two full sleeves, both shoulders, and my entire chest tattooed along with smaller designs on the back of my neck, my sides, and the aforementioned leg tattoos; I could be, and regularly am, considered heavily tattooed. This was important for respondents as not only did I have an academic interest in tattooing but I was also personally invested in the practice. Like all my respondents I had ‘undergone the needle’ and so also knew the pain involved in acquisition, the various healing methods, and knew about living with tattoos and having to negotiate ones tattooed status with friends, family, and employers; I am a fully-fledged member of tattoo figurations. Thus while we may have differed in socio-cultural factors such as ethnicity, age, and gender, myself and all respondents shared the lived experience of being tattooed and were able to relate to each other on this basis if no other. This was important as it allowed my presence in the tattooing studios where participant observation was carried out to go unnoticed and on many occasions I was mistaken for a member of staff.²¹ It also helped facilitate interviews as I was not seen as a researcher who might problematize tattooing with respondents admitting in several instances that they would not have agreed to be interviewed had I not also been tattooed; this was particularly so for those respondents recruited through internet forums where I had no visible presence but had provided a disclaimer²² about my tattooed status.

Whilst I believe that my ambiguous class status has allowed me to converse comfortably with respondents and my status as a heavily tattooed researcher lent me a certain amount of researcher credibility by creating a more open and honest exchange of information due to this shared experience with respondents, it is not as easy to analyse how other socio-cultural factors have impacted on the research process. I am a white British male aged 28 when work for this thesis began and 32 when it was completed; factors that are largely unalterable although they may be disguised (which they were not). Although it is impossible to know whether respondents would have responded differently to me had I been younger or older,

²¹ Although I was sometimes mistaken as a member of staff I at no point deliberately misled participants as to my role within the tattoo studios

²² This took the form of some text explaining that I was heavily tattooed, where I had been tattooed, and that I was not proposing that tattooing was deviant or those who bore them in need of psychological assessment.

had my ethnicity been different, or had I been a female researcher, I would speculate that those respondents who considered discrimination against tattooing to be akin to racism or sexism may not have been so forthcoming with such opinions had I been an African-American or female researcher. This is not to say that they would have not expressed these opinions at all, but that they may have been expressed in rather different terms. Nevertheless, whilst I am unable to repeat the research as a different researcher, the consistency of observations and interview responses encourages me that these factors had no negative effect on the interactions and that respondents were open and honest with me throughout the research process. In the rest of the chapter I want to focus on more traditional methodological concerns but with a continued attention on the nature of data generation between researcher and respondent, issues of reflexivity, and involvement and detachment.

Access and Participant Observation

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, in order to find out as much about contemporary tattooing practices as possible it was necessary for me to submerge myself in tattoo culture. As such my first decision was to carry out participant observation in those places that afforded the most opportunity to observe interactions between tattooed individuals: tattoo studios and tattoo conventions. Listening to clients reasons for wanting to become tattooed or for acquiring particular designs, as well as other conversations that relayed personal information regarding their involvement in tattoo figurations, enabled me to build up a preliminary understanding of tattooing practices in the twenty-first century and begin to answer the research questions proposed at the end of the previous chapter; this preliminary understanding also informed questions and themes that formed the basis of the interviews described in detail below. Participant observation also enabled me to observe the 'back-stage' (Goffman 1959) areas of tattoo studios – areas where I had not been present during my previous personal experience of tattoo studios – where tattoo artists and other staff would discuss the practice. Although there was some interaction between tattooed individuals within tattoo studios – most commonly between tattooed friends already known to

one another or customers waiting to see staff – the overwhelming amount of interaction took place on a client–customer²³ basis and so I also chose to carry out observations at tattoo conventions to enable me to broaden my understanding of the practice by observing a wider range of interactions between tattooed and non-tattooed others.

I feel fortunate as I encountered little difficulty in gaining access to the two tattoo studios in which I conducted participant observation. The first one, located in Canterbury, Kent, I attended with a friend who was acquiring a tattoo at the studio and struck up a conversation about my research with the tattoo artist who agreed that I could return in order to carry out research. The second studio, located in Caerphilly, South Wales, was run by a tattoo artist known to me personally and had tattooed me previously at another studio. Although I would not consider him a friend I had a rapport with him that had developed over several years and facilitated my acceptance into the research setting. When choosing where to conduct research a researcher must make a number of methodological choices that are personal, ethical, practical, and strategic (Bryman 2012). The two studios where I chose to carry out ethnographic research were chosen because they were well respected and popular studios allowing me to observe a large number and variety of interactions, they were conveniently located (the one in Canterbury being less than 10 minutes' walk from where I lived and the one in Caerphilly being about 15 minutes' drive from my mothers' home), and my access to both was easily facilitated due to a combination of convenient conversation and previous rapport. I chose tattoo studios as the primary site for the participant observation as these were locations in which tattooed individuals were typically always present, even those who were not tattooed usually entered with the intention of becoming tattooed and so demonstrated an interest in the practice. Interactions in these locations, whether between artists, clients, regulars,²⁴ and/or myself, were focused

²³ Whilst all the tattoo artists encountered for the research were also tattooed – and several were interviewed – the relationship that existed within tattoo studios between artist and client were not taken as being representative of regular interactions between tattooed people because of the financial implication of the relationship

²⁴ Regulars are distinguished from clients in that they often called into the tattoo studios simply to talk or 'hang out' with the tattoo artists or other staff. Whilst all regulars I observed were tattooed,

on tattooing and so allowed me access to a broad range of information on the practice generally, and more specifically on aspects such as equipment, design choices, and clients themselves. Tattoo studios also allowed for discussions about tattooing in a stigma free²⁵ environment which may not have been possible in alternative locations.

In both studios I feel that I avoided being viewed as a burden or an inconvenience because of my own personal, and not just sociological, interest in tattooing, with my tattoos acting as a 'flesh-based business card' (Atkinson 2003a: 75). Although my main role during the research was as an observer I did help in routine jobs such as helping to clear up,²⁶ photocopying designs, and running errands to local shops to buy basic supplies such as light bulbs, paper, pens, food, and drinks that were necessary for the artists and the studio. My participation in these basic chores enabled my continued involvement in the studios and meant I was able to avoid my presence being considered problematic to the artists or shop managers; I would identify Gans (1968) researcher-participant role as the one that best encapsulates my own experience. My awareness of the behavioural conventions that govern tattoos studio – having spent approximately 50 hours being tattooed myself – was also important as it meant I did not impose myself an inconvenient times, for example when artists were doing 'fine-lining' and needed to concentrate or when a client was in particular discomfort, which may have been an issue with a researcher less familiar with the research environment. During the research I was transparent about my role as a researcher to all clients (often the tattoo artists would advise clients about my research) but this seemed to have no negative effect on the interaction between client, artist, and myself, with clients disclosing personal details concerning their lives and their tattoo choices despite my presence, and responding favourably to my questions. Furthermore, the interactions seemed

not all acquired tattoos during the periods I conducted participant observation. However, their presence at the studios was accepted as they were either regular clients or friends with tattoo artists or staff.

²⁵ Despite tattoo studios being locations where tattooing was popular, that tattooing was discussed entirely stigma free is not true. Artists and other staff would often comment on the quality of tattoos and other tattoo artists, and stigma would be attached to poor choices or artists. However, this was rarely done when clients were present who were encouraged to discuss tattoos freely.

²⁶ Although I would sometimes help with general clearing of rubbish I at no point handled any tattoo equipment or was involved in any of the sterilisation of equipment that requires specialist training.

typical of my own experiences within tattoo studios as a client and so I have little reason to believe that my presence had any untoward effects on the interactions.

Research was also conducted at two tattoos conventions, a small one in Portsmouth and the second largest tattoo convention in the UK – The Great British Tattoo Show – in London. Tattoo conventions are extremely popular with around two to four taking place in the UK every month, lasting from a single day to three days (often longer if artist only days where the general public are not invited are included), and being fairly similar in structure. They are attended by anywhere from 30 to 150 tattoo artists offering their services, and most conventions advertise acclaimed, often international, artist(s) who will be present. Additionally, commercial retail outlets that offer tattoo-related products for both tattoo artists (for example tattoo machines, autoclave equipment, inks) and the general public (t-shirts, ash trays, belt buckles etc. with tattoo-related imagery) are available. Conventions offer both tattooed and non-tattooed individuals²⁷ the chance to socialise with other like-minded individuals who share their interest in the practice but it is impossible to characterise a ‘typical’ convention attendee as individuals with a diverse range of ages, socio-economic status, cultural backgrounds, and lifestyles, attend. Nevertheless, the high numbers of individuals who attend tattoo conventions, whilst still a small percentage of tattoo figurations as a whole, offers an invaluable opportunity to observe interaction and the conventions of figurations. The social aspect of conventions is evidenced by the inclusion of associated entertainments including live music, burlesque performances, laser-quest, roller derby, and child orientated play areas (see images six, seven, and eight). Finally, almost all conventions feature a tattoo competition in which individuals may compete against each other by having their tattoos judged via an expert panel in categories such as best large tattoo, best black and white tattoo, best realistic tattoo etc. in an attempt to win prestige for themselves and the tattoo artist (see pictures nine and ten).

²⁷ Non-tattooed individuals’ were by far the minority and I would approximate about 10% of convention goers had no *visible* tattoos showing, a figure likely to drop when concealed tattoos are considered, meaning the overwhelming majority of attendees were tattooed.

My access to tattoo conventions was also obtained easily; as they are public events one only needs to purchase a ticket in order to attend. However, as with the tattoo studios my acceptance in the research setting was accomplished via my own identity as a tattooed individual and my awareness of the conventions that covered these events. As an individual who seemingly belonged in the environment my presence was unproblematic and the behaviour of attendees did not notably change when I was present compared to when I observed from afar, as it may have had I been a researcher that did not 'fit' the setting. Nevertheless, due to the large number of participants and the difficulties of imposing myself in others interactions, I was not able to listen in on interactions in as much depth as I was within the tattoo studios and so my role at tattoo conventions was much more of a passive observer. DeMello (2000) characterizes tattoo conventions as being 'modern day carnival', an assessment that I would agree with due to the general disregard for conventional social rules, particularly regarding the exposure of the body, where tattooed individuals regularly walk around the convention with tops off or trouser legs rolled up to show off their tattoos, particularly if these have been freshly acquired. The regular conventions that govern tattoo studios are also set aside to an extent; for example, during all the observations I made at tattoo studios it is expressly forbidden for a customer to be intoxicated with disclaimer forms often including a section where the client must agree that they are not under the influence of any drugs or alcohol when being tattooed. However, at both conventions I attended it was common to see clients drinking whilst being tattooed with several artists also having alcoholic beverages to hand, a taboo act in all the studios I have encountered.

Although the tattoo conventions and the two tattoo studios were the primary focus of the participant observation for the research I also made more occasional observations at music concerts, festivals, and public houses, as well as at other tattoo studios when accompanying friends to be tattooed or waiting to conduct interviews with tattoo artists. I was also able to draw on what Bryman terms 'retrospective ethnography' (Bryman 2012: 294) as a result of my long and continued involvement with this form of corporeal modification. This more

occasional ethnographic research supplemented the data I had already gathered from the tattoo studios and conventions and took the form of further observations and conversations. My own tattoos are often a talking point when socialising, and any interesting data that emerged from these unplanned conversations was noted down at a convenient time afterwards; in all intents and purposes they acted as short interviews as I would often steer the conversations to my research. Observations in other tattoo studios – like those made when I myself have been tattooed – were also helpful in allowing me to be confident that the inferences I drew from the observation at the two chosen studios were typical of those found in others and so provided a degree of validity to the observations.

The aim of the participant observation carried out in tattoo studios was to observe the interaction between tattoo artists and clients, and in particular to find out about the motivations of the latter in pursuing tattooing body projects. By listening to their conversations with tattoo artists when initially entering the shop, hearing the reasons offered for wanting a tattoo, and observing subsequent interactions as personal designs were created together and tattooed upon their bodies,²⁸ I was able to begin to construct a preliminary understanding of tattooing practices in Britain. Being immersed in a tattoo studio also allowed me an insiders' view of how the *business* of tattooing operated having only been present as a client – an outsider – previously. Carrying out participant observation at tattoo conventions along with occasional observations at music concerts etc. allowed for broader explorations of the interaction between tattooed individuals and both tattooed and non-tattooed others, and helped to build upon the understanding developed within the tattoo studios. Early on in the research process I also began to carry out interviews with tattooed individuals in order to elicit narratives about their lived experiences of tattooing and why they chose tattooing body projects amongst other projects available to them. The interactions I had observed in tattoo studios

²⁸ Often this process could take several weeks as clients returned to check up on designs and they were altered or completely re-created before a final design was agreed on and an appointment booked. With some clients I was present during all these interactions whereas with others I would only be present during one or two steps of this process.

and elsewhere acted as a loose interview template in order to explore and test the themes and assumptions I had developed.

Interviews

What constitutes an interview is rather subjective and can refer to any number of interactive contexts, the conversations had during participant observation, despite being short, could be characterised as interviews for example. However, I reserve the term to refer to the longer and more in-depth interactions that were purposely pursued in order to expand and inspect the information I had gathered during participant observation. Although these interactive narratives discussed the burgeoning popularity of tattooing, the primary aim of interviews was to allow me to question respondents on their motivations for tattooing body projects and so this method was adopted to answer my first two research questions: how do individuals interpret their tattooing practices and how does this interpretation differ dependent upon the figurations in which they are enmeshed? And how and why do individuals choose tattooing amongst the range of body project available to them? The interview strategy I adopted was as an active interviewing process (Holstein and Gubrium 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 1999), aimed at exploring and dissecting narratives, with the interviews themselves being unstructured depth interviews that used 'open, direct, verbal questions [to] elicit stories' (Di Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2004: 189). I had a broad set of themes I wished to explore which had been informed by the participant observation, but interviews were flexible, allowing respondents to discuss aspects about their tattoos and lived experience they felt important and so were conducted in a conversational manner in order to encourage participants to share experiences (Holdstein and Gubrium 1997). Although an interview schedule was initially devised and a copy of this used during interviewing this was abandoned after just two interviews due to its formal appearance having a negative effect on the exchanges which precluded the conversational interviewing strategy I was attempting to adopt.²⁹ This is not to say that a form of schedule was not used after this but this was instead done 'mentally'

²⁹ Though I had not noticed any effect during the first interview, a discussion with the respondent of the second interview after it had been completed revealed that it felt to them like the schedule represented an interview 'check-list' and that I wasn't engaged as I could have been.

and subsequent interviews were opened with with a vague request for respondents to 'tell me about their tattoos' which encouraged a wide variety of responses. Some respondents were initially caught off guard by this and asked me to clarify but most quickly launched into stories about their tattoo designs, most commonly beginning with either the first or most recent tattoo they had acquired. Opening with such a vague request was a deliberate strategy as I was interested in how respondents would decipher the request and begin their stories and it opened up avenues for further exploration. Whilst large parts of interviews were focused on drawing out narratives that addressed the research questions for the project such as how respondents negotiated their tattooed status with primary figurations, their motivations for choosing tattooing body projects, and the reasons for their chosen designs, the unstructured and conversational manner of the interviews allowed respondents to discuss issues that were important to them and led to illuminating and descriptively rich data.

During interviews I regularly discussed my own experiences of being tattooed in order to encourage an atmosphere of openness and mutual exchange, and 'establish a context in which participants could feely ask questions and investigate my tattooing experiences – a key element in the active interviewing process' (Atkinson 2003a: 85; see also Holstein and Gubrium 1997; Gubrium and Holstein 1999). Not only did this help make respondents feel at ease by emphasizing the conversational manner of the interview – a deliberate strategy to make the interview appear as informal as possible – but as Atkinson rightly points out, 'the sociologist... [who] utilizes interviewing to expand the scope of data risks appearing phoney to participants if he or she assumes a more objective style of talk in interviews' (2003a: 86). Furthermore, as respondents repeatedly questioned me about my own tattoos and asked my opinion on a broad range of tattoo related issues it would be remiss of me to leave their questions unacknowledged. This key point of commonality between us 'had a consistently positive effect in terms of establishing a sense of trust and understanding' in interviews (Song and Parker 1995:250) and was important as by disclosing my own personal feelings concerning tattooing I encouraged respondents to reciprocate.

I did, in other words, take an involved position in the research process during interviews in order to investigate the processes that had led to individuals choosing to adopt this form of corporeal alteration, their negotiation with key figurations, their opinions concerning the practice's popularity, and the reasons for their chosen designs. However, at the same time I was also took a detached position as I sought to mentally make connections between what respondents were telling me during any given interview with those narratives that had been shared by other respondents during the research process in order to build up on overall picture of contemporary tattooing practices. My level of detachment also enabled me to make connections between what respondents had told me and my chosen theoretical position. Most importantly, it allowed me to take the detour via detachment necessary in order to produce the highest level of object adequate findings possible and to conduct the interviews in a value-free way (and I mean value-free in the manner proposed by Kilminster above). I was, at all times, careful not to dominate conversations, nor give responses that I felt may upset respondents, but as I expected from respondents I at no point deliberately misled them. This two-way interaction fostered an atmosphere of mutual disclosure during interviews and, in my opinion, led to a more engaging and descriptively rich narrative than may have developed with a more impersonal interviewing style. It is important to acknowledge my involvement in the interview process and be reflexively aware of how the stories that developed during interviews were a result of the narrative *between* respondents and me. By engaging in a more active, rather than passive, interview strategy, I put myself in a position where the validity of the data could be questioned; I would however reject such a claim. The mutual development of knowledge is a key component of an active interview strategy in which 'both the interviewer and the interviewee play *interdependent and equally complicit* roles in the construction of narratives' (Atkinson 2003a: 83, my emphasis) and I interpret this as a benefit rather than a hindrance. The openness and honesty during interviews led to a greater degree of truthfulness in my opinion and in many instances respondents told me personal and sometimes upsetting stories that I do not believe they would have shared with researchers who were not also open and honest with them, nor had the shared personal involvement in tattooing. The fact

that these were not just isolated incidents but that many respondents³⁰ chose to tell me about personal and traumatic events encourages me that an active interviewing strategy the correct one to utilise. Finally, there were a number of parallels present in the data across a range of themes and responses, giving me full confidence its validity.

Respondents were recruited through a combination of individuals already known to me, those observed at tattoo studios and conventions, chain-referral,³¹ and a post on a popular tattooing forum. In recruiting respondents I sought to interview a diverse range of individuals including both men and women with a variety of socio-economic characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and lifestyle preferences.³² I also sought those with assorted levels of involvement in the practice and respondents 'figurational embedness' (Atkinson 2003a) – the extent of individuals involvement in tattoo figurations as measured by tattoo coverage, years within the figuration, and personal commitment to the practice – ranged from those who had just two small tattoos to complete body coverage including the face, from less than one year within the figuration to over 30 years, and from those who posited some interest in the practice to others who stated tattooing to be an essential part of their self-identity. In selecting respondents I was concerned with seeking a range of interpretations about the practice and although there was consistency in the themes and responses offered respondents were not purposely pursued in the hope of this being achieved (Johnson 1990). The rejection rate was low with just three individuals agreeing to be interviewed before subsequently not responding to requests to arrange a time and location to conduct the interview. In approaching individuals with requests for an interview I felt my tattoos – as was the case with securing access to participant observation location – lent me a high degree of researcher credibility by demonstrating a shared personal interest and reassuring respondents that I was not seeking problematize the practice, nor their

³⁰ On just one occasion did a respondent state they did not wish to discuss a subject after they admitted to a spell of imprisonment and I attempted to solicit further information

³¹ In several instances respondents who I had already interviewed acted as sponsors when referring me to other respondents. For example, a respondent who had extensive facial tattooing also knew another individual with facial tattoos and vouched for me being an 'alright guy' and not somebody who disliked tattoos.

³² A breakdown of interview respondents characteristics is included in appendix one

involvement in it. Interviews were conducted with both tattooed individuals (n= 30) and tattoo artists (n = 5 including an apprentice, all of whom were also tattooed) in a variety of locations including respondent's homes, cafes, public houses, and tattoo studios. Three of the interviews were done via e-mail due to geographical issues which meant arranging face to face interviews was impossible, but all other interviews were conducted face to face and on two occasions I interviewed two respondents simultaneously. The interviews ranged in length from just 15 minutes to over two hours.

The decision of whether to record interviews is discussed in much depth in numerous methodological texts (Kvale 1996; Atkinson et al 2001; May 2011; Bryman 2012), but I agree with Davies' thoughts on the use of recording equipment during interviews:

It is probably less intrusive and destructive *of open and natural conversation* than having an ethnographer taking notes, and it is infinitely more reliable than memory, no matter how good, of what was said. Furthermore, its use allows the ethnographer to be much more aware of other aspects of the interaction that cannot be captured by sound recording, and to *enter more fully into the development of the interview* (Davies 1999: 114, my emphasis)

These emphasized points were important considerations and helped in the development of the conversational style and active interviewing process I adopted. This is not to say that notes were not also made in order to supplement the data gained from the interviews but on all occasions this was done after the interview had finished. These notes were important as they allowed me to pick up on key themes from the data and raised issues for further exploration in future interviews, particularly when interviews were not able to be transcribed quickly after they had been completed. The use of recording equipment also facilitated my more involved position in the interviews as described above, but whilst listening back to these recordings and making transcripts I was able to take a more detached view necessary for the delivery of more object adequate knowledge. Despite the uncomfortableness discussed above regarding the initial interview schedule

respondents appeared comfortable with recording equipment being used which was a small and discrete dictaphone; all respondents gave their permission for interviews to be recorded and all were offered the option of being provided with copies of the recordings or the transcriptions though just one respondent requested this. As suggested by proponents of qualitative interviewing (Kvale 1996; Atkinson et al 2001), the recordings were transcribed personally in order to familiarise myself with the data and while in most cases this was done within a few weeks of the interviews taking place in some instances it was several months afterwards before I had the chance to transcribe the recordings, highlighting the importance of making notes after interviews. My ability to secure just two interviews with non-white individuals – both Hispanic tattoo artists – is an unfortunate gap in the research and may be considered a shortfall of the sample; nevertheless, tattooing in Britain has been shown to be an overwhelmingly white phenomenon (Sweetman 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) and so the sample does still represent a heterogeneous range of tattooed individuals. Furthermore, I do not claim the findings of this research to be generalizable, but rather sketch out a theoretical approach that I propose is most fruitful for examining this popular form of corporeal moderation, and invite further research into this form of corporeal alteration.

Media Analysis

Engaged as I am in attempting to comprehend respondents own understandings of tattooing, identity, and quests for authenticity, the main source of data for the theoretical analysis in this thesis is the observations and interviews already described. However, media analysis has provided useful supplementary data and is an important part of discourse of tattooing:

journalists and scholars who write about tattooing are in a very large sense responsible for creating a new picture of tattooing within the minds of readers, a picture that today includes tattoo artists who have been trained in art school; tattoos that are finely executed, highly customized, and deeply meaningful; and a value system that stresses the sacredness of the body, a

lifetime commitment, and a strong spiritual or emotional connection to the tattoo (DeMello 2000: 33)

Although DeMello overemphasizes some of these aspects - the number of tattoo artists that are art school trained and the association with a spiritual or emotional connections in particular – this statement is particularly true of tattoo magazines – the main ones in the UK being *Skin Deep* and *Total Tattoo* – whose articles, convention reviews, and interviews with artists and (typically female) tattooed individuals continually stress the artistic nature of tattooing, refer to acclaimed artists, and stress the narrative – though not necessarily spiritual or emotional – aspect of individuals tattoo collections. Content analysis of *Skin Deep* and *Total Tattoo* was conducted over a 12 month period from October 2010 to September 2011. This involved developing a template (a copy of which is contained in appendix one) to make notes on the various features that appeared in each issue; more in-depth notes were then taken in relation to each article (see appendix two for an example). By analysing the key themes and phrases utilised by these magazines I was able to build up a more holistic understanding of tattoo figurations from the perspective of ‘insiders’ (though I am aware that the editorial focus of these magazines meant that tattooing was only ever portrayed in a positive light), further familiarising myself with the practice and its conventions. Tattoo magazines were a common sight in tattoo studios with upwards of 10 – including current and past issues – usually on hand for clients and artists. The utility of the magazines was twofold, first they acted as inspiration for clients and tattoo artists in choosing and designing tattoos, and secondly they acted as a diversion for clients who were waiting for their appointments. Although primarily a visual aid I did witness both clients and artists reading the articles in the magazines on many occasions. During interviews I also asked respondents about whether they purchased or read tattoos magazines with virtually all of them having read at least part of a tattoo magazine at some point, approximately 80% admitting to having bought one at least once, and around half of those purchasing tattoo magazines regularly. These magazines promote an understanding of tattooing as normative cultural practice and their influence on members of tattoo figurations is important in the latter’s

interpretation of tattooing. Many respondents admitted to having viewed tattoo magazines *before* acquiring their own designs with the promotion of the practice as normal and personally meaningful contributing to their own resolve to become tattooed. Although many respondents had personal meanings for their tattoos they also openly admitted to feeling as if they needed to invent stories for those tattoos that didn't have personal significance (see chapters six and seven) because of the discourse promoted by tattoo magazines and TV programmes such as Miami Ink that *all* tattoos should be acquired for personally meaningful reasons. The 'Ink' and other TV programmes that focus on tattooing have also had significant impact upon shaping the contemporary discourse around tattooing as a normative form of identity construction.³³ Though I have not carried out content analysis of these programmes for this thesis evidence of their influence is found in both the tattoo magazines that were chosen for content analysis – which often featured reviews of the latest series or features on the artists or clients featured in the shows – and the narratives of respondents with virtually all making some reference to these programmes without prompting (see chapter five for a discussion on the impact these programmes have had in shaping contemporary discourse concerning tattooing).

Reports about tattoos in popular media including newspapers, sport magazines, and news websites, are much more varied in their reporting of tattooing but also provide valuable insights into the status of the practice in contemporary culture. Stories popular during the period when tattooing was disreputable (see chapters one and two), including the tattooing of under-age individuals, infections resulting from un-sterilised equipment, and association with criminals, are still found, but are no longer the most common; reporting on tattooing is extensive and wide ranging, evidencing the popular and diverse nature of the practice in twenty-first century Britain. What is most interesting is that whilst the majority of articles are no longer condemnatory of tattooing per se, they increasingly make value judgements based on aesthetic *taste* (Bourdieu 2010) in terms of what is or isn't appropriate for a

³³ Although some such as 'My Tattoo Addiction' continue to paint an unflattering picture of the practice those TV programmes dedicated to portraying tattooing in a more positive light and far more common currently

tattoo design or whether it is appropriate that a particular individual is tattooed.³⁴ In *The Civilizing Process* (2000), Elias demonstrates through the use of manners books how individuals came to learn 'civilized' behaviours concerning natural bodily habits, and repugnance when the conventions governing these norms were transgressed. Key to his analysis was how the very existence of these manners books demonstrated that the civilized behaviours they sought to teach were not considered unnatural or repugnant by previous eras, and how by tracing the development of these books, behaviours that were once explicitly discussed became to be known implicitly; they had become habitualised and so explicit instruction was no longer needed. Analysing media reporting of tattooing allows for a similar exploration of the practice by following Elias's lead and tracing developments in the reporting of the practice. Media sources provide invaluable information as to the increasing degree of popularity and universality of the practice, reflect current sensibilities surrounding it, and demonstrate the increase in pro-tattooing ideology that has entered our collective and individual habitus. This analysis has enabled me to construct a more thorough understanding of contemporary tattooing practices, provided useful pointers that guided the interviews described above, and proved particularly useful in helping to answer one of the main research questions for this thesis – how and why has tattooing become such a popular practice?

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the empirical research for this thesis I applied for ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research at the University of Kent. My research plan was submitted to the ethics committee and detailed the processes I intended to undertake for the research and the questions I planned to ask interview respondents. Ethical approval was granted without any amendments needed. During the research process all respondents were made aware of my status as a

³⁴ See, for example, the wide reporting of Cathy Ward, a 49-year-old woman who had a full back tattoo based on the popular book and film series *Twilight*. Criticism directed at her was not based on her decision to become tattooed, but rather the appropriateness of *Twilight*, popular with teenagers, as a theme for a woman aged almost 50.

social researcher as detailed in the discussions above. Informed consent was gained verbally from respondents in order to avoid breaking the active interviewing strategy that I adopted. However, before all interviews it was made clear that participation was entirely voluntary and four important considerations were highlighted to all respondents:

1. All interview data would be anonymised with anything that may give away a person's identity concealed as far as possible
2. Respondents were under no obligation to answer any of the questions
3. Respondents could terminate the interview at any point
4. Respondents could withdraw their interview data at any point

Additionally permission to record interviews was also sought beforehand and respondents were offered copies of their interview recordings and transcripts. None of these considerations proved problematic as a researcher with an answer to a question being refused only once (again, see above).

As the research for the thesis was conducted overtly with fully consenting adults I encountered little in the way of ethical dilemmas. However, it would not be fair to claim that there were no ethical issues whatsoever. During the course of the research I often asked respondents about potentially upsetting events, most notable in consideration of tattoos dedicated to deceased friends or family. I was pleasantly surprised how open respondents were in discussing such traumatic events and they frequently offered very personal information. However, on one occasion a respondent did become upset when discussing a tattoo that was dedicated to a now deceased loved one. I reminded this respondent that they did not have to answer the question if they were uncomfortable and after taking a short break to compose themselves we moved on to a different topic. I have chosen not to use any of the data from that section within the thesis out of respect.

Perhaps the most ethically challenging dilemma of the research process was the inclusion of images of individual's tattoos. Early in the research I began to photograph respondents' tattoos or requested that they send me photographs of their tattoos. Permission was always sought, and as with the interviews themselves

all respondents were reminded that they were free to refuse, and could withdraw the photographs at any time. Not all respondents agreed to be photographed or provide photographs, and sometimes it was impractical ask for these. Nevertheless, this did create an ethical dilemma. As stated above, I have ensured that all interview data is anonymised as far as possible, but as sometimes highly visible, and uniquely recognisable markers of self, tattoos challenge this anonymity. Though perhaps unlikely, it is not completely impossible that a reader of this work might recognise the tattoos featured in the images as belonging to somebody they know, thereby sundering the respondent's anonymity. Additionally, two respondents allowed me to photograph their heavily tattooed faces and so their anonymity is even more disrupted. As such additional verbal permission was sought from respondent on the understanding that by providing photographs of their tattoos they might be included in the written piece of work that I would produce. Most readily agreed to this as they were proud to show off their tattoos as I have previously discussed. However, the respondent identified as Luke stressed that though he was happy for images of himself to be included as part of my research he did not consent to them being used for any commercial purposes. It is this position I have adopted in relation to all of the photographs included within this thesis.

Disseminating Research

The final phase of the research process is to write up one's findings. Within sociology there is a tendency for 'socspeak' (Cowley 1956) to be used: sociological jargon that can be impenetrable for those outside of academia, and often difficult to decipher even for those on the inside. This theme was taken up by C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) who writes that most academics adopt 'turgid and polysyllabic prose' (1959: 217) in order to appear as serious academics, and not journalists, to their peers. Against this Mills' argued that any writing 'that is not imaginable as human speech is bad writing' (1959: 221), and it is the responsibility of sociologists to write in a clear and understandable way for all audiences; the imagined test audience for researchers should be one-third expert, one-third knowledgeable, and one-third layman (ibid.). This is an argument that has been taken up more recently by O'Neill (1995) who as argued for a less jargon

laden approach to sociological writing which he contends has led to a political ambivalence towards sociological writing whilst Burawoy (2005) has likewise argued for a 'public sociology' that should speak to language of those being researched. This was something that Elias himself mostly managed to achieve with Wolf Lepenies describing Elias' writing as 'a jargon-free concern with clarity, a careful training in sociological observation and a thoroughgoing combination of theoretical discussions with often surprising references to details' (1978: 63; quoted in Kilminster 2007: 1). Although sometimes guilty of being repetitive (e.g. *What is Sociology?* (2012a)), Elias's works are in the main clear, concise, and well signposted with his use of examples to illustrate points effective; it is work that is understandable to those without specialist academic training, as Elias intended it to be (Kilminster 2007, 2011). It is this style I have attempted to adopt for this thesis as the overwhelming majority of my respondents were not academics nor versed in academic writing, this thesis must speak to them. I wrote earlier that in many ways I know more than my respondents because I am able to make the connections between the stories they told me and theories concerning the body, identity, and quests for authenticity, and this is true. But the aim of my writing is to demonstrate these connections through the use of language that is understandable to them. This may not always be possible, some respondents may still feel the language used is difficult for them to understand, and many may have no interest in what I actually write, they are just happy to share their stories. But these are not reasons to not try; good sociology should be accessible to society, i.e. to people.

This process first begins when conducting the research as respondents were informed of my research and why I was doing it, particularly when approached for interviews. Many were surprised, often pleasantly, that somebody could do a PhD that explored tattooing and interested in exactly what I was looking to say about tattooing, and by implication about them. Therefore I needed to explain my research in terms that were understandable to my respondents and avoided any jargon with which they were not familiar. I have attempted to continue this in the production of this thesis by not using unnecessarily complicated technical language and writing in a clear and concise way. It is my hope that any of my respondents

would feel comfortable reading the work I have produced yet what has been written is still of academic quality, advancing the degree of reality congruent new knowledge about tattooing, identity, and quests for authenticity in twenty-first century Britain. It is their words that have formed the basis for this thesis and the theoretical claims that I have made. But their words were not delivered in sociological terminology, they were delivered in the language of everyday speech, and so the theories constructed from those words should be delivered in a similar manner.

Another important aspect of disseminating research concerns the manner in which evidence from empirical research is chosen. Thirty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted for this project, along with countless hours of participant observation and the content analysis of *Skin Deep* and *Total Tattoo* over a 12 month period accompanied by content analysis of various other media stories throughout the research process. This generated a huge amount of data, all of which it is simply not possible to include in a single doctoral thesis. It is important to acknowledge then that 'empirical evidence and 'social facts' are not somehow 'given' a priori to a researcher [and] that researchers select evidence more or less consciously and deliberately on the basis of existing theories, understandings and values (both professional and extra-professional)' (Dunning and Hughes 2013: 130). I have already stated that I am concerned with presenting tattooing as more normative form of corporeal alteration that should not automatically be associated with social deviance or criminality, but I also consider myself a competent sociologist who has taken the detour via detachment necessary in order to present reality congruent knowledge. I sought to answer particular research questions concerning the practice that interested me and I have utilised Elias's process sociology as discussed in the previous and subsequent chapters in order to make sense of the data; this means that the data chosen has enabled me to answer those research questions effectively through an Eliasian perspective – but the data also led down unanticipated paths. The most prominent example concerns quests for authenticity described in chapter seven. I had little understanding of the literature and theories concerning authenticity previously, but as I conducted empirical

research for this thesis I came to realise that narratives concerning authenticity were central in both media analysis and interviews, and it would be irresponsible of me to not engage with these; such was the centrality of authenticity narratives that it has become a defining feature of this thesis. If the writing in this thesis needs to speak to my respondents in terms of its ability to be accessible then it also needs to ensure that it tells as much of their stories as possible; thus what has been selected not only represents by own understandings and values, but as fairly and as accurately as possible, it also represents theirs.

Chapter Four – A Figurational Understanding of Tattooing

At the end of the literature review offered in chapter two I briefly sketched out the principles of Norbert Elias's figurational sociology to demonstrate how it can help us to overcome many of the shortfalls in the current theorising about tattooing. Having provided an account of the research methods utilised in the collection of data in the previous chapter, in this chapter I will extend the discussion about the usefulness of figurational sociology for providing an understanding of contemporary tattooing practices by demonstrating the similar figurational patterns individuals face as a result of their corporeal alteration highlighted in the narratives of respondents. Drawing on Atkinson (2003a), I propose two major components of interdependencies within tattoo figurations shared by all members: the process of becoming tattooed and altered interdependencies with three key figurations – family, friends, and current or prospective employers.

Becoming tattooed

Regardless of the incredible diversity of those individuals who form tattoo figurations, all have undergone the physical process of becoming tattooed which is 'the basic chain of interdependency forming the first fragments of the figuration' (Atkinson 2003a: 110). Having made the decision to become tattooed individual's must find an artist willing to apply the design to their bodies;³⁵ clients and tattoo artists are thus co-dependent upon one another, the former as they require somebody with the necessary skill to apply their chosen design, and the latter for business in order to sustain their ability to derive income from their chosen craft. The process of choosing a tattoo artist represents an individual's first forays into tattoo figurations and individuals report similar experiences in the process of choosing their artists. In the first part of this section I wish to explore the four points of consideration that typically influenced their choices – recommendations, personal research, cost, and location – before examining the common experience of

³⁵ Some individuals do choose to tattoo themselves, either with basic materials or with tattoo equipment acquired personally. However, this is rare and although some of the respondents for this thesis had been tattooed in this manner, *all* received their first tattoos from professional tattoo artists.

receiving and caring for a tattoo also shared by individuals within tattoo figurations – pain.

Recommendations

Having decided to be tattooed recommendations from others who had already been tattooed was a key source of advice, this was especially true of individuals who were acquiring their first tattoo:

I was first tattooed at 15 with my parents' full consent and they even took me for it. It was a friend of my dad's who did it for me... When I first started seriously getting tattooed I walked into a studio of where a friend had been and just asked for the design (Heather,³⁶ 25).

Well we talked in general because Daphne knew a few shops from having had previous work done... we have a lot of friends who've been tattooed so people had different recommendations of shop they preferred (Patrick, 22)

I wanted to go to this particular artist because she was recommended to me and I liked some of the work she did, I'd never been tattooed by a woman and she's queer (Daphne, 22).

One of my friends had a few tattoos by him that I was quite impressed with (Kate, 27).

By choosing an artist whose work they could inspect on others, individuals could be assured about the artist's quality, as well as being given recommendations concerning professionalism and character. This combination of attributes was particularly important as though individuals wanted good quality tattoos, the attitude of, and rapport with, the artist were key concerns for respondents:

I prefer to be tattooed by people I know, not necessarily friends but... someone who knows me, who knows what's going on in my life so they can...it kind of puts you at ease whereas if you get tattooed by a random person which I don't really like it'll be like right, tattoo done, money, bye

³⁶ This is a pseudo-name, as are all other names used here on.

sort of thing... I'd rather chat to someone who has the same interests as me or does something that I do, or knows me or has known me for a long time rather than a random person (Chuck, 24).

I like Steve, he's quite willing to listen to me and talk to me and incorporate my ideas and explain his ideas and why certain things are better rather than going ahead and doing it because [he] thinks something is better which is quite nice (Hannah).

He shook my hand, and from that day on he called me Kevin, and when he sees us, it's hello Deb, hello Kevin... I didn't want to feel like that herded around cattle market type of things, you're just a number, and give me the money (Kevin, 54)

As the above statements demonstrate, it was important for individuals to feel they were valued customers, not simply a means to make money, and that interaction with their chosen artist was friendly. Although individual's being tattooed for the first time could not be sure that this would be the case their narratives confirmed that they often remained with an artist if they felt comfortable with them, or would choose a different artist for subsequent tattoos if they encountered problems.

Personal research

Whilst recommendations from friends, family, or other associates, were important for many individuals, others carried out personal research, either additionally to recommendations, or as a substitute if they were unable to obtain them. Previous research has indicated how individuals partake in research that often involves 'grading' local tattoo studios based on factors such as cleanliness, friendliness of staff, price, and artist portfolios (Sweetman 1999a; DeMello 2000; Sanders 2008). Though one of the respondents to this project did carry out research in a similar way – 'I was looking for friendliness, cleanliness, the willingness to talk you through how they dispose of things and changing the needles and getting the clean stuff out in front of you' (Hannah) – the increasing prevalence of the internet and tattoo magazines meant the majority of individuals who carried out personal research used these:

I then became 'obsessed' and started researching, spending hours on the internet, reading every magazine going...I had been planning on a sleeve for as long as I can remember but wanted to wait until I had found the right artist (Heather, 25).

For the cross I wanted an artist who could manage my mum's dot work style, I'd seen a lot of dot work tattoos but they always seemed to be geometric designs rather than pictures. I appealed to the users of big tattoo planet forums and two people mentioned the same artist who happened to be at Brighton tattoo convention the next month. So I called her up, emailed her the picture and went along to Brighton and had it done (Katherine, 22).

By utilising these resources respondents were able to provide themselves with as much information as possible before choosing artists to apply permanent corporeal reinscription to their bodies.

Cost

Cost was a concern for many individuals observed and interviewed for this research. Whilst none admitted to, and I did not witness anybody, attempting to barter with an artist over the cost quoted for an individual tattoo as previous researchers have witnessed (Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008), the difference in cost between different studios or artists was a consideration. This is frowned upon by artists, with the adage 'a good tattoo is rarely cheap and a cheap tattoo is rarely good' common among the artists who were part of this research, and also a common theme in tattoo magazines and tattoo focused TV programmes. Nevertheless, as one respondent claimed rather pointedly, 'money is not growing off (sic) trees' (Daryl, 35). Despite this, there was widespread recognition from respondents that better quality tattoos were more expensive and worth the extra money due to their permanency, and the artistic ability of the tattoo artist:

I'm prepared to pay money for my artwork because I like to recognise the skill that goes into it (Katherine, 22)

like a lot of people I know will be like go to him because it's cheap but it's going to be there for the rest of your life so what's an extra £20-£30 if you're gonna (sic) get a decent bit of work out of it? (Chuck, 24)

I think if you want a good tattoo and you know your tattooist is good then paying the money shouldn't really matter (Hannah)

As a result many individuals discussed their acquisition of more tattoos being constrained by the prohibitive cost of tattooing itself – 'You're looking at £70 an hour now. I think it is pretty much a muchness now, but financial restriction is a big influence on what you can have' (Damian, 41) – or by other priorities – 'there's more stuff that I need in my life that I've got to spend my money on, there's more important things' (James, 31).

Location

The location of the tattoo studio was another common factor for the tattoo artists respondents chose. While some, like Katherine above, were prepared to travel to other towns for artists, and several did express a desire to travel to get tattoos – 'there are people I want to see. Ryan Mason, he's American and works for scapegoat tattoo in Portland, Oregon... Thomas Hooper, he's English but he works in New York' (Kate, 28) – most selected studios that were conveniently located:

We just wandered into Third Eye (a local tattoo studio) and asked for some dates and they said they were free now and did we want to do it (Anne)

It's a nice place, very friendly and it's handy because it's in the city centre (Daryl, 35)

The tattooist who did my fairy tattoo was found by luck, I was in Canada for 8 weeks of my gap year... so I decided to take the opportunity while I was somewhere new to look for someone. I found a studio in a nearby town (Katherine, 22)

Choosing conveniently located tattoo studios meant there was less overall disruption to the individual's life and reduced the overall cost of the tattoo as the

cost of travel was often an important consideration along with the cost of the tattoo artist services. Respondent's also stressed how the increasing prevalence of tattoo studios meant that finding a conveniently located studio that also had a reputation for producing good quality tattoos was rarely difficult.

By engaging in one or more of these 'fact-finding' missions, individuals begin to interact with other tattooed individuals and artists and form the first bonds of interdependency within tattoo figurations. Furthermore, though individuals may adopt one or more of the above methods for choosing a tattoo artist they all engage in common figurational patterns in scheduling appointments and experiencing the acquisition of their chosen design (Atkinson 2003a). Some studios allow for walk-in appointments, usually on a specific day or as a result of cancellations, but the majority of studios encountered during this research require clients to book an appointment anywhere from two weeks to three months in advance depending on the popularity of the studio and/or artists, and to pay a non-refundable deposit of 10-20% of the final price of the tattoo to secure the appointment (for more detailed analysis of the processes involved in scheduling and experiencing an appointment see Steward 1990; Sanders 2008).³⁷ Ethnographic observation also demonstrates that artists adopt similar routines when interacting with clients. Clients are instructed to sit in particular ways dependent on the body part being tattooed and are given information concerning the equipment used, the techniques (particularly in relation to sterilization), and the process itself, a common occurrence being that artists will begin with a small line so that the client 'knows how it feels'. Throughout the tattooing process the artist would often distract the client with small talk concerning their chosen design, their employment etc. as well as offering the client short breaks at regular intervals. Detailed after-care instructions to ensure the tattoo retained its ink, and infection avoided, were also given. With repeat clients this routine was slightly altered due to the familiarity between the artist and client but they would still be offered breaks and talk would typically focus on events between appointments, i.e. how did

³⁷ These studios would accept walk-in appointments during times where they were not busy, or when a client had failed to turn up for an appointment, but pre-booked appointments were the norm.

that game you were talking about last time go? These habitualised routines witnessed at several tattoo studios demonstrate the familiarity between the experiences that all individuals undergo when acquiring a tattoo and represents another basic chain of interdependency that connects tattoo enthusiasts within tattoo figurations.

Pain

Finally, all individuals who choose this form of corporeal alteration undergo the pain acquiring their chosen design and the physical discomfort of healing. The level of pain varies based on factors such as the clients' pain threshold, the part of the body being tattooed, and the individual tattoo artist. Although some individuals did take pleasure in the process – 'I love the whole process, I love being tattooed' (Esther, 33) – or described it as being cathartic – 'I find it when it's on a nice part of your body sort of, I don't know, rhythmical, hypotonic, you can sort of zone out' (Hannah) – for most, the pain was something to be endured rather than enjoyed. Similarly, respondents were put off tattooing certain locations because of the increased pain associated with them: 'I did think about one on my foot because they look quite nice but they look painful' (Deb). Nevertheless, respondents typically discussed the pain as being something that meant not everybody got a tattoo and viewed the final acquisition of their tattoo as an accomplishment:

It hurts getting it done but I like the feeling of it in a weird way because it's like an achievement, it's like OK, I just got this really big bit of work done and it fucking hurt but I made it through it and now it's an achievement, I've made it through it and it's going to be there forever, what's four hours of pain for a lifetime of something that looks good... Yeah, it's not an agonising pain that you can't take, it's just like a pain and you're like, it hurts, and it's an achievement at the end (Chuck, 24)

I firmly believe that tattoos are journeys and the pain has got to be part of that journey no matter what you do in life. The simplest thing is going to

hurt somewhere along the line so I'd rather be in control of my pain than get hit by a bus, that's one way of looking at it (Hannah)³⁸

Following the acquisition of the tattoo a healing process of around two weeks takes place during which time clients must follow basic rules such as not exposing the tattoo to direct sunlight, not bathing or swimming, cleaning the area with warm soapy water once or twice a day, using an antiseptic or moisturiser after cleaning, and ensuring they do not pick any scabs that form. In accordance with advice from tattoo artists or other tattooed individuals most individuals adopt fairly similar after-care regimes:

I always heal my tattoos in the same way; I always use exactly the same product. I don't use specialised products like tattoo goo, I use a simple moisture like Vaseline intensive care, for me it works for what I want it to do (Damian, 41).

So all I do after I have it done it wash it down with hot water and hand soap, tap it dry with kitchen roll and then I'll put some of that hemp stuff on to keep it cool and after a couple of days it's wicked, the scab is there, it's no weeping then it all comes off in one go then you just get certain areas where the needle just goes in a bit further and it rescabs slightly (James, 31)

So far I have elucidated how individuals who choose to undergo this form of corporeal alteration form the first bonds of interdependency within the figuration as a result of their interaction with other tattooed individuals during fact-finding missions to locate suitable artists, and go through virtually identical figurational patterns during the process of tattoo acquisition and after-care. As a result, the first strands of the figurational 'web' are formed as 'tattoo enthusiasts are linked by their common experiences in this form of body redesign' (Atkinson 2003a: 117). I now want to explore how individuals' interdependencies with three core figurations – family, friends, and current or prospective employers – are reformed as a result of their decision to undergo this form of corporeal alteration.

³⁸ A further analysis of pain is offered in chapters six and seven.

Altered Interdependencies

Throughout the research conducted for this thesis respondents identified three key figurations that affect, or were affected by, their tattoo decisions: family, friends, and current or prospective employers. The initial decision to become tattooed, the choice of tattoo design, and the location on the body where the tattoo was placed were all considerations affected by individuals' interdependencies with these three key figurations. In this section I explore how and why the bonds of interdependency within these figurations are challenged by the decision to have this form of corporeal alteration.

Family

Despite the current popularity of tattooing, and the heightened respect or indifference (DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008) the practice now receives from the general public, respondents were still cautious about previously held associations between tattooing and criminality, psychosis, or perversion identified in chapter two. This was particularly true in their consideration of their parents reactions as many respondents recognised that their parents were from a generation where longstanding negative associations concerning the practice were still prevalent: 'when I talked to my mum after she found out I had a tattoo she said 'Siobhan, the only people that had tattoos in my day were whores or sailors'' (Siobhan, 20). As a result some individuals resorted to having their tattoos in locations that could be easily concealed from disapproving family members: 'My family is quite against tattoos so part of the reason I chose to have tattoos in these places is because I can hide them' (Siobhan, 20). For most individuals, disapproval from parents did not, or would not, put them off having a tattoo per se, but they either delayed being tattooed until they had moved out of their parents' home or would need to engage in processes of negotiation with parents:

by the time I decided to have them done I didn't have much of a relationship with my mum anyway and I'd moved out (Bill, 56)

I don't live with my parents anymore so I feel it's no longer an issue for them really to be able to tell me what to do (Heather, 25)

My mother made me promise that after my butterfly I'd never have any more tattoos again (Hannah)

In these examples we begin to see how individuals interdependencies with family members, in this case parents, affect their decision to become tattooed and the location on their body where their tattoos are placed. Respondents typically discussed negative reactions of parents as being outdated and prohibitive of their wish to be tattooed but recognised the need to respect their wishes, particularly where they were financially dependent on them. It is not just parents who affect the decision to become tattooed though, and in several instances respondents discussed how partner's negative reactions to tattoos prohibited them from acquiring them:

I was married at the time and my husband hated it, he thought it was disgusting (Esther, 33)

I loved them but my husband didn't like my tattoos and didn't want me to have any more...within a week of leaving him I'd booked the appointment to have the sleeve started... it might have been to spite him slightly, I don't know. Probably in hindsight it might've been...about reclaiming myself as a person (Hannah)

As these claims make clear, the constraining effects of significant others were felt more keenly by female respondents than male ones (this also reflects earlier findings e.g. Sweetman 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; DeMello 2000; Pitts 2003; Atkinson 2003a). Nevertheless, although several respondents discussed how their tattoo decisions were affected by the interdependencies with family members, many individuals tattoo choices reflected their commitment to their family. This was most commonly done by having designs that commemorated family members:

the idea started as wanting a fairy in memory of my Gran who passed away when I was about 14...the idea grew because a fairy on her own looks a little boring, she needed flowers, and I decided these should be alstromeria as they're both my mother's and my own favourite flowers...it struck me that

this tattoo could be more for the women of my family, not just my Gran (Katherine, 22)

When Hiroshima happened my granddad went over to Hiroshima to help clean it up so that is my memorial to (him)... [and] I've got the name of my nephew that died on my neck (Chuck, 24)

My first ever tattoo was this Lilly and Ted which I wanted in the shape of a meat stamp like you get on the side of pigs. They're my kids names and I think they've kind of claimed my body (Kate, 28)

Part of the reason I've got rock n roll on my back was kind of a tribute to my father to introducing me to music (James, 31)

In all these examples the bonds of interdependency between individuals and their family members are strengthened, at least for the tattooees, through their choice of permanent corporeal re-inscription. Whereas Elias was principally concerned with investigating the webs of interdependencies that existed between figurations of *living* people his theory is useful in demonstrating how the bonds of interdependency continue to exist after an individual has died and are manifest in the memories of the living, through photographs, and here given form through tattoos (see also Elias 1985; Shilling 2012). The processes of individualization, rationalization, and socialization, identified by Elias (2000; 2012a) has meant that death in modern society has been sequestered from public view, for example in hospitals and funeral homes, and contact with dying individuals is avoided as if it is somehow contagious (Elias 1985). Yet as Shilling has demonstrated, the dead remain active in our thoughts, feelings and body schemas, and the widening circles of mutual identification characteristic of modern society identified by Elias do not simply stop when an individual passes away (2012). As a result, whilst the dead should not be considered full social actors in the same way as the living, their continued existence in the lives of the living – through conversations with deceased, consideration of the deceased opinions to individuals' actions, photographs etc. – should be acknowledged (ibid.). By recognising this, Elias's theories can be extended to demonstrate how bonds of interdependency exist

between the living and the dead, as evidenced in the permanent reminders respondents choose to have inscribed upon their bodies as commemorations to the dead.

Another way in which bonds of interdependency are strengthened is through the act of being tattooed together. Although research indicates this is more prevalent amongst friends than family members there are examples, for example, a husband and wife I interviewed discussed the similar, although not matching, sea horse designs they had done together:

We got them together as kind of like an act, something to do to symbolize our related separateness. I was moving here (Britain), leaving America and it was something we did to mark our decisions to stay together. It's like our trans-Atlantic mascot (Daphne, 22)

But I also think that as far as why we chose that specific subject, that specific icon, image. There were some specific reasons there too. Mostly there's an interesting gender role and dynamic with these animals too which is something I've cited as a reason why we chose it...they have what would typically be described as reversed roles...[and] there's a sense of a suggestion that seahorses have monogamous relationships with each other, and mate with each other for life which I think sort of maps on to our identities in certain ways (Patrick, 22)

Daphne and Patrick described themselves as being in an open relationship and their decision to be tattooed with a similar design reflected not only their gender identities (they identified as non-gender specific) but also their commitment to each other despite being separated by a long distance. In Eliasian terms the bonds of interdependency between them are strengthened through their tattoo decision which symbolised their relationship. Finally, interdependencies are being developed and strengthened by individuals whose motivation to become tattooed is drawn *from* their parents. The tattoo renaissance discussed in chapters one and two led to an increasing number of men and women choosing to become tattooed, many of whom now have adult children of their own. As a result we are beginning

to witness the first generation of individuals whose tattoo choices are influenced, and sometimes encouraged, by their parents own corporeal alteration:

I also grew up around tattoos as my dad is quite heavily covered so it was something I was very aware of from a young age... I was first tattooed at 15 with my parent's full consent and they even took me for it. It was a friend of my dad who did it for me (Heather, 25)

I opted to get copies of the butterfly tattoos that my mother already had... When I was in Canada I emailed my mum asking her to send photos of the butterfly tattoos... When I went home with it... my mum, well mum started feeling bad about how old and tired her ink was looking and has since had a cover-up done on one of her tattoos, and an extension on the other, with more work planned (Katherine, 22)

Also my son as well, he's getting into tattoos... He's got a chest piece that comes around here (gestures) and the bottom half his leg completely done as well... Obviously I can't (try to stop him). I've said to him, you want a tattoo then there's no way I'm talking you out of it, you can do what you want (Steve, 38)

Despite drawing inspiration from their parents' tattoos some individuals do still show some trepidation in revealing new tattoos to their parents:

It's really strange because she (daughter) knew that I got them and knew Kevin got them but she came in and said ooh, I've had this done. But before you say anything it's my family, that's dad, that's you and that's Rich. And I think it was her way of saying you can't moan at me. Even though we've had them she still thought we might be mad (Deb)

For many individuals family is the most important figuration in which they are enmeshed, as a result their choices to become tattooed are often affected by potential reaction from family members, and in particular parents. Yet for many individuals, family members provide the inspiration for their tattoo choices and bonds of interdependency are developed and strengthened through the corporeal

act of tattooing by placing permanent reminders of their relationships on their body. This is not limited to individuals who are living, but can also usefully extend Elias's theories to demonstrate how a degree of figurational attachment *can* still remain with individuals who are dead.

Friends

Whereas respondents were often concerned about negative reactions from family members following their decision to become tattooed, they were less concerned about negative reactions from friends, who they typically claimed to be fully accepting of their decisions. Indeed, for many respondents their decisions to become tattooed were directly affected by their interaction with friends:

I was running in a pack with (Manchester) United and we all got them done and I didn't want to be left out, I had to be one of the United boys of course... go on the piss first, go get a tattoo because we were all boys together supporting United and we all went and got tattoos and then off we went, and we didn't think about it (Bill, 56)

The two friends that went in with me, one was a really close friend and one was my roommate and they are both really in to tattoos and have a lot between them and they were there to hang out, see it done (Eileen)

On the rare occasions where friends were seen as being disapproving this was generally dismissed, in a similar way to parents reactions, as a result of them being older: 'I've got a few but a lot of my close friends in Faversham are a bit older and none of them do (have tattoos) and they all go oh no its forever, how can you blah blah blah' (Kate, 28). For others, initially disapproving friends were discussed as having been influenced by respondents' tattoos and having subsequently acquired their own tattoos:

We've been friends for about 10 years and 10 years ago my two tattoos were still quite a talking point and it's amazing how fast the trend picked up pace... It seemed to go from no one had tattoos to everyone had them... Like my friend Helen, she's very responsible, very grown up and she's just got

this tiny, tiny, thing here, it's just the size of a 5p and she got it just to say she had a tattoo (Esther, 33)

As previously stated, cases of friends being disapproving were rare and *all* respondents discussed friends who were also tattooed. This tells us much about the current pervasiveness of the practice,³⁹ and demonstrates how key figurations to which individuals belong influence decisions they make. The bonds of interdependency among friends are strengthened through the act of tattooing in much the same ways as those of family members, by having tattoos dedicated to friends, or being tattooed together:

We have written 'No Sense No Feeling' kind of a quotation from Dirty Sanchez! We lived Dirty Sanchez in the two years we lived together and would always egg each other on to do silly things by using this quote. So it was/is a nice memory from that time. We went to different studios as I had mine done in NYC... I text my friend when I had it done and within in a week of me getting back she also had it tattooed (Heather, 25)

For my twentieth birthday my oldest and dearest best friend suggested we get matching tattoos, something that was personal to the both of us that would be a testament to the friendship we have... So we got this symbol that means honesty and she's got it done behind her ear, I've got mine on the back of my neck and because we're both very honest people, we don't put up any fronts, we're happy to chat about anything really so it seemed like a wise choice (Siobhan, 20)

I've got around my elbow which is the lyric 'true friends will always be there' which is a Sick Of It All (a band) lyric because my sister and two of my best friends all moved away, my sister moved away for university, a couple of friends moved to London and a couple of others moved to Madrid all within say four months and all of a sudden I was like I feel pretty alone. So I had then had that, it was a bit of a tribute to them (James, 31)

³⁹ Esther's quotation also highlights how the ubiquity of the practice has altered in a relatively short space of time

Respondents repeatedly discussed how having matching tattoos or tattoos dedicated to friends increased the bonds of interdependency between them. Despite tattoos being permanent, many respondents showed considerable foresight (Elias 2000) in recognising that although they were friends now, the possibility of them not being friends in the future did exist, witness the statements of Heather and Siobhan who were quoted above:

At the time we got the tattoos we were seriously like two peas in a pod and with different circumstances etc. we did grow apart for numerous years. However when we had them it was like the unspoken bond that we will always be friends (Heather, 25)

even if we stopped being friends it would be a testament to the friendship we had plus it would mean something personal to us (Siobhan, 20)

By conceptualising of their tattoos in these ways, respondents emphasised how the tattoo could still be personal for them if chains of interdependency with friends were broken, whilst also claiming that the tattoo would still be representative of the bond that existed at the time they were done. Finally, bonds of interdependency are not just formed with human counterparts. At a tattoo convention I witnessed a girl being tattooed with portraits of two cats, later confirmed as being her own, similarly, the following statement from one respondent recounted the tale of the paw tattooed on their neck:

I lived in Canada for 6 years ...And I had my dog who was my constant companion the whole time I would out there. I got him from the RSPCA out there and I was travelling across Canada camping in a tent and he was my constant companion. He was a great dog and I then split up with my ex and her and her friend ... I'd lived out there legally for 4 & half years but I'd made a life for myself and ended up staying illegally...But her and her friend phoned immigration and ratted me out so I had to hand myself in and come back to England. And I lost everything I owned because of her but the one thing I was determined to do, I went 6000 miles to snatch my dog back... and the first thing I did when I got back to where I was staying in Canada I

got his paw, put cooking oil on his paw and put it on a piece of cardboard and then got my tattooist to do it (Damian, 41)

As with the possibility of bonds of interdependency being broken with friends, both respondents who had tattoos dedicated to pets recognised that it was likely they would outlive their pets due to animals short life span, and Damian's dog had already passed away when I interviewed him. Nevertheless, the tattoos acted as a reminder of the bonds of interdependency that had existed at the time and also acted to extend this bond once the pet had died. As with the ability of utilising Elias's theories to the consideration of people no longer alive, these examples serve to extend his theories – concerned with the interdependencies between living *human* individuals – to non-humans too, though in a limited sense.

Whereas individuals' interdependencies with family members meant they demonstrate some trepidation in their decision to become tattooed, this rarely extends to their interdependencies with friends whom, by their nature, often share similar sensibilities. Indeed, it is often common for interdependencies with friends, having been introduced to the practice as a result of others corporeal alteration, to be a motivating factor in the decision to become tattooed. As with family members, many individuals choice of tattoo is inspired by their mutual interdependency with friends and the bonds of interdependency are strengthened as a result of their decision to be tattooed together, have designs that commemorate friendship, or demonstrate shared values or interests. Considerable foresight is demonstrated by recognising that bonds of interdependency with friends may be broken more easily than with family members, but this is justified by choosing designs that also represent something personal to the individual, recognisable as such on its own, or as being representative of a bond that existed at a certain point in time which the individual deems important to remember. Finally, by observing the ways individuals use tattoos to form and strengthen bonds of interdependency with friends we can extend Elias' theories to include not just those no longer living, but also non-humans.

Current or Prospective Employers

Work and material prosperity are important concerns for many individuals in Western society, with all able bodied individuals expected to earn a living through paid employment (Mennell 1992; Elias 2000). In this respect, many of the individuals interviewed or observed during this study recognised that although tattoos have gained an un-paralleled level of acceptability in contemporary Britain, *visible* tattoos were not normative in many work environments; as a result they purposely chose locations for their tattoos that were easily concealable. This includes the upper arms, legs and torso, and generally prohibits hands, neck, face, and to a lesser degree forearms. The following were typical comments from respondents' narratives:

I definitely chose places that were concealable, because I am a teacher, and not every school district is so friendly to tattooed teachers! (Harold)

I don't know what's going happen to me professionally, so I keep to places that can be concealed relatively easily, so that's lower arms out (Katherine, 22)

They are all in places I can keep them hidden, and for that reason (future employment prospects)... So I suppose it does hold me back a bit because a lot of places don't appreciate it (Jane, 22)

I'd love it to be a world where you could have as many tattoos as you like and people don't judge you by it and you don't get turned down for jobs by it but unfortunately we don't live in that world just yet (Siobhan, 20)

I am more thinking if I did a change of career or changed jobs for whatever reason ... So I've consciously taken the decision (to hide them), that's more on the arms really (Daryl, 35)

The locations tattooed and potential effect on employment was of more concern for women who felt they could not be as extensively tattooed as their male counterparts and still be employable: 'I think that if blokes are wearing a long sleeved shirt and get hot at their desk to roll their sleeves up people would just be

like oh wow, you've got (tattoo) sleeves whereas a woman they'd be like oh my god does that go all the way up. It would be a more shocking thing' (Esther, 33). In choosing to have tattoos placed in locations that are readily concealable individuals demonstrate awareness that their interdependencies with current or prospective employers are not equal, and having visible tattoos could potentially jeopardise job opportunities because of the greater power held by employers. Likewise, there was recognition that individuals are in competition with other individuals for employment opportunities and it was therefore necessary to consider how tattoos could alter other's perceptions:

you say to them (students) what if you're going to be a lawyer, you can't have arm tattoos, it doesn't matter how much that's wrong or discriminatory, you can't. Or what if you're going to be a doctor, surgeons have short sleeves...It's like you can't get over to them that they don't know what they're going to do and it's hard to get over to them that it's very different to be a surgeon and then get a tattoo because you're already a surgeon but going for an interview where there's a lot of competition how crap would it be if it actually came down to the fact we can't decide between these two people but that one's got a tattoo because it could if there's nothing else separating you (Esther, 33)

Recognising the unequal power they had in their interdependencies with employers, many individuals discussed potential discrimination against tattoos as highly constraining of their desire to be more heavily tattooed:

I wanted my neck framed so I was going to start them here and take it down the side and over the top of my shoulders but then I want to go into teaching and you can't really wear scarves constantly... I think if I won the lottery I'd go have a massive chest piece done, I'd like to have a huge chest piece done but I won't go get that done because I'm going to be working in an environment where this part of my body will always be on display no matter what (Hannah)

I'm proud of having tattoos, if I wasn't a teacher I would very likely go on to my arms (Esther, 33)

Of course, not everybody decides to be tattooed in locations where tattoos can be concealed. Nevertheless, those individuals who were tattooed on 'public skin' still demonstrated an awareness of how this would alter their interdependencies with employers, but typically claimed their decision to tattoo themselves in highly visible locations demonstrated a commitment to the self and ensured they continued to strive for a career they wanted:

ever since I can remember all I've ever done is draw or be artistically influenced and I've never wanted a job where I wasn't creating something or drawing something so I'm not going to be happy unless I'm tattooing or a freelance illustrator so it's up to me how I look. It comes into it that if I start worrying about the future and if my tattoos are going to affect me then I'm not as committed as I was about becoming an artist full time (Bob, 18)

I always had this thing, not arrogance, but I could always wear long sleeves so I don't care and if I couldn't get a job because of it it's not the job I'd want kind of thing (James, 31).

Finally, in one rare example a respondent discussed their desire to have more extensive tattooing, and related modifications, to be partly fuelled by their aspirations to pursue a niche career:

I've chosen body modification to do what I want as a career. It started off as a form of identity and a form of expressionism, but it's now become a desire to be more extreme and to possibly pursue a career from it... At the moment I want to get a lot more mods to get a lot more extreme to get more work so it is now to the stage that I want the modification to get more extreme to get the work I want to do (Damian, 41)

Recognising that his opportunities to pursue a more conventional career were limited as a result of his extensive facial tattooing (image eleven), Damian still retained a wish to be gainfully employed, either as an alternative model or as a

stage performer in a 'sideshow act' and had conducted considerable research into other heavily modified performers including Enigma (image twelve), Lizardman (image thirteen), and Lucky Diamond Rich (image fourteen), whom he described as his 'heroes', as well as personally contacting others who had already had their face tattooed before acquiring his own in order to investigate the reactions they had faced as a result of this more 'extreme' tattooing. Like those who use their highly visible tattoos as motivation to pursue careers, Damian's desire to be heavily tattooed as a means of pursuing a career in itself, demonstrates considerable foresight by recognising how interdependencies would be altered, and engaging in fact-finding missions prior to having his face tattooed.

Individuals demonstrated considerable foresight in recognising visible tattoos to be non-normative in many work environments, and demonstrated restraint by choosing to have their tattoos placed in locations that are easily concealable. Elias (2000, 2005) has demonstrated how those who are better able to moderate their affects develop temperaments that are better suited to the social contest of modern society. Applying this to the investigation of tattooing and the necessity of work, we appreciate how individuals recognition of the cultural norms regarding the display of tattoos in most work environments leads to them delaying the more-or-less instant gratification of receiving a tattoo so as to not potentially jeopardise their current or future employment prospects. Even those who did choose to be tattooed in visible locations demonstrated foresight by recognising that their decision may prohibit them from entering certain occupations; but by using this as motivation to strive for successful careers, or in Damian's case as a means to pursue a successful career in itself, we can consider their decisions civilized (Elias 2000) by acknowledging how they continue to ascribe to the conventional norms of society regarding gainful employment and success (see also Atkinson 2003b, 2004).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have detailed how Norbert Elias's figurational sociology provides the most appropriate framework for analysing the data obtained from the research process. By examining the similar figurational patterns in which individuals engage

when choosing to become tattooed, most notably the processes of finding a suitable tattoo artist, and the pain and discomfort of acquiring and healing the tattoo, we begin to interpret how the first webs of interdependency within tattoo figurations are formed. While not forming a distinct community or subculture, *all* tattooed individuals form the basic webs of interdependency through their similar experiences of tattooing. Secondly, respondents repeatedly discussed how their interdependencies with three key figurations – family, friends, and current or prospective employers – affect their tattoo decisions in regards to whether to be tattooed, which design they acquire, and where on the body their tattoos are placed. By adopting a figurational approach we are able to explore the overlap between the different figurations to which individuals belong and are able to do away with simple explanations of individuality, formation of in-group cohesiveness, or resistance to mainstream cultural norms, present in much of the current theorising, by recognising how individuals form figurations with *other* individuals and so cannot be considered isolation. In the next chapter I explore how the current popularity and acceptability of tattooing can be attributed to long term socio- and psycho-genic changes in cultural sensibilities concerning practice and the body more generally.

Chapter Five - From Outsider to Established – Explaining the Current Popularity and Acceptability of Tattooing.

In the previous chapter I offered a consideration of how figurational sociology can be effectively utilised to interpret contemporary tattooing practices and the narratives of those who choose to undergo this form of corporeal alteration. The figurations in which individuals are enmeshed (or will potentially be enmeshed within) have considerable impact upon their tattoo related decisions; however, another important factor was the practice's heightened respectability in contemporary figurations. In discussing the interdependencies among individuals and their parents for example, I highlighted how a generational difference was often espoused as the reason the latter were often negative in their reactions towards tattooing. A key theme in respondents' narratives was that tattooing was no longer solely associated with the social underbelly as it had once been and should be considered a more normative and legitimate form of corporeal alteration which is less likely to lead to individual's being stigmatised. In chapter one I mapped out the main periods in the history of tattooing to elucidate how competing definitions of tattooing are present throughout the history of the practice in the West. In this chapter I wish to extend this by examining theoretically how the current level of popularity and acceptability of tattooing is the result of long-term, sometimes unplanned, sociogenetic and accompanying psychogenetic changes concerning tattooing and the body more generally. I propose that four inter-related developments have led to the redefinition of tattooing and tattooed individuals: the increasing importance of the body as a site for constructing identity, the increased visibility of the practice in popular culture, processes of cultural diversity and globalization, and attempts to legitimise the practice as an acceptable art form. These developments can be attributed to general changes within Western culture as a whole and so the focus of these sections will also be on extrapolating some of the wider cultural developments that have impacted on the re-definition of tattooing. In order to interrogate how these developments have led to tattooing becoming an increasingly acceptable and sought after form of

corporeal alteration I draw on Elias and Scotson's (2008) theories concerning established and outsider relations, an overview of which is provided first.

Established-Outsider Relations

In 1965 [2008], Norbert Elias and John Scotson published *The Established and Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*, a historical study of a small British community given the pseudo-name 'Winston Parva'. Rather than adopting a class based approach as similar community studies of the period did, 'Elias and Scotson inferred a model of figurational relationships that takes into account the distribution of power chances between groups' (Atkinson 2003a: 161). They demonstrated that whilst class was one important dynamic in the relationship between established and outsider groups it does not supersede all other sources of social power. Established groups are more embedded within established-outsider figurations, often because they have a longer history within the figuration, and as a result they have greater access to economic, political, moral, and cultural power; outsiders in contrast are less embedded in positions of power and excluded from participation in socially influential power structures. As reflected in other areas of Elias's work (2000, 2006, 2012a, 2012b), Elias and Scotson's study of established-outsider relations reveals how 'social standards... protect the interests of established groups' (Atkinson 2003a: 162) and as he had done previously (e.g. *The Court Society* 2006), Elias used empirical investigation at the microscopic level to explain sociological phenomena at the macroscopic level. Consequently, Elias and Scotson's theories concerning established-outsider relations can be used to inform a wide variety of social inequalities including race and ethnic relations, gender inequality, relations between homosexuals and heterosexuals, and relations between parents and children (Mennell 1992; Van Krieken 1998; Kilminster and Mennell 2003; Wouters 2004, 2007). The theory of established-outsider relations is useful for the analysis of tattooing as it informs us how cultural standards, including those of bodily norms and display, are promulgated by individuals of established groups and coalesced around shared images of identification through which certain forms of bodily comportment are more valued than others. These forms are partly formed in relation to common social positions, roles, attributes, and

intersubjectively held belief systems, but also include shared tastes or preferences for specific outwards forms of collective representation. In chapter one I detailed how the practice of tattooing once enjoyed popularity amongst the social elite but as technical developments meant its application became cheaper and easier, and thereby attainable by the working-classes, it began to move down the social hierarchy and underwent processes of redefinition. This redefinition associated the practice with the 'low herd' of society through the publication of articles from psychology, criminology and medicine, which claimed the practice to be one concomitant with criminals and/or the mentally insane, i.e. outsiders. This was reinforced by the adoption of tattooing by socially undesirable groups such as biker gangs, prisoners and youth gangs, who used tattooing's outsider status as part of their deviant identity aimed at resisting the establishment.

In utilising theories of established-outsider relations to explore the current level of popularity for tattooing a key understanding is a recognition that power is not static and one sided, and power balances between interdependent groups fluctuate. As a result, the relations between established and outsider groups can change and formerly outsider groups can themselves become established; this has been witnessed in the various emancipation movements of the twentieth-century including workers-, women's-, black-, and gay-rights movements. During these emancipation periods there are often calls for separatism and new self-images for the formerly outsider groups are promulgated, e.g. 'black is beautiful' (Kilminster and Mennell 2003). As outsider groups challenge the previously held assumptions of the established group, images of the former 'become less fantasy laden and the attitudes of the established groups towards the outsiders [becomes] more flexible and accommodating' (ibid. 196). This is not to say that outsider groups attain complete parity with established ones but 'as the balance of power becomes *relatively more* equal (but not entirely equal) compared with the earlier phase, and outsiders begin to merge with the established to form a new establishment, then more realistic mutual perceptions become possible between groups as the tensions between them diminish' (ibid. original emphasis). As discussed in chapters one and two, members of many emancipation groups adopted tattooing as part of 'identity

politics' (Dunn 1998) aimed at challenging conservative and oppressive ideologies prevalent during the period and as a result also challenged cultural associations between tattooing and the social underbelly. As these individuals became assimilated in established groups, long-standing negative associations of tattooing underwent further processes of redefinition, was brought more visibly into the public conscious, and 'became chic for the middle and upper classes' (Atkinson 2003a: 44). Despite cultural redefinition that began with the emancipation movements in the 1970s the practice has still retained an aura of deviance as some established groups continue to posit a link between tattooing and outsider groups who continue to use the mark as a form of cultural resistance. Nevertheless, the period since has witnessed an acceleration of popularity in the practice as remaining negative associations are challenged, and in the rest of this chapter I will focus in detail on the four main developments that have contributed to this ongoing redefinition: the increasing importance of the body as a site for constructing identity; the increased visibility of the practice in popular culture; cultural diversity and globalization; and attempts to legitimise the practice as an acceptable art form,

The Body as a Site for Constructing Identity

In *The Court Society* (2006) Elias demonstrated the importance of the body as a bearer of social value. Indicating how members of courts must dress in appropriate ways to impress others and always take account of their body language in order to secure success, Elias exhibited a concern with the body long before Foucault (1980, 1995) or Bourdieu (2010). Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging that the importance of the body is not new, the post-Second World War growth of consumer culture in the West has witnessed the body become increasingly central to an individuals' sense of self-identity to the point where it is considered the principle resource utilised in the construction of identity by many sociologists (e.g. Giddens 1991; Featherstone 2007; Turner 2008; Shilling 2012). Newspapers, magazines and television programmes regularly inform readers and viewers on the latest diets or fitness regimes aimed at keeping the body looking young, slim and attractive, and a 2011 report by the Fitness Industry Association claims that 12% of the UK

population are registered members of health and fitness studios. Every day we are bombarded with images of young, slim, fit, and healthy bodies, particularly in consumer culture where the body is used to sell a vast array of products, including perfume, shaving foam, cars, and airline tickets. Related to the desire to look young, slim and attractive is an emphasis on the healthy body through which 'heart disease, cancer and other diseases are portrayed as avoidable for individuals who eat correctly, stop smoking and exercise sufficiently' (Shilling 2012: 7). These lifestyle choices are encouraged by governments looking to emphasise personal responsibility for individual's bodies in an effort to shift welfare costs away from the state. The multi-million pound industry centred on membership of health and fitness studios is complemented by the production of self-help books, dietary supplements, dieting programmes, and exercise plans, and the promotion of healthy bodies is inextricably tied up with the desire to look attractive (ibid.). Cosmetic surgery procedures such as face-lifts, liposuction, breast augmentation, tummy tucks, or nose jobs, also provide individuals with more permanent ways of restructuring the body and have entered public consciousness as normative, acceptable, and regular occurrences; in 2013 in the UK, 50,122 plastic surgery procedures took place, with breast augmentation making up almost one quarter of all procedures. Finally, developments in transplant surgery, in-vitro fertilisation, and stem cell research, have also seen the body thrust into the limelight, giving individuals unprecedented control of their bodies which are now increasingly viewed as a phenomenon of options and choices.

As the body becomes an ever more central resource upon which identity is constructed in contemporary Britain, individuals become introduced to a plethora of ways in which to re-shape themselves. The means for re-shaping the body take many forms but as dieting, keep-fit regimes, and cosmetic surgery become increasingly common place, individuals perceptions of the work done to the body are redefined, particularly in relation to pain, traditionally something to be avoided in Western culture (see chapters four and seven). To be a member of contemporary Western culture is to be increasingly encouraged to construct your identity through the body and as a result of widespread media access and processes

of globalization individuals increasingly come into contact with what Myers (1992) coined 'nonmainstream body modification': modifications such as non-conventional piercings (piercings not in the ears or nose), scarification, and tattooing. Sweetman (1999a, 1999b, 1999c) has demonstrated how these modifications can be considered body projects by those who undergo such forms of corporeal alteration and though I agree with Atkinson's (2003a) contention that we should dismiss the notion of body projects being completely individualistic and individualistic and reconfigure our understanding of individuality as constructed in relation to figurations within which the individual is enmeshed (see chapters four and six), much of what Sweetman found was reflected in the narratives of respondents for this study. Respondents repeatedly discussed how they viewed the body as central to the construction of their identity and more specifically how their tattoos formed part of an overall project they wished to achieve:

Now I've actually got quite extensive facial body modification as well, full facial mask tattoo, I'm actually looking at doing modelling and maybe using the image, I've got it so I should have some fun with it, and if I can make some money doing it all the better. So now I'm actually thinking, following the devil theme, the tribal and the symbols all go together with that (Damian, 41)

I'm going to get sleeves done, then worked on to my chest, both of my legs done do at least my knees so like full leg sleeves as well...I'll probably start at my feet and work up. Eventually when I've got all that done I want to get my full back done but I don't know what I want on my back (Chuck, 24)

Yeah, they're going to be full sleeves. It's just working stuff in the middle and I've got designs to on the side here, something to go up here (Steve, 38)

I'm always thinking of new stuff, something new will come to mind. My next piece or what's probably going to be my next piece realistically is a quite large leg piece that will come from my hip down to my knee on the one side (Trevor)

In these and numerous other examples, respondents discussed their bodies quite literally as projects in the process of becoming and often, as with Damian above, this entailed other forms of corporeal reconfiguration aimed at delivering an overall sense of self-identity. Within their narratives respondents repeatedly discussed how the incidence of more normative body projects such as dieting, weight lifting, or plastic surgery, was pervasive and coalesced their understanding of tattooing as an equivalent form of body modification. Nevertheless, many respondents were aware that although tattooing had become more acceptable some members of established groups still associated it with deviant others their reaction to this was often indignation:

you get doctors that will do breast implants, you get doctors who will do tummy tucks... if you say you want a tummy tuck because you've had children and your stomach's flabby people are like, oh yeah... Why doesn't somebody get those people (who have conventional surgery) and put them in therapy and say why do you feel the need to do this, why are you trying to conform. It's just that women should have a flat stomach, that's the perfectly acceptable norm, yet I think that's more psychologically damaging than people who've made the decision to change their bodies for art. Because that's not conforming is it...it's saying that I don't want to conform, I want to be different, in the same way that breast implants are seen as perfectly fine and tattoos aren't (Esther, 33)

Esther's indignation was fuelled by comparisons with invasive plastic surgery procedures such as tummy tucks and breast implants which fall within the acceptable norms of society and we witness in her narrative an admission that tattooing may be viewed as 'not conforming', thereby falling outside the bounds of established norms concerning the corporal alteration of the body. This is not to say that all respondents felt the same level of indignation; for some, like Esther, tattooing was adopted instead of other body projects, especially where they felt they were unable to partake in such projects, whereas others discussed how tattooing formed part of an overall body project that also entailed more normative corporeal projects such as weight lifting and dieting: 'I like to maintain my

muscularity and everything works for a function, creating an image' (Damian, 41). For many respondents, their status as members of established groups was not threatened by their involvement in tattooing which was usually limited to small designs or tattoos in easily concealed locations, allowing them to maintain a level of respectability in company where tattooing may be frowned upon – 'I really like tattoos but I want to enjoy my tattoos and not feel restricted by them... because the kind of jobs I'm looking for are business suits that kind of thing and that's not the type of stuff I wear but I'm looking to go into the business world so I've got to try and fit in with that kind of image they're expecting' (Siobhan, 20); in Goffmanesque terms they are able to 'pass' as fully committed members of respectful society. Nevertheless, whilst tattooing's status as a fully accepted body practice is still in flux, as invasive body practices such as cosmetic surgery come to be considered regular occurrences, the outsider status of tattooing is challenged as it increasingly comes to be viewed as a form of corporeal alteration congruent with those more readily promoted by consumer culture.

In discussion of tattooing body projects a theme that was repeated in the narratives of respondents was how, among the plethora of options available to them in the corporeal construction of their body, tattooing body projects signified a unique form of individuality. This was because in the assessment of most respondents, 'normative' body rituals such as weight lifting, dieting, and adorning oneself in fashionable clothing were body projects of consumer and capitalist society and so represented aligning oneself with the cultural masses. This is not to say that there are not fashions *within* tattooing or that tattoos themselves are not acquired for the sake of being fashionable, as will be addressed in subsequent chapters, but although respondents were aware that tattooing was available to everybody above the age of 18 and that the popularity of the practice meant that tattooing *per se* may not be considered as unique any longer, the individuality of *their* designs allowed them to express their *true* identity as personal and meaningful (though again we must consider this individuality vis-à-vis the collective):

I have pieces on me that are very important, they are not just these throwaway designs, each one is very thoughtful I think, and really bold and says a lot about where I was or where I am at any given time (Eileen)

I'm quite individual so I'd hate to get a tattoo to find out someone else had it (Siobhan, 20)

It's an expression and I think it's something that can make you truly an individual (Jeff, 24)

You can have them and they are individual and they can mean things (Lizzy, 19)

Though few respondents wished to deliberately label themselves as outsiders resisting the lure of consumer culture, the importance of retaining their individuality *within* consumer culture was important. As Atkinson states, 'given the extent to which we are encouraged to modify our bodies as part of doing identity, those wishing to assert some form of social or cultural *difference* find in tattooing a ready-made technique for creating and consolidating personal difference' (2003a: 164, my emphasis).

In his consideration of the courtiers of European courts in *The Court Society* (2005), Elias has demonstrated how the body can act as a text through which one is able to represent distinction, status, and affective control (2000, 2006, 2010; see also Bourdieu 2010); this is a trend that has accelerated considerably over the past 30 years to the point that the body has arguably become the principal resource upon which individuals in contemporary society construct their identity (Giddens 1992; Shilling 2012). As a result, dominant social codes concerning the body are continually undergoing long-term processes of sociogenetic change that leads to the redefining of what exactly a body is and how it is implicated in the construction of identity. The resulting psychogenetic change in individual habituses means that individuals become accustomed to altering the body in a plethora of ways. As we are increasingly confronted with practices for modifying the body such as weight lifting, dieting, and cosmetic surgery, promoted as normative within consumer

culture, so too are individuals also aware of alternative means for restructuring the self, such as tattooing:

the popularity of tattoos has paralleled a general cultural preoccupation with the body that has led to widespread obsessions with diet, exercise, and plastic surgery. Further, tattoos are able to carry the symbolic weight they do only because by modifying the skin they become a culturally recognized vehicle for talking about the self (Rosenblatt 1997: 310)

This was a theme repeated within the narratives of respondents, the majority of who considered tattooing to be simply another form of constructing identity that exists alongside more normative means. Key to this was the availability of information related to, and the increased visibility of, the practice that will be discussed in the next section, but as interest in the body more generally is on the rise it is no surprise that tattooing should also enter the public consciousness. The outsider status of the practice is continually challenged and it increasingly becomes considered amongst the gamut of conventional body techniques promoted by consumer culture. As a result it is adopted in ever greater numbers by the established members of figurations and so the level of stigma continues to decrease and individuals no longer fear the same level of social exclusion for participating in tattooing body projects; in Eliasian terms we witness unplanned psychogenetic changes regarding the acceptability of the practice as a result of long term sociogenetic changes associated with its increasing adoption by established members of a figuration. In the next section I will expand on these long term changes by focusing explicitly on tattooing and how the increased visibility of the practice in popular culture has been the key development in challenging its outsider status.

The Increased Visibility of the Practice

The increased visibility of tattooing in celebrity society (Van Krieken 2012) has, in my opinion, been the most important development in challenging the outsider status of the practice. The power of the media and those who inhabit celebrity society is debated heavily within cultural studies, but it is not disputed that it has

significant power in shaping cultural norms regarding the appearance and display of the body (Mythen 2004; Pitts-Taylor 2007; Shilling 2012; Van Krieken 2012). As tattoos are found on the bodies of sports stars and other celebrities in ever greater numbers, media reports regularly features stories on the latest designs these personalities have acquired, and tattooed models appear regularly in the adverts for consumer products, the practice becomes increasingly visible in the public domain, this was something discussed by all respondents:

I think people do find it cool, as their idols most likely have one or more, especially in the music scene. So people they respect/admire they want to mimic in the hopes they become like them, from the heaviest metal band to a pop singer! Everyone seems to have a tattoo (Heather, 25)

People who are like that (celebrities) are the reason it's become popular... I think it's so mainstream like people like Cheryl Cole etc., famous people have tattoos so like normal regular people that aren't into all that sort of thing think it's alright, like she's got a tattoo so why can't I have one (Chuck 24)

I'm trying to think why I first wanted a tattoo way back when, I think it's because maybe it was coming in and more fashionable, celebrities were starting to get the more often and I thought that wouldn't be a bad thing to get. So I guess you could say TV/Celebrities influenced me a bit in that respect (Daryl, 35)

When I first started getting tattooed... 10-11 years ago, even then it was very different... it definitely wasn't as popular. It became popular about 5 years ago. David Beckham is probably partly responsible but that was quite a while ago, probably 7 or 8 years (James, 31)

These are just some of the sentiments expressed by respondents but clearly demonstrate the extent to which tattooing is becoming visible in popular culture. As James discussed, David Beckham (see image fifteen), one of the most prominent celebrities in contemporary culture, has done much to popularise the practice over

the past 10 years and his highly visible body markings have introduced millions of people to the *possibility* of pursuing this form of body project. This is not to say that David Beckham's tattoos have been universally accepted,⁴⁰ but as the statements above demonstrate, the increased visibility of the practice in popular culture has led to redefinitions concerning its acceptability and has influenced a growing number of individuals to become tattooed themselves as they seek to mimic those they admire and acquire similar marks of distinction (Bourdieu 2010). Interestingly, almost all respondents – Daryl above being one of the few exceptions – dismissed themselves as being influenced by consumer culture and/or celebrities because they did not wish to be seen as cultural dupes, nevertheless they did universally agree that the movement of tattooing from the cultural fringes could largely be attributed to the increased visibility of tattooing in mainstream culture.

As the visibility of the practice has increased in consumer and celebrity culture there has been a rise in media devoted specifically to tattooing. Tattoo magazines such as *Skin Deep* and *Total Tattoo* are circulated globally and easily accessible TV programmes such as *Inked*, *Tattoo Hunter* and the '*Ink*' series (which now includes *Miami-*, *LA-*, *London-* and *New York-* *Ink*) are regularly available on TV networks and DVD. In her analysis of cosmetic surgery Pitts-Taylor (2007) acknowledges how the increased visibility of cosmetic surgery in the form of shows such as *Extreme Makeover* has made the practice more socially acceptable, a claim ratified by the cosmetic surgeons she interviewed for who 'readily attributed media exposure with the recent market explosion' (2007: 121). This is paralleled in tattooing with the aforementioned television programmes rapidly increasing the visibility of the practice as culturally meaningful, normative, and artistic, and although all the tattoo artists I interviewed felt the programmes reflected an overly simplistic view of the industry they nevertheless acknowledged that they had done much to popularise tattooing and increase the amount of clients they had. Interestingly, tattooed respondents also shared the tattooists' reticence regarding the way the

⁴⁰ See for example complaints made about an image tattooed on the stars arm deemed too 'racy' following Sainsbury's supermarket sending out promotional material featuring Mr Beckham: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2122801/Wont-somebody-think-children--Sainsburys-apologise-sending-promotional-posters-Beckham-featuring-revealing-Posh-tattoo-47-000-schools.html>

practice was portrayed with several describing the programmes as 'cheesy': 'I watch Miami Ink, LA Ink every now and then, it's a little bit cheesy with the stupid stories they come up with you know' (Steve, 38); 'I don't like the cheesy factor of tattooing. I get put off by Miami Ink and those programmes' (Lizzy, 19). Nevertheless, respondents were universal in their acknowledgement that such TV programmes had done much to popularise the practice and challenge its outsider status:

I think Miami/LA Ink... have made tattoos incredibly fashionable (Katherine, 22)

I just think the whole celebrity obsessed culture has changed it, especially stuff like Miami Ink and stuff as well, like people are like have you seen Miami Ink, that guy on Miami Ink, oh Kat Von D [a star of the show] (Chuck, 24)

If you look at the programmes you get on TV, Miami Ink, and LA Ink that have made it a mainstream, acceptable thing. There's got to be a relevance to the fact that getting a tattoo has become so fashionable all over the world, the UK included (James, 31)

And now you get celebrity artists with TV shows like Miami Ink, London Ink etc. it does put it out there and make it more seen and more mainstream (Damian, 41)

This does not mean that the acceptance of tattooing has been universal. A recently screened docu-drama entitled *My Tattoo Addiction* (2012) demonstrates that long-held associations between tattooing and psychopathy do still remain, and as a practice that arguably moves the body further away from, rather than closer to, the cultural ideal of the young, slim and attractive body, its acceptability is more contested than cosmetic surgery. Nevertheless, the increased visibility of the practice does contribute to the growing popularity and establishment of tattooing as it moves from the cultural shadows to become mainstream cultural practice.

In the above examples and throughout narratives respondents offered discussions centred on how the popularity of tattoo focused programmes had helped not just in redefining the outsider status of the practice, but also in making it appear fashionable. Tattooing has been accorded a place in both fashion and advertising for many years with designers such as Jean Paul Gautier and brands including Nokia and Toyota using tattooed models in their advertising campaigns (see images sixteen and seventeen), and tattoo imagery increasingly appearing on the catwalk, but this trend has intensified in recent years. We should be cautious about equating the use of tattooing in fashion as a universal acceptance of the practice; a recent television advertisement for the fragrance 'Homme Wild' by 'Joop!' for example uses a tattooed model who is seen on a motorbike in a traditional bikers' leather jacket and the voiceover tells us 'it's so good to be bad',⁴¹ whilst a similar advertisement for the fragrance 'Only The Brave-Tattoo' by 'Diesel' features an enigmatic tattooed model with the voiceover asking 'what are you hiding behind your tattoos'. In both these examples, particularly in the former, the brands use tattoos' associations with 'bad boys' (Stewart 1990), or with shady and enigmatic characters, to sell their product as 'edgy'. Nevertheless advertising campaigns such as these have undoubtedly increased the visibility of the practice and allowed for the possibility of alternative definitions with the outsider status of the practice challenged by successful multi-million pound brands using tattooed individuals to sell products aimed at middle class individuals with disposable incomes. Respondents themselves were however somewhat ambivalent when discussing the fashionable nature of tattooing. Though they recognised that the association with fashion and consumer culture had gone some way to removing the stigma associated with tattooing they paradoxically considered this popularity a bad thing as it removed some the uniqueness of this form of body project:

I do think they are fashionable, probably vogue magazine would class it in the top 5! :) It's a hard one to call whether it's good or bad, it's good in the sense I don't get random abuse shouted at me anymore...however the bad is

⁴¹ See image eighteen for the print version of this advertisement

that every Tom, Dick and Harry has got a tattoo now... it's just an everyday thing (Heather, 25)

They've just become fashionable and so many people are getting them done that it's not such a shock (Kate, 27)

I think it's changing and also with the whole culture, so many people have them, so many young people have such a lot of work done because it's fashionable and there's fashion and trends in tattooing. I think a lot of people don't give that enough thought. I think 95% of people (have them done for fashion) do, even me to a degree. It's a statement, a way of decorating yourself but I think a lot of people do it because they think it's cool (Katie, 28)

Common in the narratives was that 'everybody had them' now, despite figures estimating that approximately 20m people – less than a third of the total population and approximately 50% of the adult population – are tattooed. Nevertheless, the *perception* that tattooing is no longer a practice adopted *only* by those on the fringes of society has considerable influence in the changing status of tattooing as an outsider to more established form of corporal reinscription.

As well as the adoption of tattooing by fashion houses and marketing firms there has also been what I term a 'celebritization' of tattooing itself. As Damian's earlier statement suggested, 'you get celebrity artists with TV shows like Miami Ink, London Ink etc.' and this was reflected in the narratives of most respondents who were familiar with the artists featured on the shows that included Kat Von D, Ami James and Lal Hardy. However, respondents frequently discussed local artists in such a way that they too appeared to be celebrities and on many occasions local – and sometimes some not so local⁴² – artists were referred to by their first names only without any reference to the actual tattoo studios that they were associated with. Other high profile artists, who had been learnt about through tattoo magazines or internet research, also frequently topped the lists of specific artists

⁴² For example, one interview was carried out in a small town in Kent where the respondent referred by first name to an artist who was based in London, approximately 85 miles away

that respondents wished to be tattooed by and were spoken about in celebrity like terms, as one respondent pointedly stated – ‘it’s interesting, like celebrity chefs we’ve got celebrity tattoo artists’ (Kate, 28). Whilst the high media profile of tattooing and the almost limitless availability of information on the internet mean it is not unusual that respondents – who were all tattooed – would be familiar with particular artists and grant them a celebrity like status, there has also been an encroachment of tattooing itself on consumer culture. The increased incidence of tattoo imagery on t-shirts, ashtrays, drinks coasters etc. may not be surprising, consumer culture has a long history of co-opting outsider styles since punk became high street chic in the 1970s (Hebdige 1979; Muggleton 2000), but recently there has been the establishment of tattoo artists as brands in their own right. In 1999 Sailor Jerry’s (see chapter one) protégés Ed Hardy and Mike Malone set up Sailor Jerry Ltd. to produce clothing and other items such as training shoes, playing cards and most famously Sailor Jerry Spiced Rum (see images nineteen and twenty) while Hardy himself licensed a line of clothing based on his own art to be produced by Ku USA Inc. in 2002, going on to sell the brand to fashion designer Christian Audigier for a rumoured \$10m in 2004; his art also appears on beauty products including blow dryers, styling irons and other hair accessories produced by IGP Beauty. Though it is difficult to demarcate a clear boundary between tattooing’s encroachment on, or adoption by, fashion in these examples the crossover does testify to the increased visibility of the practice in consumer culture and furthermore underlines how the outsider status of tattooing is continually being redefined.

In this section I have underlined how tattooing has become an increasingly visible phenomenon in consumer and celebrity culture. The increased presence of the practice in these realms has introduced millions of people to the possibility of adopting this form of corporeal alteration themselves, and the popularity and thirst for information relating to tattooing has led to the introduction of tattoo focused media such as *Miami Ink* which regularly air on prime time television. As shown in studies about plastic surgery (Pitts-Taylor 2007; Elliott 2011), the increased visibility of such practices on television helps shape their social acceptability and narratives

of respondents were replete with references to the acceptability and/or popularity of tattooing being demonstrated by television programmes such as *Miami Ink*. The increasing use of tattooed models to sell consumer products and the blurring of the boundaries between fashion and tattooing have also catapulted the practice into mainstream habituses and contributed to the cultural redefinition of the practice. In the words of one of my respondents:

I think it's just the way society is, it really is. The more things you see on TV, in music, especially music, and film, it becomes more and more acceptable. You see more and more people on screen with tattoos it becomes acceptable and society adapts to the role models who get forced through your TV screen (Cliff, aged 33)

Cultural Diversity and Globalization

Processes of globalization and the increasing cultural diversity of Britain have also contributed much to the redefinition of acceptable forms of bodily comportment more generally, and tattooing more specifically. This growing cultural diversity has led to a breakdown of established ways of knowing the world as individuals are exposed to alternative understandings. As Atkinson states:

When groups come into spatial contact with one another traditions and ideologies are exposed through an on-going process of cross-fertilization – and dominant cultural ways of viewing the world are transformed... Elias and Scotson (2008 [1965]) pointed out that while established groups in a specific figuration profoundly affect the cultural ways of life of the many outsider groups, the impact is not solely one-way. The established culture is shaped and altered through the exchange process, with traditional ways of understanding life subject to redefinition (2003a: 145)

As the power ratios between established-outsider groups become relatively more equal processes of cross-fertilization have exposed individuals to the different body styles of other cultures. Interacting with others who's religious, ethnic, and cultural, habitus differs from their own individuals' view alternate clothing, make-up, preference for body sizes, tattooing etc. and reconfigure their own

understanding of acceptable body projects. In consideration of tattooing this influence is evident in the number of individual's choosing to have characters from other cultures inscribed permanently upon their body:

Tempestuous, it's Latin for storm... Semper Fi means always be faithful [in Latin]... And I've got some Chinese writing in there which means spirit... That's one of the advantages of being where I work as they translate from open source radio and video so we've got someone who's Arabic, someone who's Italian... so I'm in the right place! (Daryl, 35)

In Daryl's statement we witness not only his own desire to be tattooed with words and phrases from other cultures but also how his job means that he is regularly exposed to a diverse range of cultures. Similar themes resonated with other respondents and the participant observation confirms the popularity of other languages including Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese, among others, as script or characters choices for tattoos – 'I'd rather have it in Chinese letters or Arabic' (Kev, 54). Images from other cultures were also popular tattoo choices:

I started getting an affiliation with Japanese, I think it went back to when I was a kid. I always wanted the Japanese to win the war films! So I started getting into a lot of Japanese stuff but also had an interest in Chinese film, Korean films, Asian films in general... Everything I've got is related somehow to bits of Japanese history or current times; however you want to associate it. The symbols I have are your traditional Japanese; bonsai, traditional Japanese Cranes, Fujiyama etc... On the bottom of my spine I have a 1000-year-old prayer that was said before Samurai before they went to battle (Luke; see image twenty one)

I've got a friend who's got some tattoos, like a full Chinese dragon on that bit (Siobhan, 20)

It's le petit prince, a French character, childhood story character (Daphne, 25)

Allied to the increased cultural diversity of Western countries are processes of globalization which have exposed individuals to a variety of body projects from around the world. There has been considerable debate concerning globalization both within and outside academia, and globalization theories are wide and varied (for example Baker 1982; Giddens 1991; Donnelly 1996; Larrain 2013). Whilst I do not wish to subscribe to any one theory, nor do I wish to engage in a debate concerning the merits or otherwise of globalization, we can draw loosely on processes of globalization to demonstrate how they have introduced us to a variety of body modification habits. Atkinson claims globalization processes to 'constitute a leading set of influences that are creating a collective distrust of intolerably rigid ways of viewing the world' (2003a: 150). Resonating with Giddens' (1991) concerns about the decline of religious authority and grand narratives as providing meaning to life, and Shilling's (2012) of the growing distrust of science and medical professionals as sole guardians of knowledge about bodies (see also Featherstone 1991, 2000; Frank 1991a, 1991b), globalization processes have taught us to be tolerant of other cultures meaning systems. In consideration of body modification this is perhaps most encapsulated by the philosophy of the modern primitive movement discussed in chapter two. Although none of the respondents for this study identified as modern primitives some did discuss tribal cultures:

The whole body modification and tribal tattooing of indigenous people really fascinates me throughout the ages. Obviously you've got the dog man that was found preserved in the bog and was found tattooed and that goes back thousands of years. Obviously culturally, the cultural significance of tattooing does really interest me... I didn't want to go for a Maori piece or Polynesian piece as I totally respect their significance (Damian, 41)

Even those who did not discuss any specific tribal cultures regularly discussed the use of tribal imagery in tattoos:

tribal tattoos were my first two tattoos... in the 90s tribal was where it was at (Chuck, 24)

Some people like black and white, some like tribal, and they go the specialists and collect the designs they have (Hannah)

I was in a museum in London and I saw this tribal drum that had this writing that went all the way around the front and it almost looked like tribal calligraphy or something and if you concentrated it was words although I didn't know what it said. But I thought that's really wicked and I wanted to do my own vibe on that. So used that as the idea to have this graffiti writing go in a curve around my elbow (James, 31)

The regular referencing of 'tribal' is somewhat problematic as it was used, in most cases, as a 'catch-all' for all non-Western cultures. As a result many of the criticisms directed at the modern primitive movement were repeated as the myriad indigenous cultures were denied specificity by the casual adoption of 'tribal' as term for a *style* of tattooing. Nevertheless, the repeated reference to tribal tattooing, both as a style, and as a form of body practice of non-Western cultures, as well as tattooing practices of other cultures, notably Japan, demonstrates how processes of globalization have made tattooing a more visible practice as well as providing individuals with alternative world views upon which to draw in the construction of their own body projects. This mirrors a more general interest in the body practices of other cultures, particularly spiritual based practices from the East such as tai chi, acupuncture, and yoga (Shilling 2012). Furthermore, recent years have witnessed the 'exotic' packaged and sold for consumption by fashion labels and projected regularly through TV screens. As processes of globalization have made the world a smaller place – what McLuhan termed the global village (2001, 2011) – interest in other cultures and their body practices has intensified. The exotic rituals of cultural outsiders, once the preserve of publications such as *National Geographic*, are now readily available for all through popular media forms such as the internet and television. Since its inception anthropology has promoted cultural acceptance, a notion readily promoted through contemporary Western cultures, and the practices of these outsider groups challenge the body norms promulgated by established groups within our own society. Consequently 'Western discourses detailing appropriate body practice (including sound body modification)

no longer dictate how individuals should relate to their bodies' as individuals learn to become more tolerant of other cultures body practices and begin to experiment with them' (Atkinson 2003a: 154).

Tattooing as an Art Form

Without exception respondents referred to tattooing as art or as being artistic; bodies were repeatedly posited as canvases; and tattoo practitioners were rarely referred to as anything other than artists. Through interdependencies with tattooed others and tattoo artists, respondents learnt to define the practice as artistic, and on many occasions also discussed how tattooing sat alongside more conventional forms of art and allowed artists to find gainful employment in a competitive art world. This is enforced through the referral of the practice as art or body art in both academia and popular media which has had considerable affect in shaping discourse around the practice which frames it within artistic terminology (DeMello 2000; Atkinson 2003a; Sanders 2008; Lodder 2010). Yet, the practice's status as art has not always been so accepted, as discussed in chapter one, during the formative years of the modern tattoo era tattooists (as opposed to tattoo artists) were often retired sailors who had rudimentary skills – 'the average tattooist is a man of little imagination or artistry' (Ebensten 1953: 70) – that enabled them to apply designs to customers. As Sanders states, tattoos were generally viewed as 'a decorative cultural product dispensed by largely unskilled and unhygienic practitioners from dingy shops in suburban slums. Tattoo consumers, in turn, were typically seen as being drawn from marginal, rootless, and dangerously unconventional social groups' (2008: 19). The condemnation of the practice in early academic interest, particularly from psychologists such as Cesare Lombroso and Adolph Loos, established a long-standing tradition in which tattooed individuals and those who applied the designs were presumed to be criminals or as having some form of psychiatric (often sexual) condition; tattooing was, in short, an outsider practice and was refused entry to the lexicon of art by established figurations who continued to view tattooing as a practice of outsiders. However, the period since the tattoo renaissance of the 1970s has witnessed the practice, like modern art and graffiti before it, undergo processes of redefinition as a result of

which it has begun to enter the established art world. This is not to say that it has been completely assimilated and accepted, just like the practice itself its status as fully established is challenged, yet as it becomes increasingly displayed and discussed as art its status as such is more secure. This can be attributed to three inter-related developments: the influx of traditional artists into the figuration, many of whom continue to be involved in traditional art mediums; the display of tattooing in art galleries and museums and the related display of traditional art in these locations by tattoo artists; and the discussion of the practice in academia.

As described in chapter one, the beginning of the tattoo renaissance witnessed an influx of artists with 'university or art school backgrounds and experience in traditional artistic media' (Sanders 2008: 19) into tattoo figurations. These artists brought knowledge of 'physiological and social principles pertaining to corporeal movement, aesthetics, and display' (Atkinson 2003a: 45) to the practice, and in co-operation with new clientele who demanded unique, custom designs, contributed to the development of new techniques such as fine lining, shading, and highlighting. This continues today with practitioners continuing to refer to themselves as artists and respondents repeatedly referring to them as such too:

It's interesting because... it's allowed a lot more artists to work really because before if you were good at art, and so many of them are very good, what did you do? You might get a few people who are designers but you wouldn't get many because the fields so competitive or you might get a graphics degree. But its allowing people who've got talent to work in their chosen field (Esther, 33)

what you have to remember is that these people are artists but rather than painting on a canvas they're just using your skin to do you work (Daryl, 35)

Several older respondents also discussed how the artistic nature of tattooing had changed:

For me now, I think tattooing has gone from so much what it was like when I started to what I see on you now and I see total body art on you whereas

compared to what I've got which is just so antique you know, it's like the Flintstone's have been doing this one me! It's moved on so much (Bill, 56)

it's more art now, you can see now it's done by professional people and years ago it was just people trying to make money... it's more artistic today, it's a lot better than it was (Deb)

However, respondents were cautious about labelling *all* practitioners as artists and drew upon their knowledge of the practice to make judgements about the artistic merit and skill of individuals:

Definitely (considered art), especially now when you see what they can do... Zeke (a tattooist) did that cherry branch freehand on my back... And you think that's talent; it's not just sticking something on and going over lines. And he designed the phoenix whereas before you'd just get them to stick something on you and go over it, it was never their design (Esther, 33)

If it's custom work that makes it art. If a tattoo artist is getting it off the wall, like a flash design, then it's not really art (Lizzy, 19)

Finally, during the course of my research tattoo artists with whom I came into contact repeatedly discussed their involvement in other art forms – 'When I'm not here I'm drawing all the time, I make sure I draw at least a couple of times a week' (Bob, 18, tattoo apprentice) – which they sometimes sold to supplement their income,⁴³ and tattoo magazines regularly contain features on tattoo artists other art projects. Their involvement with more traditional forms of art lends legitimacy to the claim that they are 'genuine' artists by demonstrating their range of skills and creative talent. As tattoo artists come to be viewed as genuine artists in their own right, and become associated with more traditional art forms, they challenge stereotypes about the practice and assist in its shift from an outsider to established art form.

⁴³ For example, an artist at one studio where I conducted ethnography used drew tattoo related prints which he would frame and sell, often to other tattoo artists.

The second development that has led to the redefinition of tattooing as an art form is the display of tattoos in art galleries and museums as well as the display of traditional art by tattoo artists in these places. In chapters one and two I discussed how early tattoo artists such as Ed Hardy displayed 'drawings, watercolours, and prints in galleries on La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles and [participated] in group exhibitions that were national in scope' (Rubin 1988: 242); this too is a practice that has intensified in the intervening period. In the UK, numerous museums and art galleries display tattoo collections; the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery, the Horniman Museum, the Pitt Rivers Museum, and the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, are just some of those that host exhibitions focused on various forms of body art including extensive displays of tattoos.⁴⁴ In September 2012, the Royal Anthropological Institute ran the 'Body Canvas Photo Competition' aiming to explore 'biological, cross-cultural and social elements of body art' (Royal Anthropological Institute 2012) with one of the categories open to photographs of tattoos and shortlisted entries to be published in the Institute's educational materials. There are also museums and galleries that focus exclusively on tattooing with the Tattoo Art Museum and Hall of Fame in San Francisco established by Lyle Tuttle in the early 1980s followed by the Tattoo History Museum in Oxford, the Liverpool Tattoo Museum and the Amsterdam Tattoo Museum, among others. The traditional mediums created by tattoo artists also often feature in art gallery exhibitions and the majority of tattoo conventions also offer areas where tattoo artists exhibit more traditional work. There have also been several books published, for example Jo Waterhouse's *Art by Tattooists* (2009), which are dedicated to work in traditional mediums created by tattoo artists. The crossover between tattooing and art was taken to its conclusion by Lee Wagstaff (see image twenty two), a 30-year-old British student, who in 2000 submitted his own tattooed body for the final degree show of his Printmaking MA degree at the Royal College of Art (the tattooing had been completed in collaboration with a tattoo artist to his exact specifications over the period of the course). Taken together, the increasing display of tattoos in art galleries and museums, and the display of traditional art by

⁴⁴ For a more detailed consideration of tattooing in art galleries see Lodder 2010: Chapter Five

tattoo artists in these places, has led to increased cultural diffusion as the practice becomes redefined as art and mainstream audiences became familiar with it.

Finally, the interest in tattooing from academia has also helped to redefine the practice as art. One of the first books published about tattooing, Albert Parry's *Tattoo: Secrets of a Strange Art* (2006 [1933]) referred to the practice as art even though the content of the book was not always favourable towards the practice. However, it is the intensification of interest in the practice from sociology and cultural studies since the 1980s that has lent most legitimacy to the claim that tattooing should be considered art. The first book length treatment on the subject from these disciplines was Clinton Sanders' *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, originally published in 1989 (revised and expanded edition with Vail 2008), and the period since has witnessed the publication of hundreds of books and articles from these disciplines that have continued to refer to the practice as art. Paradoxically, tattooing has received little attention in 'writing which takes an explicitly art-historical or art-critical approach' where the term 'body art' is most commonly used to indicate a 'broad category of the visual art work in which artists foreground their own bodies within their work' (Lodder⁴⁵ 2010: 4-6). Nevertheless, sociology and cultural studies have gone some way to establishing a tradition in which tattooing is discussed as art despite the fact that publications from these disciplines are usually devoted to uncovering the social and cultural dimensions of the practice – as is this current text – such as why would somebody get tattooed, and why are tattoos becoming increasingly popular? In this respect, Sanders book is unique in that it does go some way to addressing directly the *social* redefinition of the practice as art. In doing so, Sanders identifies four factors that he claims moves the practice from a craft to an art through the 'conflictual, cooperative, and negotiative process of social interaction' (2008: 150): creative, institutional, formal, and organisational.

⁴⁵ Lodder's thesis *Body Art: Body Modification as Artistic Practice* is written with the aim of overcoming the lack of writing about tattoos and adopts a specifically art-historical and art-critical approach.

For Sanders, tattooing becomes art rather than craft on creative grounds when the artisan is able to 'emphasise the aesthetic features of their work (especially uniqueness and beauty)' (2008: 24). To take this further, Lodder states that 'tattooing makes this step from craft into an art when it involves a measure of originality, aesthetic worth and technical skill, and when it is understood by practitioners, wearers and cultural discourse in aesthetic rather than solely semiotic, socio-cultural or psychological terms' (2010: 114). When considering institutional factors, tattooing becomes art because museums and academic discussions have begun to discuss it in such terms, these are both trends that have exacerbated over the intervening years as I have already addressed. The formal factor is that the process of inscribing a tattoo on the skin mimics the production of already established artistic methods such as drawing and painting; the tattoo is essentially a drawing on the skin, something apparent by continual reference to the skin as being a 'canvas' by respondents and in both popular and academic discourse. Finally, the organisational grounds is based on the fact that books, tattoo focused media, tattoo conventions, tattoo artists themselves and the culture they inhabit 'have coalesced around a self-determined structure they refer to as 'tattoo art' (Lodder 2010: 115). In Sanders' words:

information directed at the general public by tattooing organizations and tattooists who have a vested interest in expanding the artistic reputation of tattooing emphasizes conventionally accepted values. Promotional material refer to tattoo *studios* and tattoo *art*, display exemplary work exhibiting aesthetic content and technical skills, stress the historical and cultural roots of tattooing...and emphasize the academic training and conventional artistic experience of key practitioners (Sanders 2008: 157, original emphasis)

Taken together, these four factors⁴⁶ have contributed to the social redefinition of the practice as art. Sanders book itself also established a tradition of referring to the practice as art, something future academic discussion has continued to do. Lending legitimacy to tattooing by discussing it as art in academia has helped in moving the practice away from its outsider status by attempting to remove the

⁴⁶ For a more in-depth discussion on these factors see Lodder 2010 114-116

deviant associations and promote the practice as normal, meaningful, and adopted by individuals from across the social spectrum. As negative associations are removed and tattooing becomes more acceptable individual's habituses are reconfigured through processes of sociogenesis and psychogenesis (Elias 2000), leading to the adoption of tattooing as a more legitimate art form and more acceptable form of body modification.

Whether the practice can truly be considered art by the art-world is still a matter of some debate. In 2009, 20 years after the original publication of Sanders book, Waterhouse claimed 'tattooists are *receiving* recognition as 'fine artists', their work hanging on the walls of some of the top galleries in the world' (2009: 4, my emphasis), suggesting that the status of tattooing as a genuine art form is still in flux. Nevertheless, the *social* redefinition of the practice as art has continued apace since the publication of Sanders book and is considered art in popular and academic discourse. As Sanders states, art is an:

honorific label that comes to be applied to certain objects or activities by certain agents operating in the *social* world surrounding artistic production, marketing, consumption, and appreciation (see Dickie 1974; Danto 1964; Becker 1976). From this perspective, *art is a matter of constructing consensual definition*. Objects that look like art, are discussed like art (especially with regard to some extant tradition and theoretical perspective), bought and sold like art, create by social actors who consider themselves to be artists, and presented for appreciation or sale in settings (for example, galleries and museums) in which art is typically displayed or marketed have the greatest likelihood of being defined as art (2008: 23-24, my emphasis)

From Outsider to Established

The ongoing sociogenetic developments discussed throughout this chapter have had considerable scope in reshaping cultural definitions of tattooing. As individuals are increasingly expected to partake in identity construction through the body, are exposed to tattooing body projects through their increased visibility in consumer

culture, are taught to be tolerant of, and become familiar with, other cultures body practices, and come to consider tattooing to be artistic practice, the cultural definition of the practice as one of social outsiders is challenged and it becomes more established. However, whilst evidence from both academia and popular culture point to an increasing popularity and acceptability of tattooing, and respondents were unified in their appraisal that tattooing should be considered normative, it has yet to be fully assimilated into the gamut of established corporeal body projects. Respondents were aware that a lingering association with deviance loomed over the practice and in most cases they were careful to not be discredited as members of outsider social groups. As such, respondents demonstrated considerable foresight (Elias 2000, 2012a) in their tattoo choices, typically choosing to be tattooed with small designs and/or in places that were easily concealable:

I think obviously if you want a good job, professional and stuff, you can't be covered visibly in tattoos, I don't think that would work (Carol, 22)

The options available when you are covered in tattoos are ones that are very, very diluted industries ... I can't afford to do myself out of opportunities because I want my life to be good, I don't want to have to scrimp and save so I'm not going to shoot myself in the foot by being covered in tattoos and limit my options (Jill, 29)

I've always said I won't get a job killer until I was on the path to something where it didn't matter... like neck and hands I wouldn't get them done unless I was on the right path (Bob, 18)

I know some people who go all out and just have something in a ridiculous place or the most oversized thing ever for their first one and I thought I don't want to do that because this is going to hurt and I might not even want this in 10 years (James, 31)

Though some respondents, such as James, chose to have small concealable designs because they were unsure whether their tattoos would still appeal to them in the future, for most, the key concern was employment possibilities. As discussed in

chapter four, individuals recognised that they held little power compared to established others in some figurations, and so demonstrated foresight in moderating their tattoo acquisition – by not acquiring ‘job killers’⁴⁷ for example – to ensure they would not appear as discredited social actors and jeopardise employment opportunities despite the more established status that the practice currently holds.⁴⁸ Generational differences was also posited as the key reason why tattoos were looked upon unfavourably by employers, a situation many thought would change when the current younger generation became the employers of the future – ‘because tattoos are a big thing for our generation by the time we come into our 40s maybe it’ll be easier to get jobs’ (Siobhan, 20). Nevertheless, despite ‘an invasion of the middle-class ‘establishment’ into this outsider territory’ (Atkinson 2003a: 186) challenging its deviant status, the narratives of respondents repeatedly reflected that whilst the practice was becoming *more* established it had not completely moved from the cultural shadows and was still associated with outsiders amongst some within the figurations they were enmeshed. As a result, by engaging in such practices they face the possibility of being labelled as deviant, untrustworthy, or lesser worth. If this is the case, why then do so many individuals’ continue pursue tattooing body projects? In the subsequent chapters I will explore this by examining the various ways individuals utilise tattooing in their identity construction before exploring the importance of quests for authenticity in a seemingly inauthentic age (Williams and Bendelow 1998).

⁴⁷ This is common jargon within tattoo figurations for tattoos placed on public skin – the face, hands and neck

⁴⁸ See chapter four for a more in-depth discussion on how interdependencies between individuals’ and current or prospective employers affect the former’s tattoo decisions.

Chapter Six - Representing the Self: Deviance and Normality

In the previous chapter I outlined how tattooing's status as an outsider practice has been challenged due to ongoing sociogenetic changes concerning the body and its display. Whilst evidence demonstrates tattooing has become more established respondents own narratives confirmed that an aura of deviance continues to linger over the practice meaning it has yet to be accepted, at least in their accounts, as a fully normative form of corporeal alteration. The discrediting of the practice in some media, and employers that banned tattooing as part of their acceptable appearance policies, were two frequently proposed justifications for negative associations remaining. In this chapter I wish to focus on the reasons why so many individuals in contemporary society risk being labelled as discredited social actors by continuing to engage in this form of body modification. In the first part of the chapter I focus on those who draw on tattooing's deviant status in order to signify their membership in outsider social groups, or to act as a form of resistance to mainstream cultural values. In the second part I engage with those individuals for whom tattoos represents a form of identity construction within the norms of established culture, and so act as marks of conformity rather than resistance. A key issue throughout the chapter will be to demonstrate how tattooing can offer a *dual* status of both deviance and acceptability for the same individuals, depending upon the figurations in which they are enmeshed at any given point. In the final section, drawing on established-outsider theories presented in the previous chapter, I examine how the establishment of outsider practices more generally has led to increasing difficulty and ambiguities in the reading of tattoos.

Deviant Meanings

In chapter two I discussed the literature that had posited a link between tattooing and social resistance. Despite its current level of popularity and acceptability, the aura of deviance that continues to surround tattooing means that it is still able to be adopted by those wishing to make some form of oppositional cultural statement. Recognizing that the long-held associations between tattooing and outsider social groups such as subcultures, street gangs and prisoners, still offers the opportunity to draw on deviant associations and utilise tattooing as a form of

cultural protest, some respondents were keen to stress how their tattoos placed them outside mainstream social figurations. For some this meant demonstrating their commitments to specific outsider social groups, the following respondents' considered themselves as belonging to particular scenes for example:

It goes with the BMX scene (Steve, 38)

I'm really big on the hardcore (a musical style) scene and music has been a huge influence on my tattoos (Bob, 18)

Because I was into the biker scene and biker culture tattooing does become very much an accepted part of the scene really (Damian, 41)

I had my first one when I was 18...because of the music I was in to and the people who played the music, the rock music, you look at it and think it looks pretty cool...I had the Sick Of It All (a band) dragon on the top of my back (James, 31)

The narratives of these respondents indicated that they considered the scenes to which they belonged as being outsider social groups because they offered an alternative to mainstream mass culture. Being both influenced by, and demonstrating commitment to, these groups through tattooing, respondents were keen to stress how membership of such groups represented disaffiliation with more established figurations. While some authors have argued that adopting tattooing is a means of demonstrating lifelong commitment to such outsider groups (Atkinson 2003a; Pitts 2003; Sanders 2008) a note of caution is needed. Engaging in such body practices *may* be a means of symbolizing a permanent commitment to a social figuration but individual's move between figurations and leave them altogether as the chains of interdependency are broken (see chapter four). Damian for example, discussed how his tattoos demonstrated commitment to the biker scene that he was part of at the time they were acquired but later discussed how he was no longer involved in the scene because there 'was too much politics and bullshit and bollocks...and it becomes a bit of a chest puffing contest'; as such it is important to recognise that tattooing may only represent commitment to particular figurations

for the period in which the individual is enmeshed within them, although others may continue to read them as they were originally intended.

For another respondent tattooing represented a way to show commitment to their working-class routes. Aged 56, Bill obtained his first tattoo when he was just 15 and he described how tattooing used to be a 'totally working-class thing, it was never middle management or an airline pilot like you see these days, it used to be working-class'. Now the owner of a successful company in Scandinavia Bill would outwardly appear to be middle-class but when I asked him whether he still considered himself working-class his response was 'very much so, I still am'. Adopting tattooing because he was an insider member of the socially outsider working-class – the only class who would have tattoos during this period his were acquired – Bill continues to draw on this association to demonstrate his sustained commitment to being considered working-class despite his perceived social mobility. Similar justifications were offered by an individual who was observed during ethnographic research in a tattoo studio. The following is taken from my field notes, transcribed in the studio shortly after the customer had left:

Customer has had a tattoo with the words 'working-class' and several tools associated with manual occupations (hammer, tape measure and at least one other tool that I was unable to make out). Discussed with Zeke how he wanted it because he had been brought up 'very working-class' and taught that hard work was important. He was employed as a tradesman and was proud that he spent many hours doing hard physical work. The tattoo represented that hard work to him and throughout his session the conversations he had with Zeke confirmed that his class identity was important and he had little respect for those people who 'sat around in offices all day conning money out of people'. Referenced banks and bankers as typical examples of those who 'didn't have a clue what it was really like'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ An internet search for the term 'Working-class Tattoo' also reveals a number of tattoo studios with the name 'Working-class Tattoo' and a large amount of images containing the words working-class or imagery associated with working-class manual occupations such as hammers, spanners etc. highlighting a continuation of tattooing as a means to demonstrate working-class affiliation.

Like Bill, this respondent was keen to demonstrate his commitment to his working-class routes although unlike Bill he remained employed in a traditionally working-class form of employment. In both the examples of scenes and the working-class, individuals utilised tattooing to demonstrate their commitment to figurations they deemed to be outside of mainstream established culture. However, far more common was for respondents to assert that tattooing demonstrated their belonging to fringe, alternative, or somehow different cultures:

It's also a nice statement about marginality and edginess. We both like fringe culture (Daphne, 25)

DILLIGAF is does it look like I give a fuck. Loads of people have got them done because growing up and like being alternative people would stare at me because I used to be really gothy and used to get stared at a lot and it was like I don't care, I don't give a fuck what you think about me (Chuck, 24)

We all have this free flowing, we're all kind of offbeat, we are alternative, we would put tattoos on our bodies. That we don't have this puritan your body is a temple never mark it idea. Your body is a temple therefore decorate it, have great sex and dance and be merry... I feel so silly calling my community alternative, it's a little nineties, alternative from the mainstream, this rejection of this idea that our bodies are meant to be pristine...I don't know, I see it as part of a larger idea of rejecting boring existence (Eileen)

Approximately 30% of respondents expressed sentiments that perceived tattooing to be somehow alternative to mainstream cultural practice. Drawing on the long-held association with outsider social groups these respondents recognised that tattooing could represent their feelings of being outside of the mainstream, particularly where this concerned the body as something to be cherished and kept 'pristine'. However, as the ambiguity in Eileen's scclaims demonstrates, the notion of 'alternative from the mainstream' is difficult, firstly because it is no longer clear what can be considered mainstream – there are a multiplicity of mainstreams – and therefore propose an alternative to it (Cohen and Taylor 1992; Hetherington 1998),

and secondly, because consumer culture continually incorporates the styles of outsider cultural practice as part of on-going processes of bricolage with an emphasis on *looking* alternative (Baudrillard 1983; Muggleton 2000; Atkinson 2003a). Nevertheless, whilst tattoos have become more established, and for some are viewed to be fashionable, these respondents considered their own tattoos to be more socially challenging due to the personal meaning structures they gave to them and were adopted as a carefully constructed form of resistance to established ideals by demonstrating their personal commitment to outsider cultural practices or figurations.

By far the most common form of cultural commentary adopted by respondents however concerned gendered norms of appearance. Respondents – both male and female – were unified in their appraisal that tattooing was somehow different for men and women. Typically this was attributed to the amount of tattoo coverage that was perceived as acceptable and the designs chosen, with women expected to have smaller tattoos than men, in more readily concealable locations, and expected to adopt ‘feminine’ designs – during interviews stars, flowers, and butterflies were typically proposed to be feminine. Continuing a tradition that began with the women’s movement of the 1960s onwards (see chapters one and two), several respondents discussed how tattooing allowed them to resist mainstream beauty norms that encouraged women to partake in forms of corporeal alteration such as plastic surgery yet restricted the completely free pursuit of such body work via rigid beauty codes (Atkinson 2003a). Of particular importance was how tattooing allowed them to resist cultural expectations concerning femininity:

Femininity is important to me but it’s not the be all...I think my tattoos do make me less feminine...getting my entire leg tattooed is not a girly thing to do...the ones on the lower arm I don’t think are, I think blokes would have the same tattoos that I’ve got...once you’ve got a full sleeve as a woman you’ve fucked femininity out of the window in its most stereotypical form so what’s the point in holding back? You may as well get what you want done because people are going to look at you and going to say she’s tattooed, she’s not feminine (Jill, 29)

A lot of men as well, don't like tattooed women...they'll find it off-putting...they'll be like are ladies allowed to have tattoos...I quite like breaking that mould (Lizzy, 19)

I think for a man to be completely covered is acceptable in society, for a woman to be heavily covered I think people have more of an issue, as women are supposed to be cute and girly and not have their body covered with such imagery, or its acceptable for a woman to have a Cheryl Cole⁵⁰ type tattoo or on the lower back other than that it's like NOOOOO! (Heather 25)

I've always liked being different, I don't like being classed as normal and when I had my full sleeve done it was a big culture shock to a lot of people because they were like oh my god it's a girl and look at that tattoo (Kate, 27)

Yeah, I don't think women are expected to be as tattooed as this. It's the little piddly fashionable ones that are fine, anything more than that [isn't]...you've either a certain type a woman or a Lesbian. I love that one, that because I have tattoos I'm automatically a lesbian (Hannah, 27)

Key to subverting the conventional norms of appearance for these women was the amount of tattoo coverage they had, with extensive tattooing being viewed as outside the norm of what is acceptable for women. What is interesting is that in these narratives and others, women having tattoos per se was no longer considered problematic as it was in previous eras, but having large pieces such as 'sleeves' rather than 'piddly fashionably ones' or a 'Cheryl Cole type tattoo' was viewed as not conforming with typical forms of femininity; the lingering association between tattooing and masculinity remains, but has been reconfigured around notions of appropriate designs and coverage in these narratives. Whilst the design was of importance in resisting mainstream gender norms, the majority of women admitted that their tattoos could be considered feminine, even when their coverage was extensive. Jill for example admitted that the flowers she had tattooed on her arm

⁵⁰ The music and TV star Cheryl Cole's tattoo was referenced many times during interviews and ethnography (see images twenty-three and twenty-four)

(see image twenty-five) were girly while the peacock on her leg (image twenty-six) might also be considered such. Likewise, Heather admitted that she had 'gone for old school but with a much softer touch around it, a more feminine design' which she preferred because 'some of the old school things are quite masculine' although she did also claim to have 'tougher pieces like my shins [that] are basically huge daggers from the top of the foot on to the knee' which she asserted 'there is nothing fem about'. Nevertheless, the ambiguity about the acceptability of heavily tattooed women, whether the designs themselves can be considered feminine or not, means that tattooing remains a useful tool in resisting mainstream gendered norms (see also Mifflin 2013; Pitts 2003). Tattooing body projects also challenge long held assumptions about women's ability to endure pain – '15 hours I sat there, over quite a painful length of time' (Hannah, 27) – whilst others were dismissive about the painful nature or claimed some enjoyment of it – 'I quite like it, I'm alright with the pain' (Lizzy, 19). Jarring with cultural sensibilities about pain as something to be avoided, and with the physical capability of women to withstand pain, these respondents challenged cultural norms regarding femininity by enjoying the pain associated with tattoo acquisition or feeling pride in their ability to sustain it.

However, though tattooing was actively employed by some women in an attempt to subvert traditional norms regarding feminine beauty, by far the majority of women pursued tattooing body projects *within* the bounds of acceptable appearance by having designs that were considered feminine, that were typically smaller than those acquired by men, and were in readily concealable locations. A concern for a number of female respondents was also being tattooed in places that were likely to sag, stretch, or otherwise be altered over the life-course as a result of aging or becoming pregnant. Lizzy, claimed she liked to 'upset men' and 'break the mould' because her extensive tattooing could be considered subversive of mainstream gendered norms yet showed a concern with how her body would alter during pregnancy as she intended to have children at some point in the future – 'whilst being pregnant you want a nice natural bump' (Lizzy, 19). This demonstrates how tattooing can have multiple meanings depending upon the figurations in which

the individual is enmeshed; whilst around like-minded individuals Lizzy's tattoos showed her to be resisting gendered cultural norms but while with more conservative others she could pass as conventional because her tattoos were concealable and she was able demonstrate foresight in her decision to not have her stomach tattooed because pregnancy was supposed to produce a natural – i.e. not tattooed – bump. Thus tattooing can be both resistant *and* normative and does not have to be one *or* the other, an issue that previous theories have generally overlooked as already identified.

It is clear that tattooing's continued association with deviant others means it can still act as a mark of outsider social groups or as a way to resist mainstream cultural norms, particularly as these relate to gender. However, aware of other cultures through processes of globalization and cultural diversity (see previous chapter) many respondents discussed how definitions of tattooing has varied both historically and cross culturally. Most commonly discussed were Polynesian tribes such as the New Zealand Maori whilst respondents also made reference to the 5000-year-old dog man 'Otzi' found buried in ice (see chapter one), and emphasized how tattooing was once popular amongst the social elite – 'it was very elitist at one point, it was just a select few who would get tattoos' (Bob, 18). In the consideration of gender, respondents were keen to point out that what was considered feminine and attractive also differed across cultural lines: 'If you look at European women who are hairy, and the men in those countries look at those women and they like a bit of hair whereas in this country stubbly legs is unforgivable, people find it repulsive' (Jill, 29). Nevertheless, as respondents were enmeshed within contemporary Western figurations they were aware tattooing is not fully acceptable cultural practice and so adopted it to demonstrate affiliation to outsider groups and/or make cultural statements. For most respondents however, their motivations to pursue tattooing body projects are far less antagonistic. In the next section I wish to example how individuals adopt tattooing as part of normative identity work and how their rationales are cloaked in narratives of individuality and meaningfulness that are promoted by mainstream established culture.

Normality

Given the popularity and acceptability of tattooing in twenty-first century Western figurations it is no surprise that the practice can be adopted in a number of ways for those doing identity work through the body. Although all respondents were aware that tattooing had a history of being associated with social deviants, most rejected the outsider status of the practice and reconfigured their understanding of it as a normative means of identity construction, this was reflected in many of their narratives which focused on the way that tattoos provided a form of identity construction within the normal bounds of established culture. In this respect, popular motivations for pursuing tattooing body projects proposed by respondents who rejected the outsider status of the practice were representing personal interests and beliefs, commemorating meaningful events or significant others, expressing individuality, and the controlled decontrolling of emotions.

In chapter four I discussed how individuals commemorated their interdependencies with significant others through tattooing but in many instances respondents were also keen to represent their own personal interests and beliefs through tattooing body projects. The range of interests was diverse with individuals choosing to represent personal biographies, music, hobbies, and favourite sports teams amongst other things:

I chose a Celtic tree when I was 18 because I thought it related to my identity as an Irish American... I'm thinking that I will do a full-leg piece of plants and animals from the area where I grew up - a bat, a snake, some birds, hay, etc. I was raised in a rural area, on a small farm, and that's a big part of my life (Harold)

That's 1986 the year of my birth (Chuck, 24)

I've got an Aquarius thing on my ankle because I used to be in to astrology... I quite like it; it's just two little waves. I absolutely love the sea, 100%, and the whole nautical thing (Jill, 29)

The first tattoo I got was the four elements because I wanted something weather related...the symbols are Greek for the four weather elements. Wind, Fire, Earth, Water... it's something which has always fascinated me, Mother Nature and the elements (Daryl, 35)

I have headphones which I got in the summer before my last year of college; I was 22, no 21. I wanted something that had to do with sound as I was studying sound and music, just something really graphic, simple (Daphne, 25)

For others, tattoos offered a way to demonstrate their spiritual or religious convictions:

The one on my wrist is connected to my identity as a Quaker, as Quakers believe that in every person, there is the Light of God (Harold)

the tattoo on my back, which is a large hamsa, a symbol popular in Jewish and Arab and also Indian symbology, it's a hand of protection to ward off the evil eye to protect the bearer. And above it there's a quote that says 'Disturb us, Adonai, ruffle us from our complacency. Make us dissatisfied' which is from a larger piece from the...Reformed Jewish prayer book, a larger piece about Shabbat, the Jewish Holy day, and using that time and that space to be, not to cut yourself off from the world and not to rest of your laurels but to think outside yourself and to strategize, and build and grow, and change a lot, not cut yourself off from what you need to be doing (Eileen)

So the poem *I am not a God* is about not being able to create a life but also not being able to take life away because of the kind of person that I am ... I chose the poem to be the foreword of my book and I was trying to think of different ways how I could...express that on me. So I thought fuck it, I'll get my first tattoo... I had tattoos just for a record on my right forearm, just the letters I.A.N.A.G which stands for I am not a god (Cliff, 33)

Whatever their chosen design virtually all respondents offered narratives that justified their tattooing body projects as personally meaningful and disavowed any deviant connotations associated with the practice. As Atkinson (2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004) has demonstrated in his figurational exploration of tattooing in Canada, the lengths to which individuals go to justify their tattooing body projects as normative forms of identity construction are justifications that were 'rarely made, or even considered, among the majority of enthusiasts in previous eras' (2003a: 185). As a result the lingering association of deviance is highlighted but rejected by these individuals who utilise tattooing to demonstrate personally or spiritually meaningful ideologies upon their bodies. However, it is important to note again the way that narratives about tattooing can be justified as *both* outsider and established cultural practice. As addressed above, the narratives of Chuck, Daphne and Eileen, all suggested that tattooing allowed them to resist mainstream cultural norms by belonging to alternative or fringe culture, yet I have chosen to use them again as they also all emphasized how representing personally or spiritually meaningful beliefs on their body lent their tattoos legitimacy in established culture. This highlights how adopting a figurational approach to the study of tattooing allows us to avoid pigeon-holing our analysis into either-or categories as discussed in chapters two and four, and demonstrate how the practice can be both outsider and established in the narratives of the *same* individuals. This is not to say that all those who adopted tattooing to represent outsider social groups or beliefs also claimed the practice to be normative but the *possibility* of tattooing body projects symbolising *both* resistance and conformity nevertheless exists.

As well as representing personal beliefs and interests many respondents were keen to commemorate meaningful events or their interdependencies with significant others. The following respondent for example had a tattoo to commemorate a trip they had taken:

I had one done in New York when I went there... I was there on my own, I went there on a bit of a trip and it was an experience, I wanted to mark the experience. So on my last two or three days, just before I came back, I went in and I had an idea of what I wanted so I went into this place and said this is

what I want...I want a picture of me looking up like 'oh my god', with loads of buildings, skyscrapers and that around me but I want it to have a bit of a horrible edge as well, not all glitz, I want it to look rough as well. Basically I just wanted it to really resemble as many things that are archetypal New York as possible (James, 31)

In other examples, tattoos acted as reminders of particularly meaningful events:

This is a cat which was an engagement tattoo that the wife and I both got, she got hers on her back and I got mine there (on arm) (Trevor, 41)

And the second tattoo I have were these numbers, it's an inverse St Peter's cross shape and the numbers read downwards 4, 5, 4, 5, 3, 4 and across 1, 1, 0, 3, 6, 8, 5, with the '3' connecting the two numbers and what they are is my registration numbers from when I was in hospital as a kid (Cliff, 33)

On the other leg I've got my qualified teachers payroll number which I had done the day I qualified when I got my payroll number through... It's very relevant to me; it's a big deal to be qualified as a teacher to me (James, 31)

Once again rejecting tattooing's status as the mark of the outsider, these respondents' interpret their tattoos as marks of 'positive distinction' that commemorate meaningful, sometimes one-time, life events (Atkinson 2003a; Bourdieu 2010). The usefulness of Elias's figurational sociology in analysing tattooing as a highly social act is again demonstrated; whilst narratives reflected how these tattoos commemorated personally, and individually, meaningful events, these were often experienced as events that separated them from *others* within the figurations in which they were enmeshed. James, for example, travelled to New York on his own and also commemorated how he had become qualified as a teacher, but these events were framed in relation to the chains of interdependency forged with others – those who hadn't travelled and those who had not qualified as a teacher – in the figurations in which he was enmeshed. In other cases, such as with Trevor, 41 who had an engagement tattoo with his wife, the interdependencies forged with others were much more obvious:

Because she (daughter) liked my little pony so I went and got it done because she loved me telling her all these stories about my little pony (Bill, 56)

I got space invaders done because when I was a kid I used to go to the pub with my dad and they had space invaders built into the table and it's like my earliest memory of being in a pub, and I'm a big of a geek (Chuck, 24)

Marking interdependencies with others – both living and dead – or etching permanent reminders of a period of life forged in interdependency with others is attractive to respondents as it allows them to represent the strength of the bond, as permanent marks tattoos also act as reminders of times in an individual's life, or of bonds with other people, even when the memory may fade (see also chapter four).

For many respondents the allure of tattooing body projects was their ability to signify individuality as individuality is a 'widely promoted goal...in Western figurations' and 'the search for distinction through body modification...conforms well with a matrix of established cultural codes detailing how corporeality is to be experienced and represented' (Atkinson 2003a: 199; see also Simmel 1957, 1964; Bourdieu 2010; Camphausen 1997; Featherstone 2000; Pitts 2000, 2003; Shilling 2012); thus in tattooing respondents have a ready-made tool for expressing their individuality. This is not to say that those who chose to utilise tattooing in other ways discussed throughout this chapter are not drawn to the practice because of the possibility of individuality that it offers, but for many respondents individuality *itself* was proposed as one of the key motivating factors in their decision to undergo this form of corporeal alteration. As has been addressed elsewhere (see chapters four and five), the popularity and acceptability of the practice means that adopting tattooing per se in order to signify individuality is difficult, but by choosing designs that were unique to them, often created in collaboration with tattoo artists, respondents were able to stress the importance of being viewed as an individual:

It's an expression and I think it's something that can make you truly an individual (Jeff, 24)

I'm much more about getting stuff that means stuff to me, even if it's quite an abstract connection, or tenuous or whatever (Trevor, 41)

I hated the idea of standing there and looking at someone's arm and going oh look, you've got the same tattoo as me. I think they should be custom so it was all hand drawn (Jon, 19)

In these and other examples, respondents were keen to stress how individuality was achieved by acquiring tattoos that were personally meaningful, artistic and expressive of their own unique biographies, a commonly promoted goal in contemporary figurations (Giddens 1991; Hetherington 1998; Shilling 2012). However, while individuality is a commonly promoted goal within Western figurations it is important to stress that it is only achieved in a group context (Elias 2006, 2010, 2012a). As Jon above stated, in order to achieve individuality it is important that other individuals do not have the same tattoo as this individuality becomes disrupted, thus individuality is only achieved by being different to other individuals within the figurations in which one is enmeshed.

Finally, tattoos can, for some, act as a controlled decontrolling of emotions (Elias 2000, 2012a; Elias and Dunning 2008). In her analysis of the relationship between self-injury and emotion work, Chandler (2012) moves past scientific and clinical explanations of self-injury to explore how individual's 'work' on the self to manage emotions through the body such that 'self-injury – more usually framed as irrational – becomes a rational, perhaps logical response to a difficult situation' (Chandler 2012: 8-9). Though Chandler does not frame her arguments in Eliasian terms, the processes she describes can be clearly recognised in Elias's (2000, 2012a; see also Elias and Dunning 2008) theories concerning the controlled decontrolling of emotions in which he demonstrates how outward displays of emotional affect are discouraged in modernity and pushed behind the scenes of social life, so that those who are better able to control the outward displays of emotion are able to be more successful (2000, 2006). Similar processes became apparent in the narratives of respondents as for some, tattoos become a rationalized and normative means of dealing with emotional affect through the body. The narratives of three female

respondents discussed the relationship between tattooing and self-injury where the former was proposed as a constructive and normative means of overcoming, or substituting, the latter:

I was watching anime, xxxHolic to be precise, and in one of the episodes a nine-tailed fox shows up. Now I've always had a thing for wolves and foxes, and thought about getting a tattoo, but I find wolf tattoos a little cliché and am just generally not a massive fan of wildlife tattoos...but the nine-tailed fox, that's pretty cool, and not something that's done so often... I started looking up the legends behind them. They vary, but generally the Japanese telling is that the fox gains the extra tails through wisdom and experience... some say when they reach nine tails they have unlimited wisdom. But it was an idea that appealed to me; I'm coming to my last year of university, and have been through a lot more than just studies. When I first came to university, my partner of the time moved with me, we lived together through my first year, and then suddenly last summer he broke up with me. It threw me into turmoil and depression, and I already struggled with self-harm before that. But I came out the other side feeling happier in myself, knowing myself better, and appreciating my friendships more and I think, most importantly, trusting myself more and my own abilities to cope. Suddenly, when I thought about placement, the two ideas collided brilliantly, I want the fox on the side of my right thigh, and when I was looking at it, imagining it there, it clicked that my self-harm scars are all on my right hip. If the fox's tails are carefully placed then they can cover the scars. Not because I'm ashamed of them, this is honestly the first time I thought of covering them, but because I'm past that now... I have not self-harmed for nine months. By the time I get this tattoo done it will have been at least a year. The fox will represent me learning through experience that I can cope without that (Katherine, 22)

I self-harmed as a teenager and there's a definite part that channels that, it's constructive self-harm in a weird way... I think the urge is always there and you can work with it as much as you like but there's a part of you that's

still quite, not likes the pain, but can be normalised by it. Because a lot of self-harm is taking, it's different for everyone, but quite a lot of it is taking a bit emotional angst that you can't deal with and converting it to physical pain which, in a way, is easy to deal with. So it's a definite conversion and having a tattoo does make me feel good and I don't know if that's a remnant from physical [self-]harm used to make me feel better to now just physical harm can make me feel better. But I'll be buzzing for quite a while after a tattoo (Esther, 33)

When I like to get tattooed is when I'm in a bad mood or stressed. I find it stress relief...I can see a correlation between those things (tattooing and self-harm) (Kate, 28)

In chapter two I detailed how psychological studies have a history of negatively associating tattooing as being a form of self-harm. But for these women, tattooing acts as a normative form of embodied emotion work in which emotional trauma is overcome by working on the body (Chandler 2012), however, instead of self-injuring like the respondents in Chandler's study these women use tattooing as a mimetic activity, adopted instead of potentially more dangerous and transgressive acts of self-injury, and allows them to channel their emotions in a seemingly more constructive and aesthetically pleasing way. These respondents recognised that though both self-injury and tattooing were practices not considered completely normative, the latter had achieved a higher degree of establishment than the former, and was more easily accepted because it was congruent to forms of corporeal alteration promoted within consumer culture. By utilising tattooing as a substitute for self-injury these respondents rejected the negative psychological assessment between these body practices and reconfigured their understanding of tattooing as a civilized way of controlling emotional affect within the bounds of accepted and normative behaviour (Atkinson 2003b, 2004). For two respondents their tattoos were a way to come to terms with the trauma of being sexually or physically attacked:

I got my first one done (a phoenix tattoo) because I was attacked by City Hall when I was coming out of [a night club] when I was 17/18. This guy had attacked children of all things and thought I was younger than what I was and he put his hands between my legs and yanked my trousers down around my ankles and I got quite badly beaten up but he didn't do to me what he'd done to two other little girls because I fought back and it was sort of ... it comes out of fire, reborn, it came out of that (Hannah)

I got beaten up twice in a very short space of time and it affected my confidence massively, I stopped going out and it was a nightmare. And one day I woke up and was like, this is ridiculous, it was a couple of months and I'd been petrified, I was just walking down the street and I couldn't look people in the eye, it was really bad. So I was like, this is ridiculous, and I went down and got an extra bit on to this tattoo, I got these things that look like rays of light coming out of the top with a Chinese symbol for confidence and I was alright then. It was something I felt like I had to do, I had a mini epiphany I suppose and was like, right I can't handle this, this is stupid and I've been ok ever since. I guess I made a commitment to myself that if I'm getting this tattooed on myself I've got to live up to it, I've got to make sure I maintain this confidence that I'd lost for that couple of months (James, 31)

Tattooing acted in these instances as a means of overcoming traumatic events and being metaphorically 'reborn' or making a commitment to the self by being utilised as a device for managing difficult emotions that may otherwise have been pushed behind the scenes of social life. Tattooing may also act as a way of managing grief with several respondents discussing how they had tattoos to commemorate deceased friends or relatives:

whenever I used to buy her flowers I'd take her pink flowers and she'd say I'd know these are from my Jilly because they're pink and she used to love the fact that nobody else bought her pink flowers, it was just me. So after she died I had lilies, obviously because of the fact she died, and they're pink. So for me this my tribute to my nan (Jill, 29)

The chrysanthemum is the flower of death and my mum died last September and the last gift I bought her when she didn't even make it out into the garden was a garden gnome that she really wanted. So I sent a picture of the gnome to Xam which I really wanted with the chrysanthemum and the gnome as close to the actual gnome that I got her as possible coming out of it (Trevor, 41)

In chapter four I explored how tattoos commemorating the deceased extended the chains of interdependency beyond the grave and so Elias's figurational sociology could be expanded to include the deceased but having tattoos that commemorate those who have passed away also acts as a highly controlled way of dealing with emotional loss.

In rejecting the outsider status of tattooing many individuals' narratives posited that the practice was a normative means of identity construction that was adopted within the norms of established culture. These narratives repeatedly referenced the increased visibility, acceptability, and popularity of the practice, yet maintained that their chosen designs were personally meaningful, artistic, and unique, and so allowed them to maintain a sense of individuality, a widely promoted goal in Western figurations. For others, tattooing was utilized as a rationalized way of dealing with emotional affect which may have been pushed behind the scenes of social life due to the discouragement against open outbursts of (negative) emotions, or may have been managed in potentially more transgressive ways. In the final part of the chapter I want to address a key theme that arose during the research process and is reflected in the narratives of respondent: the establishment of outsider practices that has made it difficult to determine exactly what is now considered outsider as opposed to established in contemporary culture.

The Establishment of Outsider Practices

Throughout this chapter I have highlighted how the multiplicity of meanings attached to tattooing means it can be adopted by both those trying to proclaim membership to outsider social figurations, and by those who utilise the practice as a normative means of identity formation with the bounds of established body

practices. I also highlighted how figurational sociology allows us to interpret how the practice can be utilised for *both* of these purposes by the *same* individuals, depending upon the figurations in which they are enmeshed at any given point. Part of the reason that this is possible – related to the difficulty in ascertaining exactly what the mainstream is and therefore the alternative to it discussed above – is that there has been a general establishment of outsider practices as once taboo practices and subjects come to be appropriated by mass culture, and their acceptability reconfigured. In the previous chapter I discussed how cosmetic surgery, once considered taboo, has become an acceptable, and even encouraged, form of corporeal alteration within mainstream established culture (Pitts-Taylor 2007; Elliot 2010), but recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in various outsider groups and practices. The trilogy of novels in the *50 Shades of Grey* series (James 2011-2012), for example, has witnessed BDSM (bondage and sado-masochism) practices come to the public fore with discussion of the books and such practices regularly appearing in TV programmes, newspapers, and magazines (Williams 2012), and the sale of sex toys increased (Briggs 2012). Similarly, while I have already addressed the increased incidence of media related specifically to tattooing in the previous chapter, the interest in outsider groups and practices has witnessed a proliferation of media focused on them, with TV programmes such as *Ice Road Truckers*, *Big Fat Gypsy Weddings*, and *My Transsexual Summer* commonplace on TV schedules. This increased interest in outsider social groups and practices is a result of changing power balances within established-outsider figurations. As outsider groups attain relatively more power within figurations there has been a trickle up effect of practices associated with these groups in the same manner as processes of globalization discussed above have contributed to redefining the acceptability of tattooing. As individuals become more aware of outsider groups and practices they begin to become incorporated into the gamut of established cultural practices, this was reflected well in the narrative of one respondent who explained the level of popularity and acceptability of tattooing in the following way:

The more things that we used to frown upon that we accept over time then human standards and values deteriorate. So for example, this is the only way I can think of explaining what I'm trying to say, and it's got nothing to do with tattoos but I'll explain it so you know what I'm saying. So, you remember when you were younger, if a film was an 18 rated you knew it was going to be pretty violent, there'll be loads of swearing and probably a bit of sex and they would be proper action films and horror films. But you look back on some of the old 18 rated films and go and buy it on DVD and it's now a 15 because by today's standards that's not so bad. And that's for various reasons but people now accept so much more because we live in tougher times. We're desensitizing...and even though I like the fact that certain things are more acceptable like tattoos I do think it's part of a bigger picture (James, 31)

As society becomes desensitized to such practices, including tattooing, then they come to be accepted as forms of tolerable differences (Stebbins 1988), practices that may be considered deviant but because they usually only affect the individual or immediate others' partaking in the practice (as with BDSM for example), and because they have little to no impact on wider social issues such as economic or climate crises, are tolerated. Atkinson (2003a) claims in his analysis of tattooing that of tattooing body projects can be considered 'resistan[t] but respectful, serious but playful, and alternative but socially acceptable' (Atkinson 2003a: 185), highlighting the way in which tattooing can straddle the boundary between outsider and established and how this once outsider form of corporeal alteration itself becomes established.

Chapter Seven – Quests for Authenticity

So far in this thesis I have traced the development of modern tattoo figurations through several distinct, but overlapping, periods; offered an explanation for the increasing establishment of the practice in the twenty-first century; and explored the myriad ways that individuals incorporate tattooing into their identity construction. These chapters address the initial research questions that I sought to answer with this research project – how and why is tattooing such a popular form of corporeal alteration in contemporary Britain, and how do individuals utilise tattooing in the construction of their identity? However, in the course of investigating contemporary tattooing practices it became apparent early on in the research process that quests for authenticity were a central concern for many of those who adopted tattooing body projects. In discussing authenticity authors such as Baumeister (1986) and Snyder (1987) have posited that individuals have private, authentic, selves and that the impression management (Goffman 1959, 1963) individuals undertake as part of their everyday lives represents false impressions designed to enable us to be successful in life. In contrast, postmodern theorists such as Gergen (1991) and Tseelon (1992) have argued that there is no such thing as an authentic self because we project ‘different embodied identities to various audiences’ (Shilling 2012: 230). Offered below is a consideration of how authenticity has been explored in sociological writing but it is important to note that in discussing authenticity I am drawing out the respondent’s own construction of authenticity as something which is perceived as existing within contemporary culture and so has personal meaning for them. The content of tattoo media and the narratives of respondents were coded with statements that emphasised the importance of achieving authenticity. As a result authenticity was a key theme in interviews and repeatedly posited as being a meaningful attribute for respondents to attain. I contend that the centrality of these narratives makes quests for authenticity the defining feature of modern tattoo figurations.

In this final empirical chapter I want to focus attention on why quests for authenticity have assumed such importance individuals in twenty-first century Britain and how tattooing allows them to fulfil these quests. To begin I explore

exactly what is meant by the term authenticity in sociological writing and how it has come to occupy a position of importance in both popular and academic discourse. I then examine why authentic identities have become an increasingly valued commodity within contemporary society, and how tattoos allow individuals to portray such an identity. In the penultimate section I reveal how authenticity is not just a general concern in contemporary society, but also operates *within* tattoo figurations as a result of the assimilation of tattooing practices into mainstream culture. Finally, I focus specifically on the strategies individuals utilise to construct their own identities, and tattoos, as authentic in order to fulfil their personal quests for authenticity within the figurations in which they are enmeshed.

Framing Authenticity

Authenticity can refer to such different things as 'sincerity, truthfulness, originality, and the feeling and practice of being true to one's self or others' (Vannini and Franzese 2008: 1621), therefore, when discussing the concept it is important to be clear about exactly what one is referring to when using the term. In order to elucidate an understanding of authenticity I once more adopt Elias's figural approach and trace the historical development of the concept. References to authenticity can be dated back many centuries – 'to thine own self be true' (Pontius in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1992)) – but Weigert (1988) suggests that the concept took on its modern cast approximately 90 years ago. The first major examination of the concept is Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), which explores the modern development of authenticity from the value of sincerity. Trilling describes sincerity as a 'congruence between avowal and actual feeling' (1972: 4) which Erickson contends denotes congruence between 'one's outward appearance and the underlying reality of the self' (1995: 123; see also Goffman 1959). Defining sincerity in such a way means that one is always referring to the presence of another to determine an individual's sincerity; in figural terms sincerity can only be validated as a result of co-present interdependency with others. A concern with sincerity 'arose during the sixteenth century as a result of the gradual breakup of face-to-face feudal relationships in European society' (Lindholm 2008: 3). According to Trilling:

the intense concern with sincerity which came to characterize certain European national cultures at the beginning of the modern epoch would seem to have developed in connection with a great public event, the extreme revision of traditional modes of communal organization which gave rise to the entity that now figures in men's minds under the name of society (1972: 76)

This 'great public event', for Trilling, was the shift to industrial society, and resultant large-scale urbanization, which brought large numbers of strangers in to contact with each other for the first time. This brought the possibility that people could be duplicitous about their true social position, and cheat one another; as a result sincerity came to be a valued trait. Much of this is mirrored in Elias's (2006) own study of the court societies of Europe, and the importance of courtiers being sincere in their dealings with one another, or at least appearing to be so, even if they were secretly plotting against their fellows. The transformation in emphasis from sincerity to authenticity was proposed to be the result of two related developments: the Cartesian 'pursuit of a valid science', which 'supported an increased focus on discovery of one's own authentic...self' (Lindholm 2008: 5), and the voyages of discovery,⁵¹ about which Lindholm claims the following:

The West, it became clear, was part of a larger world, in which there were other advanced civilizations that could rival or even surpass European accomplishments. The unconscious acceptance of the customs and habits of ordinary life was no longer possible when the new plural environment offered both the attractions and threats of exotic otherness. Anxiety about the stability of the taken-for-granted resulted in intensified efforts to ratify the Western experience as somehow absolute and true. The result was a heightened concern with cultural and personal authenticity (ibid.)

Authenticity, in contrast to sincerity, concerns one's relationship to oneself and is 'understood to exist wholly by the laws of its own being' (Trilling 1972: 124). Thus,

⁵¹ Though the European voyages of discovery began as early as the fifteenth century, before Trilling's claim of the origins of sincerity, they increased exponentially in the period since, resulting in a concern firstly with sincerity, and later with authenticity.

according to Trilling, authenticity is a self-referential concept that does not explicitly include others to validate it, as is required with sincerity. However, I reject this contention and propose that we cannot exclude the social aspects of authenticity. By drawing on Goffman (1959, 1961) and Erickson (1995), I conceptualise of authenticity as being a combination of both an individual's own perception of themselves *and* the verification of authenticity by other actors within their figurations. Thus, authenticity operates simultaneously as an individual, and social, concept and the determining factor of authenticity is recognition, by others, of being true to one's internally felt emotions, thoughts and morals. The so called 'non-modern' or 'primitive' cultures encountered during voyages of discovery in particular were thought of as authentic; living in isolation, these tribal groupings were considered as being at one with nature, and unhindered by the trappings of modern technological culture. This was prominent in the theorizing of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who claimed that the original authentic character of humanity – which had for him been lost – could still be found in simpler cultures. This view lies at the heart of the modern primitive movement discussed in chapter two. Whilst I have discredited the romantic view of primitive authenticity employed in the tattooing practices of modern primitives as overly simplistic, and lacking in cultural sensitivity, the notion of authenticity itself remains important if we remove the 'primitive' as quests for authenticity, and a concern with constructing authentic identities, have become increasingly central concerns for many individuals in contemporary culture.

Despite the cation of Trilling's seminal work over 40 years ago, 'systematic discussions on authenticity have become more common within social psychology and the sociology of culture only in the last 15 years or so' (Vannini and Williams 2009: 12). In their review article of sociological research on authenticity Vannini and Franzese (2008) claim that theorists of authenticity converge, although they do not always agree on, five points: whether there is a true self; whether authenticity is self or other referential; whether authenticity can exist with the constraints of (post)modernity; tension surrounding the concept; and authenticity's potential as a motivating force (1623 – 1627). In what follows I will engage more directly with

these in exploring how quests for authenticity have increasingly been pursued through the construction of identity. The importance of authenticity is perhaps most significantly highlighted in consumer culture, where the virtues of authentic cashmere are extolled, where Coca Cola implore you to drink 'the real thing', and where Lazlow Jones, producer of Grand Theft Auto V – a computer game generating revenue of over \$1bn in just three days – claims that the digital gang members featured in the game are voiced by 'actual gang members, real gang members. I mean, El Salvadorian gang dues with amazing tattoos and one of which had literally gotten out of prison the day before...*authenticity* you know' (quoted in Reilly 2013, my emphasis). As Lindholm claims: 'we speak of authentic art, authentic music, authentic food, authentic dance, authentic people, authentic roots, authentic meanings, authentic nations, authentic products...authenticity, in its multiple variations...is taken for granted as an absolute value in contemporary life' (2008: 1).

The contemporary concern with quests for authenticity has had considerable influence on the way that individuals construct their self-identity. With the decline of meta-narratives associated with religion and scientific knowledge in which to make sense of our being, individuals increasingly have to inject their own sense of meaning and authenticity into everyday life (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Shilling 2012). As Hetherington states:

[the] quest for authenticity is generally taken as a consequence of the routinisation and rationalisation of everyday life and the separation of value spheres like religion politics, law, and culture by systematic or institutional processes. Everyday life becomes de-centred by such processes – stretched and fragmented so that it is impossible to have a single location called everyday life. The disenchantment of the world, as Weber famously put it, leads to a search for new forms of experience and identification, often located around issues of identity within everyday life (Hetherington 1998: 69)

Thus, identity has increasingly come to the fore as individuals struggle for recognition in contemporary consumer culture, and the body has become a key site

for identity work (Giddens 1991; Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner 1991; Shilling 2012). In what follows I explore the relationship between identity and quests for authenticity to highlight how tattooing allows individuals to claim authentic identities.

Authentic Identities

Persons are authentic if they are true to their roots or if their lives are a direct and immediate expression of their essence (Lindholm 2008: 2)

In the previous chapter I highlighted how individuals draw upon both deviant and normative meanings in order to construct a biographical narrative that they considered to represent their true self. For those who proposed tattooing to be a more normative form of corporeal alteration a key feature was that authenticity was a cherished attribute in contemporary consumer culture and so by drawing on this narrative they downplay the deviant aspects of tattooing. However, whether respondents considered their tattoos as offering resistance to the mainstream, or as being a normative aspect of identity work, virtually all drew upon notions of authenticity. In this section I wish to explore tattooing and identity construction further by exploring the importance of identity being viewed as authentic. The relationship between identity and authenticity has been a central concern in identity and subcultural studies, with scholars interested in authenticity to one's own self-identity and/or to one's category identity (Brekhus 2008), and authenticity being one of the key places where identity disputes or struggles occur (Brekhus 2003; Howard 2000). Authenticity can be claimed for personal identity based on internalized personality characteristics (e.g. that a person is honest), or for social identities that verifies one's authentic membership to particular figurations, with acceptance and recognition from others that this membership is internally felt (Brekhus 2008: 1064-1065; see also Burke and Strets 2009, Goffman 1959, 1963). Tattooing allows individuals to project both a personal and social identity, but as I have demonstrated already even this personal identity must be recognised in the social to be verified as individuality. Thus for many respondents, tattoos operated

as a signifier of being true to themselves but also allowed them to portray this outwardly for others to read:

When I decided to become visible tattooed, I decided to myself that I was not concerned about finding a job with tattoo's because it's something that I have wanted to be done, I definitely thought long and hard about this but it's more important to me to live my life how I want to and not for a corporate company (Heather, 25)

I have them because they're personal like your favourite shirt, if you're comfortable with it then it doesn't matter what other people think ... I fancied a couple of spirits under the eyes portraying my outlook ... I have no regrets about it. It is mine, it's what I like (Luke)

For these respondents, and many others, key was demonstrating a commitment to the self that was realised through having tattoos, particularly where these were located in visible locations. Readily available for others to read, including those within their figurations who they considered as having more power such as employers, these individuals demonstrated their authenticity through having marks that could potentially limit their future opportunities, but eschewed any regrets and demonstrated a commitment to living their life how they wanted, a key aspect in quests for personal authenticity (Vianni and Franzese 2008; Lindholm 2008).

Another central theme that emerged was that to represent an authentic identity tattoos should be seen to be thoughtful and meaningful, and not frivolous or chosen on the spur-of-the-moment. This narrative is reflected consistently in tattoo media in which interviews and articles within magazines stress the meaningful nature of tattooing and tattoo TV programmes only feature those people for whom tattoo acquisition represents something personally significant, most commonly the loss of a loved one or a rite of passage. Interacting with this media and others within tattoo figurations, individuals discussed how their tattoo narratives represented who they were really felt themselves to be on the inside and so were considered personally meaningful, and therefore authentic identities. This

resulted in those who were viewed as acquiring tattoos for non-meaningful reasons being considered as inauthentic:

I think there are maybe two categories of people who get tattoos. You can think of girls who get the tramp stamp, like that whole idea but then there are also like the equivalent guys who get like a cross, or a tribal and they're just kind of like silly, they're conceived of as kind of stupid or silly, and not meaningful (Daphne, 25)

I sometimes feel a bit sad when people have it done for no real reason; they just want a tattoo so they've had one done (Esther, 33)

Whilst some respondents admitted having tattoos that could be considered non-meaningful they typically justified this by explaining that these tattoos were older designs and they had since acquired the requisite cultural knowledge that meant that they now only acquired tattoos that had been thoughtfully considered, were meaningful, and represented who they really were. The apparent need to construct a narrative around ones tattoos in order to avoid being labelled as having pursued the practice for inauthentic reasons was recognised by several respondents – 'I hate talking about tattoos because what I find is it's so full of contradictions. One minute you're saying it makes me feel individual ... then the next your saying everyone else is sheep. Or it doesn't have any meaning, then it needs meaning' (Kate, 27) – but despite the ambivalent nature that these respondents took regarding this, they continued to construct their own narratives as fulfilling personal quests for authenticity identities.

One significant issue associated with constructing and reflecting an authentic identity is the range of possibilities available in contemporary society; as Giddens claims, identity 'has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities' (1991: 3). The construction of identity is conceptualised as a project by many scholars (e.g. Giddens 1991; Shilling 2013; Sweetman 1999a, 1999b) but it is acknowledged that this construction takes place in a particular time from the 'cultural toolkit' available to each individual (Best 2011), thus identity is a process that takes place within particular figurations at particular moments (Elias 2012a).

However, tattoos occupy a somewhat ambivalent nature in this conception of identity. As permanent markers of the self they overcome many of the issues of forming stable identities in the limitless possibilities provided by modern consumer culture (Falk 1994), yet they also challenge the notion of identity being constructed in particular time periods in which we are enmeshed. Unlike fashion which is considered fleeting, the permanence of tattoos 'anchors' (Sweetman 1999a) an individual to their identity narrative and so not only constructs the individual's identity in any particular moment, but also speaks of their biographical history and future identity. As a result, tattooed individuals utilise tattoos to demonstrate that they are really who they claim to be, and narratives of respondents referenced how a commitment to a lifelong self-identity meant that their tattoos enabled them to pursue quests for authenticity:

I'm always going to like metal even if I'm like 50 ... It's like stages of life, I'll always remembered that when I was 18 through my 20s I loved metal, I loved thrash, I love death metal, it's like a chapter in life ... I want to remember that I always loved these bands because that's who I am ... it's like chapters in a book, that's a chapter in my life (Chuck, 24)

By being able to permanently represent their inner self through their tattoos, and conceiving of themselves as being committed to their self-identity for their entire life, respondents were able to demonstrate authentic identities by having a stable identity that for them is more difficult to achieve with ephemeral items such as clothing or hairstyles.

Assimilation

Previously I discussed how individuals who adopted tattooing as part of their normative identity work draw upon narratives of authenticity promoted by contemporary consumer culture in order to justify their involvement with a practice that continues to have a lingering association with social outsiders. Yet despite these narratives of normality, respondents were concerned with the complete assimilation of tattooing into the mainstream. Even when proposed as a non-deviant form of identity construction, as a practice that has not been fully accepted

into mainstream society, tattooing allows individuals to pursue quests for authentic identities because of the commitment to the self demonstrated by permanent and potentially stigma inducing corporeal alterations. For those who utilised tattooing body projects as part of resistant identities against mainstream cultural norms and relied on, and promoted, the continuing association with deviance, the assimilation of the practice into the mainstream was even more of a concern. Thus the narratives of respondents, whether they claimed their tattooing practices to be subversive or normative, were replete with references that justified their involvement in the practice as authentic, resisted the complete assimilation of the practice into mainstream culture, and saw those who pursued tattooing practices because of the practice's assimilation into mainstream culture as doing so for inauthentic reasons.

Much like subcultural groups such as punks (Lull 1987; Fox 1987), and music such as hip-hop (McLeod 1999), the changing acceptability and commodification of tattooing has witnessed a once outsider practice threatened with widespread acceptance; as a result authenticity is a valued commodity within tattoo figurations which is achieved by pursuing tattooing body projects for genuine (i.e. authentic) reasons, or having a long history within tattoo figurations that pre-dates its recent surge of popularity and acceptability in mainstream culture. A key element in debates concerning quests for authenticity is drawn from work that has explored subcultural identity (Vannini and Franzese 2008; Vannini and Williams 2009). Although I have dismissed the usefulness of subcultural theories for studying tattooing per se (see chapter two), the concept of subcultural capital can be usefully adapted for exploring contemporary tattooing practices. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital (1991, 2010), Thornton first coined the phrase subcultural capital in her analysis of dance clubs and raves. Thornton proposes that subcultural capital 'confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder', and can be both objectified – 'in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections' – and embodied – 'in the form of being 'in the know', using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles' (2013: 27). Though Thornton's focus is on dance

clubs and raves the term has been usefully appropriated to explore a range of different subcultural groupings (see Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Jenks 2005; Hodkinson and Deicke 2007). However, the applicability of the term is limited when considering tattoo figurations because the diversity of individuals who form these figurations cannot be considered as a distinct subculture; additionally Thornton proposes that subcultural capital is applicable to the young and to youth culture, disputed categories with no clear boundaries. Instead, I propose that we should reconfigure our understanding and propose the term figurational capital to conceptualise of the way respondents construed their own knowledge as being representative of authentic membership in tattoo figurations. In much the same way as subcultural capital, figurational capital is both objectified – in the case of tattooing by making aesthetic judgements and assessments as to whether tattoos represent who individuals truly claim to be – and embodied – by being ‘in the know’ concerning tattoo artists, designs etc. However, figurational capital is not limited to particular subcultural groupings, or by divisions such as age, class and/or gender, and can be usefully utilised in the analysis of disparate conglomerates of individuals who may have little else in common.

In consideration of the current project respondents’ socio-cultural make up was often divergent but they all shared the experience of this form of corporeal alteration as the first chain of interdependency within tattoo figurations (see chapter four). In order to justify their tattooing body projects as part of personal quests for authenticity respondents established their figurational capital by demonstrating knowledge regarding tattooing processes, tattooing styles, the history of tattooing, and tattoo artists, and often infused their narratives with tattoo jargon. These narratives put a premium on the ‘second nature’ of such knowledge (Thornton 2013) in order to reject their pursuit of tattooing body projects being the result of following trends or fashion which has been an effect of the practice’s continued assimilation into mainstream culture:

They’re old school rather than new school, the style of the designs ... This one here is a Sailor Jerry tattoo (Jane, 22)

it's got to the point where I start going to artists for their work, for them to draw me up work because I love the idea of collecting a piece of art rather than it just being a tattoo (Bob, 18)

There are people I want to see. Ryan Mason, he's American and works for scapegoat tattoo in Portland, Oregon ... There are loads of artists I'd like pieces [from] ... If I ever do get the chance then I've got the space and if I've got the money. Thomas Hooper, he's English but he works in New York, in New York Adorned (Kate, 28)

I haven't decided if I will do it as a traditional Japanese design yet, if I do I will certainly be getting in touch with Hayley Hayes as I love her Japanese work ... I see the amazing stuff that's being put out there by artists like Kamil [and] Jeff Gogue (Katherine, 22)

I'd love to get tattooed by Uncle Allen but it's just really annoying that [he's] far away (Jeff, 24)

Explanations for what was unique about different tattoo styles were not offered, and discussion of artists also rarely elaborated on their location (Kate, above, being an exception) or any biographical details; instead respondents demonstrated their figurational capital through the implication of such knowledge being second nature and also expected me to have the requisite figurational capital to understand what they were discussing so tested my own status as an authentic member of tattoo figurations (see also chapter three).

Another key narrative utilised by respondents to demonstrate their authentic involvement in the practice was a long history with the practice, particularly if this involvement was before the more widespread cultural assimilation that is currently being witnessed:⁵²

Yeah, I've always viewed it as an art form really, even when I first started in 1990 (Trevor)

⁵² Although tattooing has been through two tattoo renaissances (see chapter one) that have resulted in the practice becoming more accepted the current level of popularity and acceptability of the practice is unparalleled

That one was 1969 and I had to go from Manchester to Blackpool to get that one done ...it's like the Flinstones have been doing this one me ... but this was what was on offer in the 1960s, early 1970s (Bill, 56)

When I first started getting tattooed ... 10-11 years ago ... even then it was very different. There were none of those TV programmes on then. And it definitely wasn't as popular (James, 31)

For those who were unable to demonstrate a commitment to the practice as a result of a *longue durée* within tattoo figurations a devotion to the history of the practice and its cultural roots was instead proffered:

I research artists all the time and I'm always following artist's blogs ... And even the roots, there's a documentary out called Hori Smoku Sailor Jerry about his life and stuff and it's got Ed Hardy and Malone in there, the original American masters who tattooed all the sailors and stuff in there. It talks about how they used to break into morgues and tattoo on dead bodies. It's the proper original tattooists who were just rebels or sailors. I love looking into that (Bob, 18)

Having explored the importance of portraying an authentic identity, the ability of tattooing to operate of a marker of such authenticity as well as issues of authenticity that operate within figurations threatened with assimilation into mainstream culture, I now turn my attention to focus more specifically on the strategies used by respondents in demonstrating their own authenticity.

Non-Tattooed Others

In extolling their own authenticity, respondents typically discussed how their tattoos enabled them to achieve more authentic identities than non-tattooed others, or those they considered as having inauthentic tattoos or pursuing tattooing body projects for inauthentic reasons. In comparing themselves to non-tattooed others, respondents typically proposed that their tattoos allowed them to achieve authentic identities unobtainable by other means available from the 'cultural toolkit', or focused on how the painful acquisition of permanent identity marks

meant their quests for authenticity were validated as a result of having to overcome processes of acquisition and healing, processes that also allowed them to experience the self in ways not possible elsewhere in consumer culture. The permanence of tattoos was a key indicator in allowing individuals to demonstrate a lifelong commitment to their identity narratives, which for them was a crucial aspect of quests for authenticity not achievable by non-tattooed others:

It's nice because a tattoo isn't like hair dye or a haircut, it won't grow out
(Lizzy, 19)

These really show who I am which you can't do with clothes or something
(Cliff, 33)

For me it is an important part of who I am, it's definitely a strong statement that I've made about my ideology using my body, you know, it's permanent, it's forever and it's pretty visible ... there's no other way you can do that ...
It's definitely a very important part of who I am (Eileen)

Recognising the importance of demonstrating the 'real you' in contemporary culture, these respondents drew comparisons between the permanence of tattoos and fleeting aspects of consumer culture such as clothing or hairstyles to highlight how the former more easily allowed them to fulfil quests for authenticity because of its unalterable nature which demonstrated a stronger commitment to one's self-identity. A consistent narrative throughout the research was that non-tattooed people could not understand what it meant to have tattoos and that by marking themselves with permanent additions to the body, tattooed individuals could more clearly represent who they really were on the inside, a key component in quests for authenticity (Vannini and Franzese 2008; Vannini and Williams 2009). Despite this however, tattooed people were rarely condemnatory of non-tattooed others, instead preferring to emphasise the importance of tattoos in demonstrating their own authenticity as compared to other aspects of consumer culture. This was because most respondents saw some non-tattooed others as being prejudiced against those with tattoos – 'we all know that tattoos can prejudice some people' (Trevor) – and did not want to be viewed as prejudiced themselves; a popular

phrase in tattoo figurations is that 'the only difference between tattooed people and non-tattooed people is that tattooed people don't care if you're not tattooed' (see image twenty-seven).

In emphasising how their personal quests for authenticity were pursued many respondents posited pain as key source of authenticity:

I think going through the pain to have something personal for me is important, it's kind of like it's almost as if it's going through a little barrier in a way. Someone wouldn't normally go out to seek pain for example...if you wanted to not have the pain you'd just get henna or those wash on wash off things (Siobhan, 20).

It's a couple of hour's discomfort; a couple of weeks of healing and then you've got it for the rest of your life (Damian, 41)

My ribs were so painful; I was shocked at how painful it was...I had it in one sitting so it was just 2 hours of continuous pain ... I'd still do it [again] because it is worth it (Jon, 19)

In chapter four I discussed how the painful acquisition of tattoos forms the first chains of interdependency amongst individuals enmeshed in tattoo figurations as it is the key difference between those who are, and those who are not, tattooed. But pain also acted as an important indicator of authenticity as respondents stressed a commitment to the self in overcoming the painful act of being tattooed. Although virtually all studies of tattooing acknowledge the painful nature of the process there is little work that has directly addressed the importance of pain in allowing individuals to construct a coherent and authentic sense of self. Where pain has been analysed more explicitly it has been done so through the lens of resistance, by demonstrating how pain of tattooing jars with cultural sensibilities about the body (Sweetman 1999b, 1999b), or through the modern primitives use of pain as a means of connecting with a so-called authentic primitive self (Vale and Juno 1989; Klesse 2000; Atkinson and Young 2001). However, pain was posited as a crucial aspect of contemporary quests for authenticity in a world where we can no longer

rely on meta-narratives to provide meaning in our life as reflected in the narratives of respondents who viewed the painful acquisition of tattoos as 'important', 'worth it', and an 'achievement'.

Another key feature of the pain associated with tattooing was the way it allowed individuals' to *experience* the self. The rise of practices associated with the body such as body building (Wiegers 1998; Wesely 2001), combat sports (Spencer 2009; Green 2011), and plastic surgery (Gimlin 2002; Pitts-Taylor 2007; Elliot 2011), has seen the cultural definition of pain as something to be avoided reconfigured. Although most commonly associated with a means to an end, the mantra of 'no pain, no gain' is now a common phrase concomitant with numerous body practices that not only focus on an end product (i.e. the muscular, hardened, or surgically improved body), but on pain as a way of connecting with the body, and the self. In his analysis of mixed martial arts (MMA), Kyle Green demonstrates how the experience of pain in both training, and fighting, is not only characterised as something to be overcome in order to become a better (i.e. fitter, more controlled, and with better technique) mixed martial artist, but is embraced in and of itself as 'an avenue to encounter the body as a united organism', and a way to establish 'an intimacy between the participants, central to [the] formation of community' (Green 2011: 378). Similar findings were found by Spencer's who's own ethnography of MMA demonstrated how reflexive (painful) body techniques (RBTs) associated with the sport mould the bodies of the fighters and leaves them with 'bumps, bruises, scrapes, black eyes, broken noses, broken bones and calluses' (Spencer 2009: 139), which significantly shapes how those individuals view themselves and how their identities are reflected to others. Parallels can also be drawn with tattooing where it is not just the finished tattoo that is of importance, but also the experience of being tattooed:

It's prickly, tickly, it's erotic, whatever you want it to be (Luke)

I find it when it's on a nice part of your body sort of, I don't know, rhythmic, hypotonic (Hannah, 27)

I love being tattooed...I like the whole process....I've never been at the stage where I wanted it to stop or I couldn't take it anymore...I quite like it when it's sore afterwards because you can walk around and feel you've got a tattoo (Esther, 33)

I quite enjoy getting tattooed ... I didn't like my stomach though (Jeff, 24)

This is not to say that all individuals enjoy the experience of being tattooed; the process was variously described as being 'irritating', 'necessary', a 'barrier', something to 'overcome', and as 'hating every minute of it', whilst many respondents, like Jeff above, disliked being tattooed in particularly painful locations. Nevertheless, for some the painful, physical process of being tattooed enables quests for authenticity to be fulfilled by experiencing the body itself as real.

Tattooed Others

While some respondents promoted their own authenticity compared to non-tattooed others, it was far more common for respondents to make authenticity claims by denying authenticity to other members of tattoo figurations who, in their opinions, were tattooed for the wrong reasons. One of the most commonly forwarded propositions for others adopting tattooing for inauthentic reasons concerned the age of the individual, particularly where they were young and had obtained extensive coverage in a short period of time:

I really do not agree with them being heavily tattooed... because most of these teenagers will regret it as most people change a hell of a lot from being 16 to 21. And this is a much harder trend to get rid of than a clothing trend. Unfortunately it is very cool to have tattoos so at a young age you want to be seen as cool and in that trend (Heather, 25)

I'm in a band and we played a festival in Nottingham called Hit the Deck and I've never seen so many kids with tattoos. It made me wish I wasn't tattooed to be different. There were kids who looked like they'd just turned 18 with their throats and hands tattooed (Jeff, 24)

So many young people have such a lot of work done... It's a statement, a way of decorating yourself but I think a lot of people do it because they think it's cool (Kate, 28)

Mirroring the findings of Glass (2012) on punk subculture, and Mullaney (2012) on the Straight-Edge music scene (see also Atkinson 2003b, 2004), respondents denied young tattooed individuals the status of authentic tattoo enthusiasts, because they were seen as obtaining tattoos to be 'cool' (see also Turner 2000), rather than adopting the practice as part of genuine quests for authenticity; this was despite the fact that the majority of respondents were themselves under 30 so could be considered young, and many had acquired their first tattoos at similar young ages. In contrast, several respondents, regardless of their age, considered themselves to collectors of tattoos:

I've been collecting since 1990; I've got various bits and pieces now, different styles by different people... I like the idea of collecting tattoos and I like the idea of getting work by different artists... you get to sample more people, more different styles... It's become something about which a connoisseurship has built up; it's taken more seriously (Trevor, 41)

But now it's got to the point where I start going to artists for their work, for them to draw me up work because I love the idea of collecting a piece of art rather than it *just* being a tattoo... it's got to the point where everybody has got them; it's [now] about who you got them from and why you're getting them (Bob, 18, my emphasis)

Similar to the narratives of tattoo collectors studied by Vail (1999a, 1999b), and Irwin (2003) (see chapter two), the narratives of these respondents suggested that they were more serious, thoughtful, and committed tattoo enthusiasts – i.e. 'elite' (Irwin 2003) members tattoo figurations – and so their tattoos fulfilled quests for authenticity that was not achieved by those who were not tattooed with personally meaningful designs, and/or by celebrity/elite tattoo artists:

Anybody can get a tattoo from any guy but what separates you now is that you've gone to that person for their artwork and that piece they've given you is original (Bob, 18)

So many people have tattoos, and I suppose I'm being rude here, but that are meaningless... he's got one so I'll have one... it's like seeing your best mate with a shirt and you ask where they got it so people are going to get them because someone else has (Luke)

Despite his young age, Bob, a tattoo apprentice, used his figurational capital to position himself as a collector of tattoos who had to appropriate cultural knowledge concerning the practice to claim his own tattooing body projects to be pursued for authentic reasons.

Another common assertion amongst respondents was that tattoos that were considered fashionable, or acquired for fashions' sake, were also somehow inauthentic:

My step mum's a bit of a chav so she's got a slag tag! One of the Celtic weird little designs, one of the flash designs (Siobhan, 20)

My step sister has tattoos; she's got lovely little fashionable ones as I call them... I personally think they're tacky (Hannah, 27)

A lot of people are going in and getting flowers or stars on the elbow for no reason, just for the fact that it's fashionable (Steve, 38)

I saw a girl with a Hello Kitty one on and I was like you're going to regret a Hello Kitty tattoo when you're like 50 (Carol, 22)

Resonating with the claims of those who considered themselves more serious collectors, many respondents considered having flash designs, tattoos with no personal significance, or in particular, fashion/fashionable tattoos, as illegitimate reasons to obtain them, and considered these individuals' tattoos as not being pursued in order to construct authentic identities. Whilst obtaining tattoos for fashionable reasons was seen to restrict the extent to which individuals would claim

individuality as discussed in the previous chapter, authenticity was also denied to those who were seen to be pursuing tattooing body projects because of fashion. Much like the insider/outsider status of those seen to be 'being' punk (i.e. authentic punks) compared to those who were seen to be 'doing' punk (i.e. non-authentic poseurs) (Fox 1987), tattooed individuals made distinctions between those for whom tattooing was adopted as part of a genuine quest for authenticity, and those whose interest in the practice was viewed as not serious or committed enough and had been drawn to the practice because of its increasing assimilation into consumer culture which promoted the practice as fashionable. It may seem somewhat contradictory, given the permanence of tattoos, that individuals within tattoo figurations could be seen as simply 'doing' tattooing or a tattooed identity, but the narratives of respondents contained many statements that served to draw lines between those considered on the inside who pursued tattooing body projects as part of personal quests for authenticity, and those on the outside, who pursued tattooing body projects for fashionable reasons or to fit in with peer groups:

There's people who like to have tattoos and then there's people who like to be tattooed (Jill, 29)

There are tattooed people, it's very different... people who are more involved in the culture of tattoos (Jane, 22)

Tattooed people know more about tattoos than people with a few tattoos (Chuck, 24)

I think there are some people who want the kudos of a tattoo and don't really give a shit about what on earth they have done, they would have anything, anything at all just to say they've got a tattoo (Esther, 33)

You can really tell the people who aren't just there because it's fashion because of how heavily they've got into it and just by talking to them you instantly know whether they have any understanding of the industry; they'll be passionate about their tattoo ... it can be annoying that some people don't understand the reason behind the tattoo they're getting so they'll just

pick a Sailor Jerry tattoo from a poster and not really understand anything about Sailor Jerry (Bob, 18)

As discussed in chapter five, the fashionable nature of the practice has undoubtedly contributed to the growing establishment of tattooing, but almost all respondents – whilst mostly keen to reap the benefits of the practice being considered less of an outsider practice and threatening their social respectability – were disparaging of those who acquired tattoos for fashionable reasons, with only two admitting they *may* have been influenced by the increasingly fashionable nature of the practice.

Conclusion

The construction of self-identity is an ever increasing concern for members of contemporary society and the body has become an increasingly central resource upon which identity is constructed (Giddens 1991; Turner 2008; Shilling 2012). As a practice that has lost much of its deviant association, tattooing has become incorporated into the body projects of many individuals who utilise the practice to represent such aspects of their selves as hobbies, relationships, favourite bands, sports teams, and religious outlooks, through the body. But the construction of identity is precarious as not only must individuals navigate their way through the plethora of options available in the ‘cultural toolkit’ of contemporary consumer culture, but quests for authenticity that have become increasingly central in contemporary culture means identity itself must also be considered as authentic by truly representing who they are. Authenticity itself however is a contested concept, one is not simply authentic or not, with what is considered authentic or inauthentic constructed within figurations in which individuals are enmeshed. Thus members of tattoo figurations construct their authenticity vis-à-vis both non-tattooed and tattooed others. By comparing their identities to non-tattooed others, respondents are able to construct their identities as authentic by demonstrating a commitment to the self not possible through less permanent markers of identity such as clothing and hairstyles, and by drawing on narratives of pain which further demonstrated a commitment to the self and allowed them to experience the self. Authenticity was also established by denying authenticity to other members of the figuration, most

notably younger members, or those who, in respondents' opinions, were tattooed for the wrong reasons. The demarcation between those who pursue tattooing body projects as part of genuine quests for authenticity and those who are considered to not be doing so was something not considered by previous generations (Atkinson 2003a) and is the result of the continued assimilation of the practice into mainstream culture which has witnessed the practice threatened with widespread acceptance. As the practice becomes more common and is witnessed ever more in the public eye individuals strive to be viewed as not pursuing tattooing body projects because of this heightened popularity.

The modern tattoo figuration is, Atkinson (2003a) proclaims, one of choice, but as individual identity becomes an ever more central concern for individuals in contemporary society we are living in what Taylor (2007) terms 'the age of authenticity'. As permanent markers of identity, tattoos enable individuals to fulfil quests for authenticity by demonstrating a commitment to the internally felt self as well as displaying their identities for others to read:

My personal feeling is that every tattoo should have a double fronted meaning. One is very personal, very private to you and you will only tell people that are close to you. I think that's the way it should be. Tattoos are for displaying but I personally think they should have meaning. So one is for internal, personal, and the other is because you are showing it to people that you have this element of belief. At the end of the day I personally think it should come back to very very personal things (Luke)

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Appendices

Appendix One – Interview Respondent Characteristics

Interviewee Number	M/F. Age.	Occupation	Pseudo-name
1	F/25	Student	Daphne
2	M/25	Student	Patrick
3	F/22	Nike	Jane
4	F/27		Kate
5	F/2?	Hospital Worker	Eileen
6	F/22	Student	Carol
7	M/24	Unemployed	Chuck
8	M/56	Company Owner	Bill
9	M/38	Bike Mechanic	Steve
10	F/27	Student/Bar Worker	Hannah
11	F/20	Student	Siobhan
12	F/33	Teacher	Esther
13	F/28		Katie
14	M/54	Engineer	Kevin
15	F/5?	Hotel Worker	Deb
16	M/35	I.T.	Daryl
17	M/18		Bob
18	M/30	Teacher	James
19	M/41	Unemployed	Damian
20	F/19	Student	Lizzy
21	M/55	Unemployed	Luke
22	M/19	Student	Jon
23	F/29	Company Owner	Jill
24	M/2*	Band Member	Jeff
25	M/41	Publisher	Trevor
26	M/29	Web Designer	Matthew
27	M/24	Piercer	Ed
28	M/33	Agency	Cliff
29	F/	Local Government	Anne
30	M/?		Enrique
31	M/?		Xavier
32	M/51		Martin
E-Mail Interview 1	Trans/2?	Teacher	Harold
E-Mail Interview 2	Female/25	Student	Heather

E-Mail Interview 3	Female/22	Retail Worker	Katherine
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Appendix Two – Magazine Content Analysis Template

Issue:

Cover:

Conventions:

Shop/Artist Features:

Other Artists:

Articles:

'Academic' Articles:

Free Gifts:

Editorial:

Letters:

Articles

Appendix Three – Magazine Content Analysis Example

Issue: Skin Deep October 2010 (190).

Cover: Female Model; Conventions; Artists; The Secret of a Great Cover Up.

Conventions: Liverpool; New York; Derby; Tattoo Jam.

Shop/Artist Features: Buena Vista Tattoo Club; Ryan Davies; Aaron Bell.

Other Artists: None.

Articles: Cover-Ups; So You Want to be a Model? Getting a 'regular' job with tattoos (cover model); Her Name on You (getting a partner's name tattooed on you and regret); The Power of the Tattooed Lady (PHK).

'Academic' Articles: None.

Free Gifts: Tattoo Jam.

Editorial: 'Each and every time you let that needle into your skin, you're telling a story about where you are in your life. You might not think you are, but that ink is pretty damn permanent'.

Letters: Problems with regulation of tattoo studios and importance of researching before becoming tattooed ('Two Sides of the Coin').

Articles

Not Just a Pretty Face (becoming a model with tattoos)

- Being tattooed as a career of becoming tattooed to pursue a career?
- No comparison with regular modelling.
- No mention of male models.
- **Editorial:**

Liverpool Tattoo Convention

- Celebration of the art, which is essentially what tattoo conventions are.

Buena Vista Tattoo Club

- This is what true art does – it evokes a response at the emotional level that demands either taking part or moving on.
- Give us total freedom to create the art freehand...completely unique designs that are one of a kind.
- In the last few years, it has become more common to tattoo designs or styles that belong more to art than well known tattoo styles...we always saw tattoos as art, not as tattoos themselves.
- We never do anything twice.

Ryan Davies

- An apprenticeship is definitely the way you should get into tattooing. There are too many people just grabbing a machine these days.
- Half the battle is acting like you know what you're doing. You've always got someone watching you and it's got to be perfect.
- It's not just the designing of the tattoos though, it's the placement, body structure and everything being taken into account.
- Today there are so many artists out there who are prepared to help each other. A few years ago they wouldn't tell you what needle or ink they used for instance...years ago, everyone was out for themselves and they didn't want anyone in on their territory
- I want someone to come in and say 'I want something different' and truly mean it. It is almost getting to the stage where you can't do something completely different though: tattooing has been around so long and so much has been done

Tattoo Jam

- They come from all corners of the globe to get some art from some of the best names in the business
- Tattoos are an extraordinary kind of art, a pure art. Tattoos cannot pass from hand to hand, cannot be sold on or auctioned, there is no secondary market, but there is an **industry** around them, magazines that document the **community**, conventions, prints, books, and t-shirts
- **Tattooing frequently enters renaissance periods, not least now.**
Contemporary tattoos can be divided into three distinct groups, the **Traditional** (encompassing Japanese, Old School and Neo Traditional, featuring distinct outlines, dark shade and solid colours, utilising or disregarding traditional tattoo iconography), **Black Work** (Tribal, Eastern or Geometric patterning using lines and dots) and **Realism** (black and grey or full colour depictions of real subjects, such as wildlife or portraits).
 - Some tattooers are well versed in all styles, and some choose to specialise – **collectors** and **enthusiasts** do them same.
- Tattoo Jam is a convention that remains focused on tattooing and tattoo art and does not get distracted by additional cultural phenomenon, there are no skateboard ramps or burlesque dancers here, just lots of (almost 300) working tattooists, some relevant art and a few bands.
- Tattoo **royalty** Lal Hardy and Louis Molloy
- Tattoo Jam offers an opportunity to view contemporary tattooing in its current renaissance period, a chance to see tattoo artists taking the traditional craft forward and continually elevating the status of tattooing to where it belongs, that of an **art**.

Having a lot of tattoos and a regular job/cover girl interview

- Sometime in the future I'd like to get work done by Buena Vista Tattoo Club, Uncle Allan, Matt Difa and Leah Moule – there's more but those spring to the front of my mind.
- The public profile of tattoo art is possibly the highest it's ever been thanks to the media.

- Everyone tends to assume I got all my tattoos before for some reason but most of them came after I qualified (as a nurse)...there's an awful lot of misconceptions surrounding tattoos and people definitely tend to perceive you differently.

The Power of the Tattooed Lady

- We have come out of the circus and we have travelled a long way, although we still attract attention.
- I have public skin tattoos, my hands and throat, tattoos that are showing all of the time...more and more people are tipping the scale from having a tattoo to being tattooed.
- People look, stare, shout and tut, so I've learned to wear metaphorical blinkers and I'm getting pretty good at blocking out the whispers and the nudges.
- The man on the street now had a context in which to place me (because of Kat Von D).
- Comments such as 'what's a pretty girl gone and done that to herself for' and 'ruining herself' are daily occurrences for a contemporary tattoo gal
- It's not about approval or disapproval of others, it's about feeling good in your own skin, owning amazing, one of a kind artworks and being in control (although this is not true for everybody as some people seek approval).

Images

Image One



New Zealand Maori (Chapman 2010)

Image Two



The Tattooed Entertainer Alexandrinos who performed under the names
Constantine, Captain Constantine or Prince Constantine
(www.vanishingtattoo.com)

Image Three



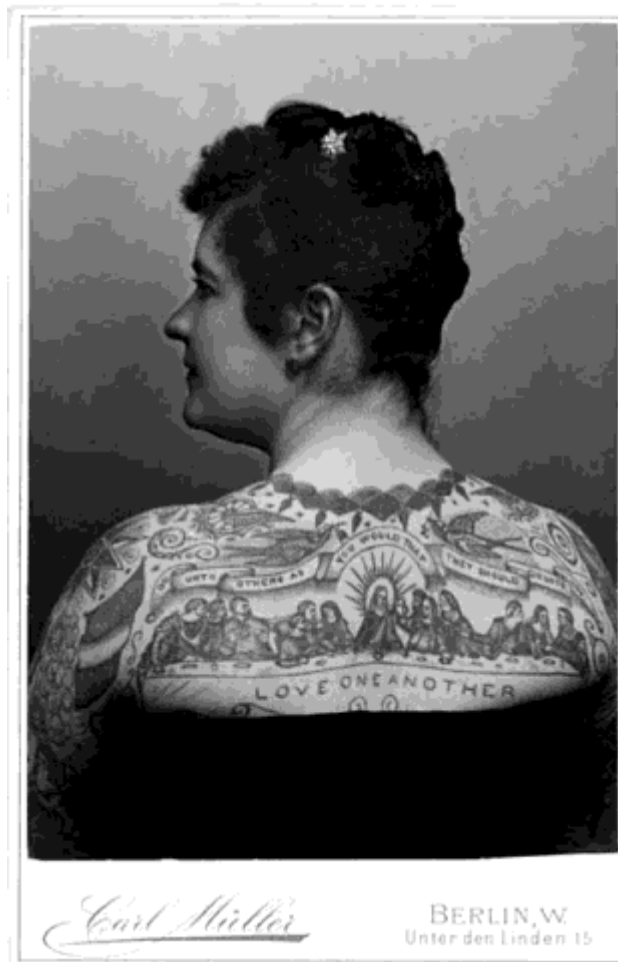
The 'original tattooed lady' Irene Woodward (known as La Belle Irene) (Mifflin 2013: 13)

Image Four



Lady Viola (Mifflin 2013: 20)

Image Five



Emma de Burgh (Mifflin 2013: 21)

Image Six



Live Music: Portsmouth Tattoo Convention 2011 (author)

Image Seven



Roller Derby Exhibition: Great British Tattoo Show 2013 (author)

Image Eight



Car display and sale: Great British Tattoo Show 2013 (author)

Image Nine



Tattoo Competition: Great British Tattoo Show 2013 (author)

Image Ten



Tattoo Competition: Great British Tattoo Show 2013 (author)

Image Eleven



Facial Tattooing on Damian (author)

Image Twelve



Tattooed Performer Enigma (wikipedia.com)

Image Thirteen



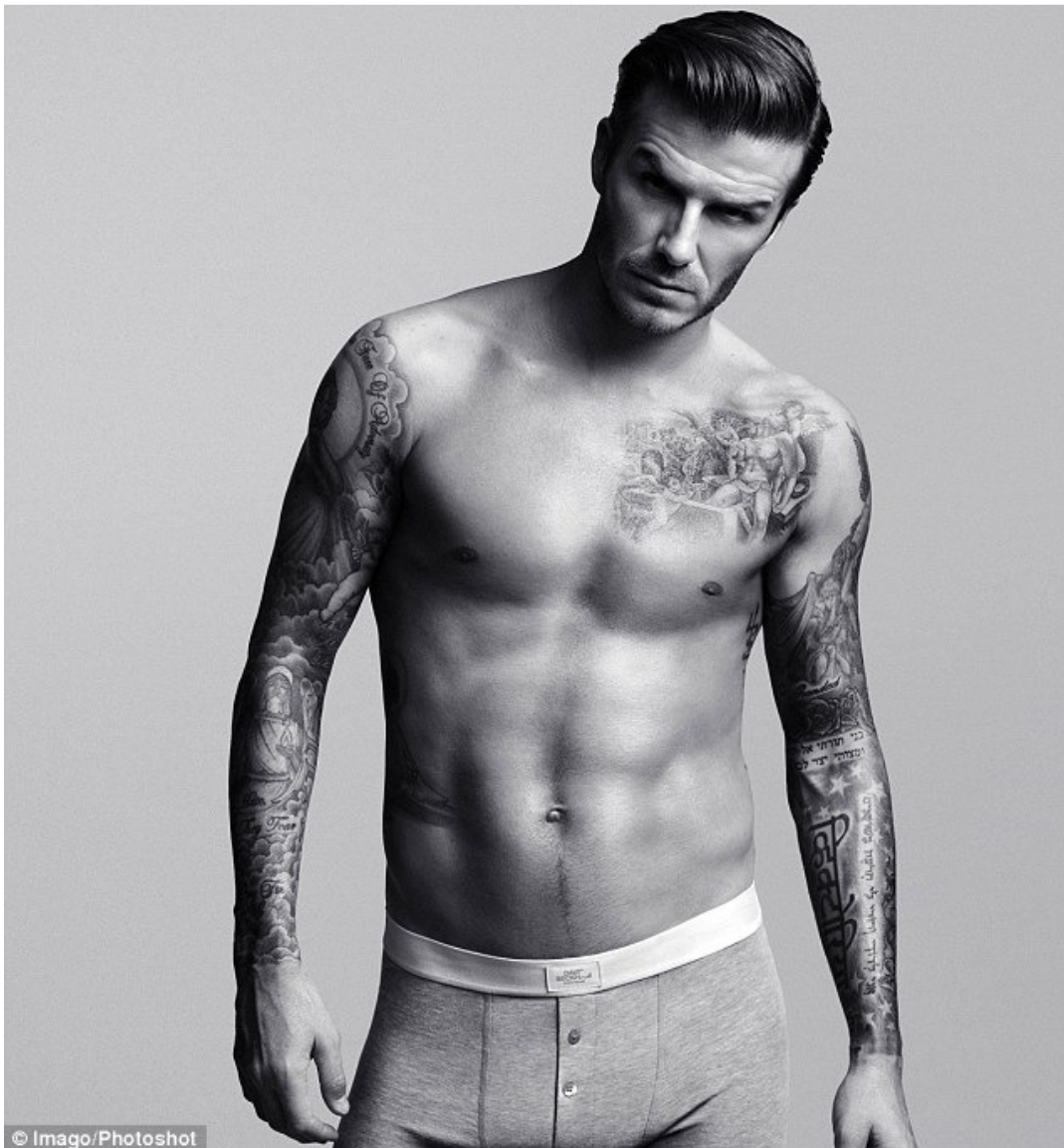
Tattooed Performer The Lizardman (trulyparanormal.blogspot.com)

Image Fourteen



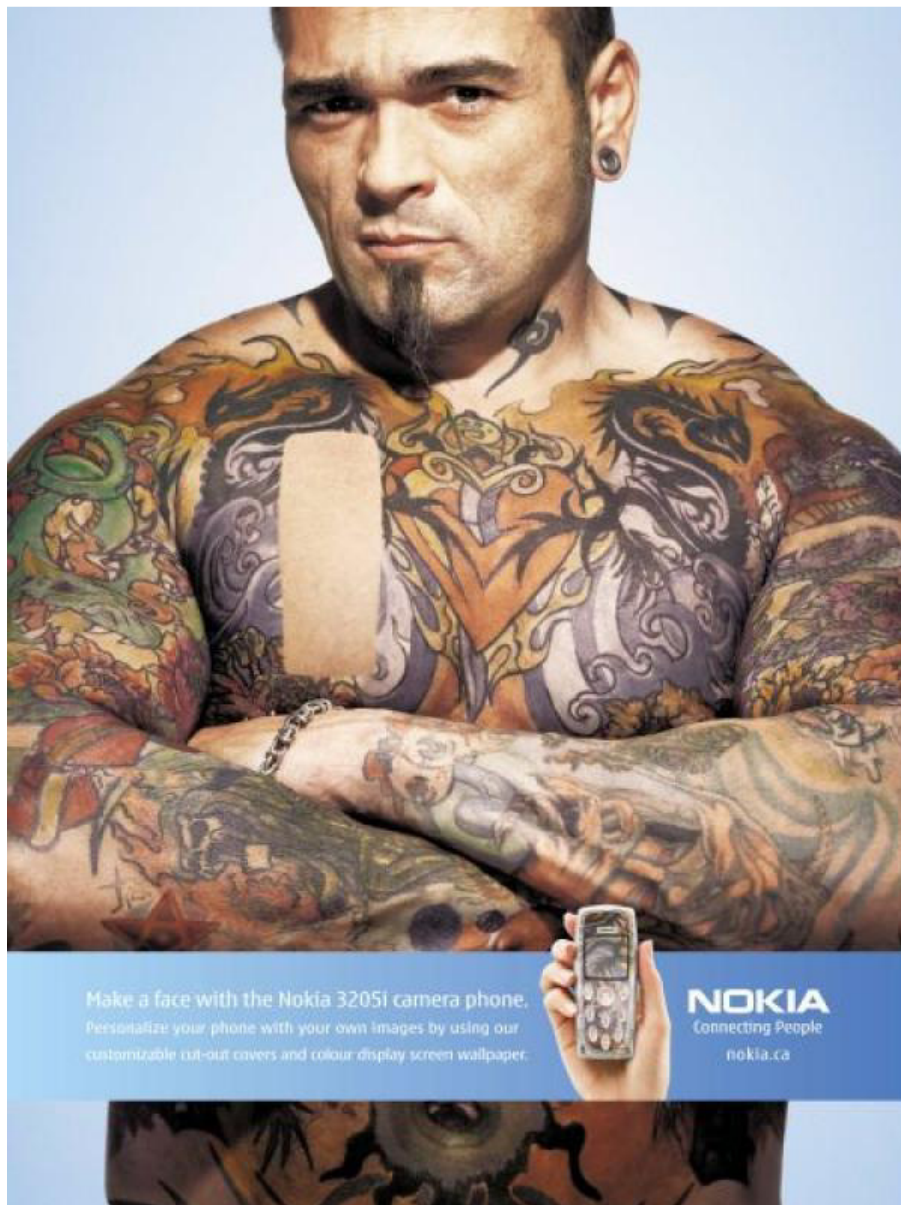
Tattooed Performer Lucky Diamond Rich (Ranald Mackechnie / GWR / Barcroft Media)

Image Fifteen



David Beckham photo from H&M advertisement (Imago/Photoshot)

Image Sixteen

An advertisement for the Nokia 3205i camera phone. The main image shows a man with extensive, colorful tattoos on his chest and arms. He is holding a small, silver Nokia 3205i camera phone in his right hand. The phone's screen displays a close-up of the man's face, which is the focus of the advertisement. The background is a plain, light blue color. At the bottom of the image, there is a blue banner with white text and the Nokia logo.

Make a face with the Nokia 3205i camera phone.
Personalize your phone with your own images by using our
customizable cut-out covers and colour display screen wallpaper.

NOKIA
Connecting People
nokia.ca

Advertisement for Nokia 2003 (Nokia)

Image Seventeen



Advertisement for Jean Paul Gaultier fragrance 'Le Male' featuring tattooed model
(Jean Paul Gaultier)

Image Eighteen



Print advert for Joop! Homme Wild featuring tattooed model (Joop! Homme)

Image Nineteen



Sailor Jerry Rum

Image Twenty



Sailor Jerry Playing Cards

Image Twenty One



1000-year-old Samurai prayer tattooed on the back of Luke (author)

Image Twenty Two



Lee Wagstaff final degree show Printmaking MA degree at the Royal College of Art
(Lee Wagstaff)

Image Twenty Three



Cheryl Cole's Hand Tattoo (www.tattoostime.com)

Image Twenty Four



Tattoos of roses on Cheryl Cole (www.mirror.co.uk)

Image Twenty Five



Jill's large flower tattoos (author)

Image Twenty Six



Jill's large peacock tattoo (author)

Image Twenty Seven



A sign from a tattoo studio of a popular phrase in tattoo figurations (author)