IMAGING THE BODY:
a discourse analysis of the writings of people with tattoos

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December 2007

Table of contents

Acknowledgements

The following people have been invaluable in the production of this research report:

- The anonymous authors of the postings, who were willing to share personal experiences with the world.
- Adri Prinsloo for continuous support and invaluable feedback that allowed this report to develop in its own time.
- Stephen, Graham, Shane, Lindz, Marissa, Athena, Ryan, Davina and other people too numerous to mention who have stood by me throughout.
- My wonderful husband, who has been a source of strength and inspiration second to none.

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Abstract

The increased popularity of tattooing in recent years serves as the backdrop for this research report. As tattooing has grown in popularity it has become increasingly mainstream and has been embraced by people from all walks of life. In particular, a large Internet archive of tattoos has emerged, that contains narratives by people with tattoos as well as numerous pictures of tattoos.

In this research report a discourse analysis was conducted on fifty-two of these Internet postings, in order to ascertain what discourse were in use in these postings. Thus, the discourse analysis looked at the ways in which having a tattoo/ being tattooed were constructed within these postings.

In order for the discourse analysis to be conducted, the research first embarked on an extensive review of literature, that looked at the academic readings of tattooing. It was found that these readings were varied, and that it was possible to read tattooing in many different ways. Both positive and negative readings of tattoos are highlighted within the literature review.

The theoretical backdrop of social constructionism informs the methodology section of the research, as it presents a detailed and contradictory discussion of the field of discourse analysis. Rather than unproblematically claiming to produce a discourse analysis, the research interrogated the term itself, highlighting the contradictions in the field before narrowing to the presentation of a pragmatic approach to discourse analysis that was used in this specific research report.

Following the debate in both the literature review and the methodology, three discourses were identified by the discourse analysis conducted. The first discourse relates to tattooing as being a definition or a redefinition of the self, a way to construct a new and complete identity. The second discourse refers to the process of getting a tattoo as providing access to a certain way of speaking that is only available to those who have tattoos. The third discourse identified looks at the construction of the tattoo artist as expert, and the role that the tattoo artist has as a gatekeeper to the discourses of tattooing.

Key words: discourse analysis, tattoo, body modification, social constructionism, body art, embodiment, Foucault, Internet research, Parker's twenty steps, Potter and Wetherell

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Description of the research

The research presented in this research report consisted of the conducting of a discourse analysis on fifty-two Internet texts. These texts are posted on a website about tattoos, and speak of the experience of being tattooed. In order for the discourse analysis to be conducted, a literature review was first presented. This review looks at the array of discourses that are currently in use around tattoos. Methodological debate was also entered into, so as to be able to make use of the some of the concepts presented in the conducting of a discourse analysis.

Context

This research takes place against the backdrop of the growth in popularity of the body modification industry. It is possible for each of us, at an anecdotal level, to attest to this growth. We all know people with either tattoos or body piercings, or even other, more extreme forms of body modification such as scarification. Many of the individuals reading this will have body modifications themselves. Thus, looking closely at tattooing is something that is interesting on a purely anecdotal level.

However, on a more academic track, the popularity of tattooing is apparent not only in anecdotal accounts, but which has come to the awareness of, and been researched and commented on, by many individuals within the academic world. It has been

accounted for from different perspectives, by disciplines as diverse as marketing and dermatology. It is this academic interest that is discussed in the chapter on tattooing.

The motivation to do this research springs from both these strands – from my own anecdotal and personal experiences with tattoos and tattooing, and from the academic literature around tattooing and body modification more generally, which complicate the field and present a broad range of understandings. This research is therefore another contribution to this field, as it seeks to broaden the already existing literature around the increasing popularity of tattooing.

A further context that must be mentioned is that of the Internet itself, as both tool and place of research. The texts used for the analysis in this research report are Internet based, and as such this report would not have been possible twenty years ago, before the growth of the Internet.

Research Question

This research will undertake a discourse analysis of the writings of people with tattoos, in order to identify some of the discourses that are used in understanding the processes of getting a tattoo, and being tattooed. The focus of this research is therefore to answer the following question: What discourses are being utilized by people with tattoos, in order to articulate the experience of being tattooed, and of having a tattoo?

This is not a traditional research question, in that it does not attempt to answer a set question about some measurable aspect of human behaviour. In other words, the question is not: how many discourses are there about tattoos? Instead, the question formulated points towards the provisional and contested nature of knowledge, as it aims not at definitive answers but at further knowledge and information. This, according to Macleod (2002) is one of the basic strengths of discourse analysis, as it changes the position of the researcher. The researcher is no longer an expert who knows about, or measures human behaviour or human beings, instead the researcher's expertise lies not in what can be known, but in the range of questions that can be formulated, and the range of interpretations that can be accessed. These

interpretations are always tentative, ensuring that they provide space to engage with the material analysed and embrace the possibility of reinterpretation or rearrangement.

Goals

On the most basic and broad level the goal of this research report is therefore to access the discourses about tattooing which are at use within the specific data set. This is aimed at contributing to the body of literature on tattooing and body modification. However, within this goal there are a number of more specific goals. One of these is the conducting of a literature review on the subject of tattooing, in order to bring together the various strands of academic discourse around this subject. A further goal is to enter into methodological debate, and to present a form of discourse analysis that is beneficial for this research report. In addition, the handing in of this research serves my personal goal of completing my MA qualification in Clinical Psychology, as it constitutes part of the academic requirements for the degree.

Structure

The chapters in this research report are designed to flow logically into one another, each one building on ideas and suggestions which were prominent previously, while at the same time ensuring that each chapter involves a close analysis of a specific area within this research report. Each chapter, therefore, serves a specific purpose within this body of work but also relates to the other chapters presented here.

The two chapters immediately following this one constitute the literature review. The review has been presented in two chapters because it consists of two basic bodies of knowledge. In the chapter on tattooing, the academic literature around tattooing is presented. This includes a discussion of the historical background of tattooing as well as the status of tattooing today. In addition, the bulk of the chapter critically examines theoretical understandings of tattooing. It looks at the various ways in which tattoos are portrayed by the literature surveyed, and aims to illustrate that the various understandings of tattooing point towards a wide variety of discourses in use around tattooing.

The second section of the literature review, the chapter labelled social constructionism, is much shorter than the first, and serves a different purpose. In this section, a basic understanding of the field of social constructionism is presented, through looking at the work of Gergen (1985) and Burr (1995). The chapter also points towards some of the origins of the term social constructionism, as well as looking at criticism of the field. This chapter serves as the groundwork for the rigorous discussion of discourse analysis that follows in the next chapter. As such, the focus in this chapter is on presenting a clear picture of the field rather than on engaging more forcefully with contradictions and debates, an activity which features prominently in the methodology chapter.

A large section of the methodology chapter involves an engagement with the immense body of work that constitutes the field of discourse analysis. Various understandings of the term discourse analysis are presented, as well as various examples of suggested methods for doing discourse analysis and practical examples of research where discourse analysis is listed as a methodology. The chapter engages with this field, and then pragmatically makes a decision about what will constitute discourse analysis in the context of this particular piece of research. The motivation for this pragmatic approach is discussed extensively within the chapter.

Following the discussion of discourse analysis, the methodology turns its attention to other methodological issues within this research. It looks at the Internet as research context, and speaks of the unique nature of the texts used, as all as sampling and coding procedures for these texts. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of possibilities for evaluating the quality of qualitative research.

After the methodology chapter, the results of the discourse analysis are presented. In some ways, this results chapter forms the heart of this research report. It is the focal point in that it constitutes the presentation of the texts themselves, in terms of the discourses that were identified through the discourse analysis conducted. Although it is central to this research, this chapter does not stand alone. The presentation is contingent both on the understandings of tattooing that were presented earlier, as well

as on the stringent theoretical discussion that informed the use of discourse analysis within this research.

Within the results and discussion chapter close attention is paid to three discourses that were identified through my reading of the postings. These three discourses are:

- Tattoos as definition/redefinition of the self
- Getting a tattoo
- The tattoo artist as expert

Within the chapter, all three of these discourses are discussed at length. Each discourse is presented along with extensive extracts from the postings that formed the raw data on which the discourse analysis was conducted. These extracts are included within the research report as it is felt that they serve to provide a feel for the postings themselves, as well as illustrating the statements that are provided within the discussion of the identified discourses.

The results and discussion chapter moves on to a brief discussion of the way in which the three discourses relate to each other as well as to the material covered in the literature review. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the way in which the discourse analysis presented within the chapter can be evaluated in accordance with the principles for evaluating qualitative work that were discussed in the methodology chapter.

The final chapter of the research report consists of a summary of the conclusions that can be drawn from the work presented in the rest of the report. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the recommendations for future research that can be made as a result of the conducting of this research.

Presentation

A notable feature of this completed research report is the presence of a large number of pictures of tattoos. These pictures are included for several related reasons. On a purely aesthetic level they contribute to the overall look of the report, but their inclusion involves more than an aesthetic choice. When we speak of tattoos we speak of ink embedded in the skin, of a physical and an embodied reality. It is important that this is not forgotten in the glib theorizing of an academic discourse. Therefore, I include pictures of tattoos as texts in their own right, which are outside of my text and serve as a counterpoint – a visual reminder of the physical and embodied nature of tattoos.

The tattoo pictures presented here are all sourced from the same website as the postings (www.bmezine.com). The website contains over sixteen thousand pictures of tattoos, listed under various headings concerned either with the location of the tattoo (hand tattoos, lip tattoos) or the subject matter of the tattoo (geek tattoos, tribal tattoo, religious tattoos).

Conclusion

Concluding an introduction involves not a true conclusion but rather marks a beginning. Therefore, this is the beginning and in the chapters that follow the topics briefly alluded to above are interrogated, examined and presented.

Chapter 2:
Tattooing

Tattooing has undergone many 'voyages' … it has crossed continents, cut across class and gender lines, and hovered between high and low cultural milieus. Tattoos were a symbol of exoticism for the leisure classes at the turn of the twentieth century; a source of pride and patriotism for military men serving in World War I and II; and a mark of differentiation and affiliation for prisoners, gang-members, punks, carnies, and other socially and self-proclaimed deviants for over a hundred years … at the turn of the twenty-first century, tattoos are increasingly commonplace within mainstream, middle-class … culture and can be found upon the bodies of white-collar professionals, college students and soccer moms.

(Kosut, 2006, p. 74).

Introduction

As this research takes for its central focus the elucidation of some discourses around tattooing, it is unsurprising that the major focus of the literature review presented here is on meanings (that is discourses, or ways of understanding) which surround tattooing. This chapter offers a broad overview of the academic writing on tattooing, attempting not just to summarize it but to engage with it: pointing out overlaps, points of comparison, contradictions and moments of cohesion between the different versions of understanding presented here.

The chapter begins by briefly situating tattooing within the broader discourse of body modification. It then moves on to consider the history of tattooing, with a particular focus on tattooing in the western world and the increasing popularity of tattooing today. Following this, a review of literature is presented whereby academic articles on tattooing have been separated into two categories that function as binary oppositions: positive and negative readings of tattoos.

The use of a binary classification such as this within a piece of research that positions itself within the social constructionist framework requires explanation. The presentation of this dualism is not intended to imply that tattooing must be either good or bad in any simplistic or moral sense. Through presenting the articles in this manner the way in which a certain 'object' – the tattoo or tattooed body – is variously constructed and positioned through different ways of speaking and different modes of understanding is highlighted.

Following this, the review moves on to look at particular facets of tattooing that have enjoyed close attention within the literature. The focus falls particularly on the relationship between women and tattoos, and on the motivations for getting tattooed.

The section on tattooing ends with an attempt to draw together the various strands that have been discussed throughout the chapter in a manner that makes sense for the project being undertaken in this research, that is the analysis of discourse.

Body modification

The practice of body modification refers to practices that are carried out with the aim of altering the form or appearance of the body (Huxley & Grogan, 2005). This means that practices such as dieting, wearing of restrictive clothing (such as corsets), bodybuilding and cosmetic surgery all fall within the realm of body modification. Although these practices are all technically examples of body modification, the term has increasingly come to be used in order to define a specific set of practices, which includes body piercing, scarification and branding as well as tattooing. The latter can be defined as "a procedure that involves the puncture of the skin so that a dye may be

inserted into the dermal layer to achieve a permanent design" (HELA, 2001 cited in Huxley & Grogan, 2005,p. 832). These practices have come to constitute an industry in their own right, which is frequently referred to as the body modification industry. Websites, such as the one from which the postings used in this research were taken, are often connected to various forms of body modification associated with the body modification industry, and not just tattooing.

There are some forms of body-modification that are neither accepted social expressions (such as body-building or dieting) nor part of the body modification industry (such as tattooing and piercing). These include forms of body-modification that are viewed as overtly pathological. Deliberate and direct destruction on body tissue by the self without suicidal intention, such as cutting the self, is viewed as a sign of psychological ill health (Favazza, 1998) and is frequently referred to as self-injury, self-harm or self-mutilation. Such practices do not form part of this study.

This research takes as its specific focus the practice of tattooing. However, it is important to note that tattooing is only one of several practices of body modification, and that each of these practices can be interrogated in order to determine its meanings, connections and connotations.

History of tattooing

Tattooing is an almost universal phenomenon, with roots that can be traced back to the earliest civilizations. There is evidence of tattooing amongst the ancient Egyptians as well as in other ancient civilizations spanning the globe. It seems as if the only societies that did not practice tattooing are those where the skin itself was too

dark for the practice to be effective (for example, in central Africa), in which case scarification and piercing were practiced instead (Ferguson & Procter, 1998). Within the literature, tattooing is often linked to other body modification processes such as body piercings and scarification. The focus of this paper is on tattooing, however much of the research relates to other practices of body modification and body art as well.

The practice of tattooing is so widespread that it is unlikely to have been begun by one culture only and then spread to others. Instead, the evidence suggests that it is a phenomenon that began independently at several places across the globe. As such, it does seem to reflect some type of universal desire to decorate and mark the body (Singh & Bronstad, 1997). In most cases, tribal tattoos seem to have been related to mystical objectives, such as providing their owner with safety. In other cases, they were used as marks of strength and virility, often marking a man as a warrior who could endure much pain (Ferguson & Procter, 1998). The origins of the tattoo are not only exotic; it is argued that tattooing was a common practice among the Celtic warriors at the time of the Roman conquest (Carr, 2005). Four centuries before the birth of Christ, Greek citizens were tattooed to indicate their professions (Hicinbothem, Gonsalves & Lester, 2006),

In Western traditions, the tattoo has been largely associated with deviance. It is suggested that this could perhaps be related to the assertion in Leviticus, which specifically prohibits the marking of the body: "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you" (Holy Bible, Old Testament, Leviticus 19:28).

However, despite strong injunctions against tattooing (it was banned by Constantine in AD. 325, and again by Pope Hadrian I in AD 787) it continued to be a feature of Western society, and particularly Western Christian society. During the Crusades, it became customary to receive a tattoo as a souvenir of a visit to the Holy Land (Ferguson & Procter, 1998). The practice of tattooing continued throughout the middle ages and into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It was the colonization urge of the eighteenth century that really brought the tattoo firmly into the Western domain. As the navies of Europe explored the world, they came across various varieties of tattooing, and received tattoos themselves. "The practice of sailors acquiring tattoos developed in subsequent years, first becoming a fashion, then a superstition, and finally a tradition" (Ferguson & Procter, 1998, p. 20). Tattooing became so widespread that by the end of the nineteenth century, an estimated 90 percent of sailors in the U.S. navy had tattoos (Ferguson & Procter, 1998).

As the century progressed, tattooing became more widespread, filtering into various sections of society. There have been people from all walks of life with tattoos. On the one hand there were circus show 'freaks' that made a living by displaying their heavily tattooed bodies. On the other hand, several members of the British Royal Family were proud owners of tattoos. Indeed, the practice of tattooing enjoyed a brief period of fashion and popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century amongst upper-class British women (Bailkin, 2005). Despite these extremes, the image of the tattoo in Western society became very firmly linked to certain sub-groups of society (Ferguson & Procter, 1998).

The tattooed body in the nineteenth century symbolised the margins of society, the savage and the uncivilized (Pritchard, 2001). Tying in with colonial ideas, the tattoo (despite some periodic episodes of popularity, as described above) remained firmly connected with that which was not central, but belonged to the margins. Tattoos were read, in some instances, as markers of the degree of savagery of a tribe (Gengenbach, 2003). That which was outside of civilized culture, the tattooing of sailors (and other members of the underclass) marked them as not truly belonging to the civilized centre (Pritchard, 2001). Thus, marginalized and deviant groups marked themselves, creating both an identity and a record of life-events (Gengenbach, 2003).

The link between sailors and tattoos still remains strong. The popularity of tattooing has spread, however, to include much of the armed forces. Therefore, tattooing is strongly associated with people in the army, the navy and the air force. Within these contexts, tattoos serve as badges of belonging, as well as marks of bravery. Tattooing has also been strongly associated with prisoners and with criminal gangs. Both these

sub-groupings emphasize tattooing's link to deviance and non-conforming (Ferguson & Procter, 1998).

In the 1980's body modification was picked up by the punk scene. Body modification (in particular piercings, but tattoos to a lesser extent) also became an important characteristic of the gay movement, voicing protest against the conservatism of middle class societal norms. Until the early 1990's, body modification remained part of various subcultures (Wohlrab, Stahl & Kappeler, 2007).

Tattooing today

In recent times, tattooing (as well as other forms of body art) has risen in popularity. Many celebrities sport tattoos, some of the most well known being actress Angelina Jolie, and soccer player David Beckham. There appears to be a tattoo renaissance, which has brought the practice of tattoo into mass culture (Bengtsson, Ostberg & Kjeldgaard, 2005). An Internet search revealed literally hundreds of websites dedicated to tattooing and celebrity tattoos. Many of these websites contain pictures of tattoos, tattoo FAQ's (frequently asked questions), as well as advise about getting tattooed. There is even a website where you can post a picture of your tattoo, and receive feedback (a rating) about it. Quotes from these sites emphasise the popularity of tattoos "Your body is a temple, decorate it" (welcome to the tattoo parlour, www.squidoo.com). Another website has the following to say about tattoos:

> You'll find them almost anywhere, on almost anyone now-a-days.
> In Hollywood and New York, but also St. Joseph, Missouri and
> Lexington, Kentucky. Tattoos show up in churches on ministers and
> hidden behind the suits of Wall Street professionals. We have taken
> tattoo into another realm, one shared by all humanity, rich and poor,
> ordinary and famous. (Celebrity tattoos and tattoo designs,
> www.tattoojohnny.com)

Indeed, tattooing has become so popular that it is estimated that between ten and thirteen percent of adolescents (Braithwaite, Robillard, Woodring, Stephens & Arriola, 2001) and twenty-five percent of the general population have tattoos (Huxley & Grogan, 2005)[1], and in 1996 the tattoo industry was listed as one of the top six

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1 The figures given refer to an American sample.

growth business in the United States (Vail, 1999). Benjamins et al. (2006) report that many of their sample of high school students wanted tattoos. According to DeMello (1995) in the past few decades "tattooing has moved from being a symbol of the outcast to that of the rock star, model, and postmodern youth, and with this shift in public perception has come a shift in meaning as well, as tattoo moves from stigma to status" (p. 49).

The increasing popularity of tattooing has lead to various academic disciplines expressing an interest in the phenomenon. In the following sections, numerous understandings around tattooing are explored. The literature ranges in scope, focus and orientation, but what is consistent is an agreement that tattooing is become ever more popular, and that this popularity compels interest and debate. Prichard (2001), in his article on the shifting meanings of Maori tattooing, states it well when he speaks of the broad range of "identifications" (p. 27) that have become attached to contemporary tattooing. The popularity of tattooing means that having a tattoo no longer necessary signals affiliation to certain subcultures, and that new readings of tattooing have emerged.

Negative readings of tattoos

There is a large body of literature linking tattooing to negative and maladaptive behaviours. Riley and Cahill (2005) insist that within much of psychology, the question around body art has become: "What particular pathologies do these people have?" (p. 263). The implicit assumption is that having a tattoo is linked to pathology, and this pathologizing view of tattooing has a long history in academic literature.

In a book published in 1911 Cesare Lombroso explicitly linked tattooing to degenerate behaviour (Kosut, 2006). Lombroso presented his findings, based on a study of over 7000 tattooed people over a period of 13 years, and concluded that tattooed people were instinctively criminal (Braunberger, 2000). In 1933 Parry postulated that tattooing was linked to sexual deviance and dysfunction, especially homosexuality (Kosut, 2006). In 1968 Post reduced the motivations for being tattooed

into three deviant sexual categories: exhibitionist, masochistic and sex-symbolism (Kosut, 2006). Post's study went on to conclude that being tattooed was correlated to having a personality disorder (1968 cited in Putnins, 2002). These negative appraisals of tattooing continue into more recent studies. The following serve as examples.

An article in the Archives of Women's Mental Health links childhood sexual abuse, psychopathology and being tattooed in women (Romans, Martin, Morris & Harrison, 1998). The results section asserts that women who are tattooed are more likely to report childhood sexual abuse, drink more, and have more psychiatric symptoms and borderline personality traits than are women without tattoos.

A letter to the National Review by a psychiatrist and physician (Dalrymple, 2002) contains many examples of common prejudices against tattooed people. The letter is entitled "Marks of Shame" and contains many derogatory statements about tattooed people. These include the idea that tattooed people do not think about the future at all and the statement that "while it is not true that all tattooed people are criminals, it is almost true that all criminals are tattooed" (Dalrymple, 2002, p. 29). In addition, the letter concludes that any woman who ignores the presence of tattoos on the men she chooses to date is likely to find herself severely beaten and tortured.

Disordered eating, gateway drug use, hard drug use, sexual activities, suicide and violence were associated with tattoos and body piercings in a sample of adolescents (Carroll, Riffenburgh, Roberts & Mrhye, 2002). Another study by one of these authors also linked having a tattoo to high-risk behaviours amongst adolescents (Roberts & Ryan, 2002). Armstrong, Roberts, Owen and Koch (2004) go so far as to list tattooing as one of the independent variables indicative of risk behaviour, along with sexual promiscuity and alcohol consumption, in their study on body piercing. An article by Brooks, Woods, Knight and Shrier (2003) links having a body modification to alcohol and drug abuse amongst adolescents. Although they do attempt to emphasise that the presence of body modification does not necessarily make someone a substance user/abuser, closing comments that explicitly link body modification to substance use, and suggest that all adolescents with body modifications be screened for substance use lean towards a tendency to view body modification as pathological.

Other authors also make use of the category of tattoos within their studies. Many of these articles, while not explicitly labelling tattoos as negative, implicitly do so by researching links between tattoos and behaviours that would be assumed to be

negative. For example, Huxley & Grogan's (2005) article looked at whether those individuals who engaged in healthy behaviours and attached high value to health were less likely to have tattoos and piercings. The assumption of this research question is that tattoos are dirty and unhealthy. The study found no significant relationship, but the negative association remains. This is obvious in statements such as the following comment about motivations for getting tattooed/pierced: "[h]ealth risks were sidelined relative to the desire to be seen as 'cool' and fashionable and wanting to express individuality" (Huxley & Grogan, 2005, p. 839). The study ultimately concluded that people who opt for tattoos did not consider health problems, and were unaware of the potential serious dangers involved in the procedures. In other words, people with tattoos are just plain irresponsible about their own health.

A similar approach is found in an article by Nathanson, Paulus and Williams (2006) that looks at the relationship between personality factors and cultural deviance markers (which include tattooing). Although the article concludes with the comment that the authors hope that the article encourages readers to avoid reacting stereotypically to deviance markers, and instead develop a curiosity about the meaning of the markers for the marked individuals, the majority of the article does not reflect this sentiment. Indeed, reference is made to permanent marking of the body as being indicative of a maladaptive identity, and the personality factors which were hypothesized to be related to deviance markers (and therefore the factors researched) were overwhelmingly negative: neuroticism, low conscientiousness, low self-esteem[2], narcissism, Machiavelliaism, subclinical psychopathy. Only two positive characteristics were researched: openness to experience and extraversion. The study does go on to conclude that not all of these factors are associated with deviance behaviours (only open to experience, low self-esteem and subclinical psychopathy are correlated), and that cultural deviance markers are only spuriously connected to misconduct.

The association of tattooing with other negative behaviours continues in much of the literature. The article by Braitwaite et al. (2001) lists, from a brief review of literature, many socially negative traits associated with tattooing, such as low self-

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2 This despite acknowledging the presence of two previous research projects that had failed to find correlations between low self-esteem and body modification.

esteem, delinquency, participation in satanic rituals, drug abuse, smoking, sexual promiscuity, being arrested, shoplifting and alcohol abuse. Braitwaite et al.'s (2001) study itself found that having a tattoo was correlated to alcohol, anti-depressant and sedative use. Putnins (2002) linked having a tattoo to aggressive behaviour amongst youth offenders. While I am not suggesting that these studies were somehow flawed or falsified, the way in which they are presented suggests that tattooing is the root of all evil, and that the very presence of a tattoo is automatically indicative of all the above traits. This does not sound very different to Lombroso's conclusions in 1911. Indeed, Putnins (2002) cites Lombroso's work approvingly in his literature review. An example of this negative bias towards tattoos is found in Putnins' (2002) article, which suggests that young offenders be encouraged to engage in tattoo removal, despite the finding of the article that there is no relationship between tattoos and recidivism.

Another manner in which tattoos are implicitly described negatively is by the listing of health risks associated with tattooing, without any mention being made of the prevalence of such risks (for example, Huxley & Grogan, 2005). (This does not mean that tattooing does not carry health risks (Weilandt, Stover, Eckert & Grigoryan, 2007)). Tattooing is actually associated with surprising low rates of medical complications. Brooks et al. (2003) cite a study by Mayers, Judelson, Moriaty and Rundell (2002) that found that zero percent of the undergraduate students sampled had experienced health problems as a result of getting a tattoo. An allergic reaction to red dye was considered rare enough to publish as a case study in a medical journal (Tsuruta, Sowa, Higashi, Kobayashi & Ishii, 2004).

Statements framed as facts also serve to position tattooing as a dangerous and thoughtless behaviour. For example, Braithwaite et al (2001, p. 15) suggest that "adolescents who wish to have tattoos … will find a way to obtain them … [therefore] tattooing …[is] a subject in need of address by public health professionals who can help … educate youths about the risks associated with these procedures". The irresponsible and impulsive youth is contrasted with the knowledgeable and responsible health professional, and the foolhardiness of the youth is implicit and obvious.

Studies that acknowledge some of the more positive connotations of tattooing do exist (see next section). Some studies do acknowledge these traits, such as expressing personal freedom, but continue to focus on negative correlations of tattooing, such as its relation to body dysmorphia and self-destructive desires (Hicinbothem et al., 2006). One study linked tattoo to the existence of prior suicidality (Hicinbothem et al., 2006), though the linkage was largely explained through the association of depression and suicide. The article concludes that "body modification, including piercings, tattoos, scarification and surgical procedures, may be markers for depression and suicidality" (Hicinbothem et al., 2006, p. 362).

These are only a few examples of the negative associations of tattooing in the literature. Atkinson summarizes the argument of this body of literature as follows:

> to voluntarily inflict pain on one's body and mar the skin with everlasting symbols of impurity is described as overtly antisocial (see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Loimer and Werner, 1992). Such interpretations ring with Judeo-Christian understandings of the body as a sacred 'home' and legitimate Western-scientific theories about tattoo enthusiasts prevalent since the turn of the 19th century (2004, p. 127).

Thus, tattoos are seen as being "markers of mayhem", and indicative of the individual in possession of the tattoo as living an antisocial lifestyle (Brooks et al., 2003 cited in Nathanson et al., 2006, p. 785). There is, however, also a body of literature in opposition to this, which speaks of tattooing in a more positive manner. Some of the positive connotations of tattooing, as explored by the literature, are discussed below.

Positive readings of tattoos

Atkinson (2004) argues that far from being a pathological example of body damage, tattooing can be interpreted as a "pro-social and affectively regulated act of communication" (p. 135). His argument is that labelling tattooing as deviant is to practice a form of sociological myopia. Tattooing is rarely examined as a normative practice because studies assume that both the act and the actor are pathological. Atkinson (2004) shows how the body project of tattooing can be viewed as symbolizing conformity to prevailing cultural norms about the body, as well as

17

maintaining affective control. In relation to the body project, he further argues that tattooing can be seen as a practice that is consistent with established cultural norms around improving, beautifying and personalizing the body (Dutton, 1995 cited in Atkinson, 2004). In this way, it is possible to link tattooing with practices such as cosmetic surgery and exercise, which are also aimed at making the body appear more physically attractive. Related to this is a desire to individualize the body and to be recognized for individuality. This is again something that can be seen as linking with standard cultural ideas around the importance of individuality.

In addition, Atkinson identifies how tattooing can be seen as a way of controlling and managing emotions. Thus, some tattoos are connected to sexuality, others to loss of a loved one and grief, and yet others to a sense of self-empowerment (Atkinson, 2004). Thus, tattooing can be seen as a way of expressing emotions in a controlled fashion, an ability that is highly prized in Western society. Anderson and Sansone (2003) offer a case study of an individual who made use of tattoos as a way to prevent himself from self-harming, thus using tattooing as a way of recovering from depressed states.

An article in Sociological Spectrum entitled "College Students, Tattooing, and the Health Belief Model: Extending Social Psychological Perspectives on Youth Culture and Deviance" (Koch, Roberts & Cannon, 2005) looked at a broad range of factors associated with the decision to get a tattoo. Although they do not ultimately see tattooing as an entirely positive behaviour, they were willing to concede that: "motivations behind tattooing may be more complex than we once thought" (p.96) and are not solely related to deviant behaviour.

In a very different article, Riley and Cahill (2005) argue for body art (especially piercing and tattooing) as being a very powerful and meaningful representation of a valued subjectivity in a group of young women. Through analysis of conversations they identify how a counter discourse to the one of pathology identified with body art has sprung up, as a discourse around a rebellious and celebrated personality (Riley & Cahill, 2005). Their research found that "participants drew on the notion of an authentic self to argue that body art was an expression of an intrinsic self-identity, which represented their authentic, unique, and bounded self" (Riley & Cahill, 2005, p.

263). This was found to generate a counter discourse itself, which decried the increasing popularity of body art as being inauthentic, and being done simply for the sake of fashion, without an understanding of the deeply mysterious and magic nature of body art (Riley & Cahill, 2005). Thus, the participants in the study differentiated between those who were authentic in their use of body art, and those who were merely consumers of body art (Riley & Cahill, 2005).

Irwin (2003) bases her ideas about tattooing around her intimate experiences with an elite grouping within the tattooing world - tattoo artists, and collectors of fine tattoos. Through her marriage to a tattoo artist and collector, she has been able to observe this group of tattooed people in a very personal and close-up manner. She concludes that while it is possible to view people with tattoos as negative deviants, there is also an aspect of positive deviance to tattooing (Irwin, 2005). She identifies ways in which elite tattooists can be seen as positive deviants. They can be seen as high culture icons, because of their connections with the art world (Irwin, 2003). This is especially true as many of the elite tattooists are actually trained in the fine arts (Irwin, 2003). In this way it is possible to identify them with the highest echelons of 'civilised society', through the introduction of norms, structures and values associated with fine art into the world of tattooing. She also identifies how these elite groupings of tattooists and tattoo collectors can come to be viewed as popular celebrities as they receive praise and positive evaluation from others.

Reading negative and positive readings of tattoos

How does one make sense of this multiplicity of voices around tattooing? It is important to note that each of these articles speaks from within a specific context, and a specific way of viewing the world. Thus, the conclusions made by these articles are not value neutral but instead are embedded within the particular discourses that inform the authors of the texts. This is not to say that some of the conclusions are false or incorrect while others are true or correct. Saying that a statement is embedded in discourse does not imply that the statement is incorrect or bad. All statements, all ways of speaking, are embedded in different discourses, different ways of speaking about the world. Any specific way of seeing or speaking will highlight certain aspects, but will also obscure others. Therefore, each of the texts presented in the preceding sections is embedded within a way of viewing the world, and the conclusions that the text draws are therefore also part of the worldview – they inform it and are informed by it.

By way of example, most people would have no problem with the statement that Lombroso's 1911 conclusions about tattooed people are informed by the time period in which they were published, that is the context of pre-war Europe. That society, which considered itself to be immanently civilized, and therefore qualified to pass judgement on, practices which did not meet the standards of civilization. In much the same way, each of the articles reviewed can be situated against the backdrop of the era in which it is published.

What are the contexts that inform the negative and positive readings of tattoos presented? And what does the use of these specific modes of speaking allow each article to highlight and, in the process of highlighting, to obscure?

An interesting context that can be mentioned by way of example is that of the research methodology used. Many of the negative readings (for example, Armstrong et al., 2004; Braitwaite et al., 2001; Carroll et. al., 2002; Nathanson et al., 2006) made use of quantitative research methods. Such methods focus more on evaluating shared characteristics of groups than on looking at individualistic explanations and meanings.

These methods are also more targeted at producing a specific type of knowledge: conclusions that are clear answers to specifically posited research questions and which are also falsifiable.

In contrast, many of the articles which read tattooing as positive (for example Atkinson, 2004, Irwin, 2003; Riley & Cahill, 2005) make use of more qualitative methodology that aims to access individual meanings and motivations rather than looking at global trends. It is therefore possible that the context of the research methodology led each article to ask different questions about tattooing, and in this way get different answers about how tattoos should be read.

What is important to remember, in the context of this chapter, is therefore that these readings of tattooing are not neutral and value-free, but are closely tied up with the context in which they were produced. The same is true of the section presented below, which focuses on theories around tattooing, which are in themselves ways of reading tattoos. Each of these theories serves both to highlight certain aspects of tattooing, while obscuring other aspects.

Theorising tattooing

The popularity of tattooing can also bring into focus cultural issues around belonging and meaning, as elucidated in articles by Stephen Pritchard (2000, 2001). Examining the popularity of Maori tattooing, and what that means for concepts such as property and ownership, Pritchard (2001) theorises the tattoo as that which marks the edges of culture, or the division between body and culture. He argues that whether it is "read as … a sign of affiliation within a social order, or pathologized as an 'infantile', 'self-destructive' or 'oppositional' manifestation of the interface between the individual and society, the 'tattoo' is taken … as a key to insights into identification and socialization" (Pritchard, 2001, p. 29). The tattooed body, when viewed by both the self and the other, tells something about the individual, and about the society. How these messages are read differs, but the tattooed body serves as text. The tattoo "marks the body; it inscribes, constructs and invests it within a variety of psychical, cultural and political fields" (Pritchard, 2001, p. 29). A final quote from Pritchard (2001, p. 30) elucidates the ramifications of this statement:

The tattoo gives us a metaphor for the problematic relationship between the sensible and the intelligible: not merely a line or inscription which ties together and individuates subject and culture, not a marking or act that can be *known* in a manner that is not already subjected or reduced to some general economy, the tattoo might be thought of as a marking which precedes and exceeds the individual act, event, 'thing' or idiom insofar as it is meaningful, while not being reducible to a generalizable system of relations or terms insofar as it is a specific mark which is irreducibly singular" (italics in original).

The term introjection is perhaps a way in which to describe the process of tattooing. Tattooing can be viewed as a site of introjection, in that introjection is a way of mediating between the cultural exterior and the psychic interior (Braunberger, 2000).

Mary Kosut (2006) in an article entitled "Mad artists and tattooed perverts: deviant discourse and the social construction of cultural categories" uses the example of asylum art to illustrate how definitions of deviancy fluctuate. She argues that cultural boundaries are ever shifting, and that the meaning of tattooing has shifted. Tattooing has lost its link to deviance and tattoos are now being used by major clothing designers, and are featured in art galleries and museums (Kosut, 2006). Though definitions of tattooing as deviant persist, she goes on to argue that it is the linkage to art culture which has given the tattoo increased legitimacy, as it has become linked to the powerful institution of art. Recent scholarship about tattooing (as presented in this literature review) has granted some academic legitimacy to tattooing, and tattoos have come to have both aesthetic and cultural legitimacy through being exhibited in institutions within the art world. Through the use of art metaphors (skin-as-canvas, tattoo studio instead of tattoo shop, tattoo artist instead of tattooer), as well as the entrance of academic artists into the field, tattoos have gained access to the power of institutions. This does not mean that tattoo art is universally accepted within the fine art world, but it does indicate that the aesthetic-cultural value of tattoos is being redefined within institutionalised frameworks and discourses (Kosut, 2006).

This focus of tattooing as art serves to position tattooing within a new discourse, and attempts to 'liberate' it from its previous connotations (DeMello, 1995) such as the linkages with sailors and deviants described earlier in this chapter. However, discourses obscure as well as highlight, and the discourse of tattoo as art necessarily obscures the ongoing importance of tattooing for certain subcultures, such as bikers. In order for the tattoo to become a legitimate part of middle-class culture it needs to make sense within that culture. DeMello (1995) suggests that the justifications used to legitimise the rising popularity of tattooing amongst the middle-class are laden with middle-class ideals and morality. The language that is used by this movement is that of spirituality, self-help and personal empowerment. It is therefore important within this "new" group of tattooed people that they are distinguished from old (primitive) notions of tattoos and tattooing. What it tries to obscure are the more "unsavoury" components of the tattoo community: "Are tattoos art? 'Fuck, no,' you say, 'tattoos are bitchin!' That's a good response. It shows you ain't a queer art critic" (Solari, 1992 cited in DeMello, 1995, p. 39).

DeMello (1995) goes on to look in-depth at the ways in which popular representations of tattoos focus on certain privileged meanings and groups, and at the same time obscure and silence other, less privileged, members within the tattoo community. One of the aspects she highlights is that the common tendency of articles about tattooing (such as this chapter) to begin by focusing on the seedy history of tattooing, encouraging the assumption that that is in the past, and that current tattooing no longer has connections with its more suspect beginnings. The understanding is that tattooing, and people who wear tattoos, are now different from those origins. This

discourse, as mentioned before, gives voice to this new generation of people with tattoos, while at the same time rendering other tattoos invisible.

The ideas that are purported to motivate this new generation of tattooists are thoughts around personal aesthetics, individuality, spirituality and personal growth. The personal growth narrative in particular borrows much of its language from the popular self-help movement (DeMello, 1995). In this narrative, deciding to get a tattoo is a deeply personal decision, and one that is not taken lightly or impulsively. Also, tattooing is often linked to tribal and cultural origins (e.g. Maori or Native American) instead of to sailors, convicts and bikers. Through doing this a mythical past is created, which seeks to reaffirm the spiritual dimension of tattooing and to avoid the cruder aspects of its history.

It is important to note that the reasons for getting tattooed in this new generation's discourse can be understood and respected by other members of the middle-class, even though they may not have tattoos. Therefore, the world of tattooing becomes a safe and understandable place for other middle-class people, even if they do not have tattoos. By combining popular discourse such as self-help, personal growth and individualism with the fashion statement of having a tattoo, tattooing has become both safe and sane within a middle-class world (DeMello, 1995). This blindness and selective attention to tattooing is also represented in academic work, which (when tattooing is viewed as being positive) focuses on middle-class tattooing and ignores other strands of the tattooing community.

DeMello (1995) concludes that it is only within the tattoo community itself that a wider understanding of tattooing exists, and that other subcultures come to be represented, such as bikers. Even within the tattoo community silences remain, and some tattoos remain invisible. For example, convict tattoos are almost never included within popular tattoo magazines.

Bengtsson, Ostberg & Kjeldgaard (2005) comment on an often ignored aspect of tattooing as they focus on the commercial aspect of the tattoo world. The popularity of brands (logos, trademarks, packaged designs – such as Volkswagen, Nike, The Blue Bulls, Mickey mouse) in tattooing points to the impact of the commercial realm

and consumer culture on tattooing – linking it to things other than the spiritual and personal realms that are often used as explanations for tattooing (Bengtsson et al., 2005). "When consumers inscribe brands on their bodies, they do not just buy into the marketing discourse provided by companies. Rather, what is taking place is a personalization of the meaning where the individual frames meanings to fit with life themes and life projects" (Bengtsson et al., 2005, p. 266). Although tattoo "purists" and those who identify themselves as tattoo "artists" oppose the use of such symbols, they willing engage in commercial transactions and tattoo the designs onto bodies.

Consumer culture has also encouraged new definitions of identity as something that can be expressed through that which is bought and owned (Bengtsson et al., 2005). Thus, the idea of expressing identity through the purchase of a bodily mark is something that fits well with consumer culture. As bodies represent the self, body image seeks to be coherent with the self-narrative. Because of this search for coherence the body becomes malleable in that it can be used to manifest and represent identities of the self. Thus, narrating the self includes the body, and as such becomes embodied. (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995 cited in Bengtsson et al., 2005).

Women and tattoos

A substantial proportion (some articles suggest that the majority) of people acquiring tattoos in recent times have been, and are, women (Hawkes, Senn & Thorn, 2004). The number of women acquiring tattoos has doubled since the 1970's (Hawkes et al., 2004). There is much debate within the field about the meaning of this rise in female tattooing, and the meaning of the tattooed female body. In this section, the debates within this subsection of the literature are explored.

The phenomenon of the tattooed female body is not new. Gengenbach (2003) embarks on a study of tattooing amongst women in Mozambique and found that this practice of tattooing, in order to "make themselves beautiful" has deep rooted historical origins, as well as associations with the colonial era, and present day circumstances in Mozambique. These tattoos served to mark a shared female culture that was independent of familial or ethnic identity.

It is possible to see the modification of the body on a continuum with the mutilation of the body evidenced by practices such as self-mutilation, transsexual surgery and cosmetic surgery. This view is put forward by Jeffreys (2000) in an article that looks at tattooing and piercing from a feminist perspective. She claims that the client base of the tattooing (and other body modification) industry within the western world consists largely of self-mutilating, troubled young people. She describes post-modern as "fashionable" (Jeffreys, 2000, p. 409) and providing rationales for tattooing that obscure the mutilating nature of the practice. The article claims that tattooing is practiced by despised social groupings, as a result of (not a resistance to) male dominance. She affirms that these are practices of self-mutilation and are equivalent to other western self-mutilation practices which are passed off as being about fashion, beauty or choice, such as cosmetic surgery, dieting and high-heel shoes. The article dismisses claims of spirituality and meaning in connection with tattooing (such as those put forward by the modern primitive movement of Fakir Musafar) as justifying and ennobling what are actually ethically dubious and dangerous practices. She accuses postmodern writers of ignoring the political consequences of body modification, and rather focusing on the flexibility of the body, and she refers to this as "[t]he intellectualising postmodern determination to avoid recognition of real pain and oppression" (Jeffreys, 2000, p. 432).

However, in contrast to Jeffreys' (2000) article, other research (Claes, Vandereyken & Vertommen, 2005) found that body-modification was linked to self-care behaviour in their sample of mainly female eating disordered patients, and was found to protect some of the patients from self-harm. People with tattoos tend to have more positive feelings towards their bodies than their non-tattooed counterparts (Claes et al., 2005).

Braunberger's (2000) article looks at the phenomenon of the tattooed woman. The title of the article "Revolting bodies" plays on the dual meanings of the word revolt as being both disgusting, but also as being revolutionary. She introduces the concept of monster beauty when speaking of female tattooed flesh. In a culture which largely demands silence from women, and which subjects the female body to the male gaze, tattooing women's bodies marks bodily excesses – "the body has become a site for commentary and resistance" (Braunberger, 2000, p. 2). Unlike other body modification processes, such as cosmetic surgery or dieting, tattooing transgresses cultural norms and expectations for women.

Historically, the tattooed woman's body has almost always been viewed as transgressive, even criminal (Braunberger, 2000). A famous case involves a rape trial in Boston in the 1920's. All charges against the rapist were dropped when the prosecutor discovered that the female rape victim had a tattoo of a butterfly on her leg, as this was felt to be indicative of sexual promiscuity (Braunberger, 2000). This also highlights the way in which tattooing (of women) has been linked to sexual excess (although men have staunchly denied any sexual connotations in the tattooing of men by men). Cesare Lombroso, in a study mentioned earlier in this chapter (Braunberger, 2000) focused specifically on tattooed woman, and found that their criminality manifested chiefly in prostitution. In a 1990 study Steward (cited in Atkinson, 2002) classified North American women with tattoos as being either tramps, dykes or farm wives.

How then, has tattooing become popular among women, and what are the implications of this? Tattooing has always been more accepted amongst working-class women, perhaps because working class women have less luxury to indulge in gender roles, and have historically been expected to carry out more 'masculine' tasks than their upper-class counterparts. Denied access to the conventional forms of beauty such as smooth skin and flawless nails, these women access a different kind of beauty – that of the tattoo (Braunberger, 2000).

Another avenue of appearance for the tattooed women's body was that of freak shows and carnivals. "In the United States the staging of women's bodies in freak shows,

tattoo contests, and beauty pageants all grew up on the same carnival stage" (Braunberger, 2000, p. 8). An interesting aspect of these tattooed women was that the stories of how they acquired their tattoos were also classic adventures – kidnapped and forced to subject to being tattooed – thus reinforcing stereotypes of savage and helpless female victims. In contrast to the stories of victimisation, the life of these carnival freaks actually involved far more freedom than that which was available to their non-tattooed counterparts. The "tattooed woman" could travel, earn money and be independent. Braunberger (2000, p. 12) refers to this as a "reckless kind of freedom" which can be used to horrify others, and which is seductive, scary and strange.

This sense of recklessness and freedom Braunberger (2000) associates with what she calls monster beauty. This sense of freedom is contrasted to the most commonly used symbols in female tattooing – roses, hearts, butterflies – which are overtly feminine, perhaps speaking to the tension between the desire for freedom and the fear of rejection, of being a freak. Braunberger (2000, p. 19) concludes her article with the following statement: "the history of tattooed women as freaks provides a touchstone for many tattooed women in the West. The boundary position of the tattooed freak is a chosen one, a refusal to submit to the cultural inscriptions written on women's bodies".

This is in keeping with the notion that one of the reasons for the popularity of tattooing amongst women is the way in which it radically challenges accepted notions of femininity and the feminine (Atkinson, 2002). The article by Atkinson (2002) goes on to develop a more nuanced account of the female tattoo, looking at personal and private aspects as well as public and political stances, and finding within the field numerous ways in which the notion of the female and femininity is negotiated in relation to tattooing. Atkinson (2002) argues that women's tattoos have many layers related to established, resistant and negotiated ideas around femininity.

Through interviews with forty women with tattoos, Atkinson (2002) concluded that a substantial portion of these women expressed conventional or normalized notions of beauty through their tattoos, rather than framing them as overtly resistive or rebellious to the dominant cultural norm. Many women mentioned considering whether men

would find the tattoos attractive as an important factor in deciding to get a tattoo. Thus, a common motivation was to enhance the body aesthetically and sexually. This is reflected in the choice of overtly feminine designs such as roses and butterflies, and in the placement of tattoos in places where they are easy to conceal (Atkinson, 2002).

This connection of tattooing to femininity is not simplistic, but can take on many complicated forms:

another learned motivation that underscores how tattooing is undertaken in the process of conforming to established femininity centres on the manners by which a tattoo body project can be generically cast as a tool for 'exploring femininity' in a culturally fragmented, postmodern world. Given that emotionality and introspection conform well with established interpretations of femininity, it makes sense that tattooing (if done as an expression of emotionality or self-exploration) can be reconciled in some cases as a feminine practice (Atkinson, 2002, p. 124).

Thus, in both implicit and explicit ways, maintaining culturally established feminine status impacts (for some women) on the acquisition of a tattoo. This is contrasted to the study by Braunberger (2000) mentioned above, which views tattooing as the revolt of the female body.

In agreement with Braunberger (2000), Atkinson (2002) does suggest that for some women the act of tattooing is overtly rebellious. Thirty-eight percent of his sample stated that the wish to challenge accepted notions of the female body impacted on their decision to become tattooed. Thus, tattooing is viewed as a conscious challenge to the gendered order of society, and the permanence of the tattoo makes it attractive because by its permanence it marks the radical challenge to accepted notions of femininity.

Atkinson (2002) also identifies a third strand of tattooing amongst women, that incorporates ideas from both the acceptance and rejection of accepted notions of

femininity. This is a negotiated, pragmatic position which involves the resistance to some gender codes combined with an understanding of the need to conform in some degree to gender codes in order to live comfortably within the established gendered order – a negotiated centre-point between unapologetic resistance and outright conformity. These women view tattooing as a private act of rebellion, one which does not have to be publicly displayed or acknowledged in order to be meaningful. It is a fine line, however, between negotiating tattooing and selling out to accepted notions of what the female body should be.

A study by Hawkes et al. (2004) confirms that women with tattoos are generally viewed negatively by the general public. Men tend to view women with tattoos more negatively than women do. Indeed, judgements about women with tattoos were more negative than judgements towards men with tattoos (Hawkes et al., 2004). However, an interesting finding of the research was that women with tattoos were viewed as being more powerful and less passive than women without tattoos. Although this could be coded as a negative, as power and action are normally associated with masculinity and not femininity, what this suggests is that having a tattoo does contribute to a woman being viewed as less stereotypically feminine.

Motivations for being tattooed

What is missing from the above literature survey is perhaps a more personal approach to viewing tattooing. Instead of theorising broadly about the meaning of tattooing, some authors have focused more intimately, on the motivations of people who become tattooed, and what influences the decision to get a tattoo.

In a single paragraph, Anderson and Sansone (2003) suggest a broad range of possible motivations: establishing personal identity, promoting individuality, externalising important feelings, bolstering a crippled self-esteem, establishing a sense of belonging, expressing antisociality, protecting one from danger, marking alienation from the mainstream, sexual motivations, narcissism, exhibitionism, decoration, initiation into manhood or compensation for physical handicaps. The examination of these ideas forms the remainder of this section of the chapter. This section is,

however, not going to presume to explain why people get tattoos. As Braunberger (2001, p.3) states: "One does not become immanently 'knowable' by virtue of being tattooed. Tattoos can be as inexplicable to the selves who wear them as they are to their viewers". Reading tattoos involves both an understanding of how the wearers encode them, and how they are decoded by those who view them (Atkinson, 2002). Thus, once again, this section constitutes a tentative overview, not a definite conclusion.

Wohlrab, Stahl & Kappeler (2007) undertook an extensive review of the literature in order to determine the most commonly reported motivations for body modifications, especially tattooing and piercing. The authors reviewed over a hundred articles in order to arrive at their conclusions. For tattooing in particular, the study found that it was possible to group stated motivations into ten broad motivational categories.

The first category revolved around art, beauty and fashion. Thirty-eight of the articles surveyed contained this category as a motivation for getting a tattoo. Encompassed within this motivational category are statements about tattoos being art, as well as ideas around tattooing being fashionable and a way in which to embellish the body. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

The second category concerns individuality, and was highlighted by fifty-eight articles about tattooing. Thus, the creation of individuality seems to be one of the most important motivations for tattooing. Tattoos can be viewed as helping to create and maintain self-identity, and a sense of being special and distinct from others. The ability to control appearance is seen as being linked to the ability to control identity. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

Personal narratives form the third motivational category, and were mentioned by fifty-two of the articles. The idea of personal narratives is a fairly broad one, and includes ideas around tattooing as marking deeply personal meanings and journeys. Things such as personal catharsis, expression of personal values and experiences, and tattooing as a rite of passage are found in the literature. In addition, some authors link tattooing to reclaiming the body from abuse. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

The fourth category identified by Wohlrab et al. (2007) is motivations that involve physical endurance (twenty-one articles). Motivations in this category revolve around testing the pain threshold and overcoming personal limits. Thus, the pain involved in body modification (tattooing in particular, in the articles surveyed) is not an unpleasant side effect of the procedure, but the motivation for performing the procedure in the first place. Thus, tattoos can be seen as marks of toughness and courage. In addition, the release of endorphins during the painful stimulation of tattooing can trigger positive emotions, as well as anaesthetizing the pain. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

Group affiliations and commitments to groups remains one of the reasons for getting tattooed, and forms the fifth category. This is according to forty-seven of the articles surveyed. Belonging to certain groups or social circles, or marking a relationship to a loved one or a friend, some people are tattooed in order to mark their place in society. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

Category six involves resistance, and the thirty-eight articles listed in this motivational category highlight the role of tattooing as protest against society. This is particularly common amongst adolescents, who use the process of becoming tattooed as a protest against their parent's generation. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

The seventh category relates to motivations that are connected to spirituality and cultural tradition (fifteen articles). These practices include tattoos related to cultural heritage (such as Maori tattooing) and also body modification practices performed by such groups as the modern primitives. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

The idea that one can become addicted to tattoos was raised by three articles, and forms motivational category number eight. On a physiological level it is possible that this might be due to the endorphins released during tattooing, on a psychological level it may relate to the tattoo collector's need to hold on to memories, values, experiences and spirituality through the marking of the skin. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

Sexual motivations are listed as the ninth motivational category, and supported by seventeen of the surveyed articles about tattooing. Although piercing is more

commonly linked to sexual motivations (especially genital and nipple piercings) the articles report that tattoos also have sexual connotations, sometimes expressing sexual affiliation and sometimes emphasizing the sexuality of the body. (Wohlrab et al., 2007).

The tenth and final motivational category Wohlrab et al (2007) proposes is based on impulsive decisions to get tattoos (two articles) without any other motivation going into the decision making process. This includes people who became tattooed under the influence of alcohol or drugs and cannot remember getting the tattoo.

Claes et al. (2005) suggest that motivations for obtaining a tattoo (or other body modification) can be grouped into three clusters: aesthetic reasons (fashion, art), individual motives (expressing the self, personal meaning) and social motives (showing membership in a group).

Subgroupings of the tattooed

Within the literature, authors identify different subgroupings that value tattoos as part of their group identity. The modern primitive movement is such a grouping. A subsection of the tattooed population identify themselves as modern primitives (Pritchard, 2001). "… the term modern primitive refers to individuals who, in the midst of rapid industrial and technological change and the insecurities of modernity … challenge western philosophy's notions of faith in scientific, rational and profit-driven progress" (Lentini, 1998, p. 38 cited in Pritchard, 2001, p. 38). Tattooing in this context is seen on a continuum with other body modification practices such as flesh hangings, as being about a spiritual connection to oneself.

An elite subgroup, which has been mentioned before in this chapter, is that of the tattoo collectors. Vail (1999) looks at the process of becoming a tattoo collector, which is a physical, psychological and subcultural transformation. To become a collector refers not only to the physical inking of the skin, but also to the wide range of associations and connotations that are attached to being heavily tattooed. It is important to distinguish becoming a tattoo collector, a long process that will eventually situate the collector far outside of social norms, from simply getting a single tattoo, something that does not hold the same social ramifications as the collecting of tattoos. Firstly, therefore, a collector must desire to become a tattoo collector, not just want a tattoo. Secondly, the aspiring collector must learn from collectors how to go about being a collector – how to structure tattoos on the body, to distinguish good art from bad and to plan the project, the new self. Thirdly, the collector must discover a way in which to make the collection of tattoos meaningful for the self. Therefore, becoming a tattoo collector is not a simplistic process of acquiring numerous tattoos, but instead involves the careful conversion of a body and person from being a blank canvas to being a complete suit (Vail, 1999). "To the collector, tattoos are not something one owns … they are a part of him or her" (Vail, 1999, p. 270).

Atkinson (2003) looks at the use of tattooing in a very specific subgroup in Canadian society, that of the life style 'straightedge', which is a philosophy towards life that embraces concepts of self-restraint and clean living. The credo of the 'straightedge' is: "don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck. At least I can fucking think" (Atkinson, 2003, p. 198). Tattooing has become a mainstay of the 'straightedge' lifestyle, as an affectively controlled and rationalized act of resistance (Atkinson, 2003). 'Straightedgers' tend to be middle-class, young, white and heterosexual, and therefore the appropriation by them of tattooing (which is

historically associated with the working class, and with homosexuality) speaks to the shifting meaning of tattooing, and the way in which it is incorporated into many different discourses of identity.

In an article mentioned earlier in this chapter, Nathanson et al. (2006) found three personality traits to be associated with the possession of cultural deviance markers (which included tattooing). Openness to experience was considered to predict the presence of cultural deviance markers because it reflected a high degree of creativity and range of expression. Low self-esteem was also associated with the presence of cultural deviance markers. The authors hypothesized that this relationship might be due to the individual with low self-esteem being accustomed to perceived negative feedback from the environment and therefore accepting the negative feedback which accompanies cultural deviance markers as appropriate for them; alternatively cultural deviance markers may also provide the individual with low self-esteem entrance into a group, and therefore a sense of belonging. Subclinical psychopathy was the third variable that predicted the presence of cultural deviance markers. This could be due to overt messages of antagonism being sent out (i.e. don't mess with me), or it could be due to the identification of such people with antisocial subcultures such as gangs and criminals, who sport tattoos as marks of belonging.

It is important to remember that tattoos also have a long history in the non-Western world, and that motivations and explanations for tattooing within these realms are created around different sets of meanings and understandings. Gengenbach's (2003) study of the motivation for tattooing amongst women in Mozambique highlights the way in which the colonial traditions and beliefs impact on cultural practices, but also how cultural practices are, at some points, independent of colonial forces.

These are just a few examples of the many and varied meanings attached to tattooing within the literature. In general, the idea of tattooing as negative and as linked to pathology seems very prominent within the psychological literature, whereas the more positive views of tattooing are found more commonly in sociological studies. This is not an exhaustive description of tattooing by any means, but rather serves as an introduction to a diverse and broad field of knowledge.

In conclusion: drawing together the strands

What is the lasting impression that we are left with at the end of this section? It is of tattooing as something that is complex and complicated – as something that is about more than just ink. The articles reviewed are full of contradictions: tattoos are portrayed as both positive and negative; tattoos can both empower and disempower; tattoos express individualism but are part of a consumer driven brand-culture society; tattoos are deviant but are also normalized. There is no way to reconcile these divergent strands, nor is it the purpose of the literature review to attempt this reconciliation. Instead, the meaning lies in the confusion, as it points towards the presence of numerous competing versions, or competing discourses. Each discourse highlights a different aspect or meaning, and the point of the literature review is not to discover the truth but to present these many voices in such a way that they can be heard to speak together. In this way, different aspects of tattooing are highlighted by the different voices. The idea of competing definitions and versions of the world is elaborated on in the theoretical section presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3:

Social Constructionism

Introduction

Following on from the far-ranging discussion of tattooing which forms the previous chapter, this chapter turn towards a presentation of the theoretical background of this research: the field of social constructionism. These sections are intended to serve several purposes within the context of this research. Firstly, they provide a brief introduction to and explanation of the field of social constructionism, as well as pointing towards the contradictions and debates that exist within the field. This is necessarily brief because a full engagement with all the debates and confusions around social constructionism would necessitate the writing of a book, not a research report. Therefore, all this section can hope to do is point towards key ideas and concerns, and engaging in in-depth discussion only with those aspects which are particularly salient to this piece of research – that is, those aspects connected to the concept of discourse.

The second goal of the chapter on social constructionism is therefore to introduce ideas around discourse as an important concept within social constructionism and, more specifically, within this piece of mini-dissertation. This presentation of discourse serves as the bedrock on which the extensive discussion of discourse analysis that is presented in the methodology section is based.

Background

The research presented here grounds itself within the body of work that is broadly referred to as social constructionism. However, social constructionism as a body of knowledge is fragmented, drawing from many sources and defining itself in various ways. The purpose of this theoretical section is therefore not to try to pin down, in any simplistic way, the 'true' meaning of the term social constructionism. What is presented instead is a reading of the term that is designed to facilitate usefulness within this particular piece of research. This is in keeping with Stam's (2001) comment that social constructionism means different things to different people, depending on what is needed at a given time. It is because of this that the discussion of discourse has been foregrounded within this chapter, as discourse is a concept that is vital to the discussion of discourse analysis that follows in the next chapter.

What is presented here is a brief overview of some of the historical and cultural roots of social constructionism, in order to contextualize the presentation. The term social constructionism is frequently used in connection with the terms poststructuralism and postmodernism. It is necessary to briefly discuss each of these terms.

Broadly speaking, although the two terms overlap substantially, poststructuralism refers more to a theoretical orientation towards language and knowledge (Agger, 1991). The most well known theorist within this body of work is the French philosopher and linguist Jacques Derrida. Derrida's contribution revolves around ideas of deconstruction, which is challenging common-sense readings and understandings of texts and examining instead the gaps in meanings that are endlessly presented. This builds on to the notion of *differance* – a word meaning both to differ and to defer. Meaning exists only through difference; it is because one word is different to another that we are able to ascribe meaning to words. At the same time meaning is constantly deferred, because it exists only through being different to something else - it is not possible to state definitely what something is, it is only possible to state what it is not (Agger, 1991). Derrida's project is not to produce a new way of reading or understanding, but rather to encourage a critical stance towards that which is assumed or taken for granted.

Postmodernism also focuses on being critical of common sense understandings (Agger, 1991). The term is closely linked to the work of Michael Foucault, and often looks at the existence of different discourses that constitute knowledge in different ways. Power is of especial interest to postmodern scholars. The concept of discourse, a key feature of Foucault's work, will be discussed extensively later in this work. Postmodernism views truth as plural and rejects singular explanations and accounts of events (Agger, 1991).

The terms poststructuralism and postmodernism are often used interchangeable, especially within the field of literary criticism. There is, however, another term that has found a particular home within psychology, but which shares it's critical stance and theoretical orientation with poststructuralism and postmodernism, and this is the term social constructionism. The key figure within the academic literature on social constructionism is Kenneth Gergen, who has written numerous articles on the subject. This does not mean, however, that the definition of social constructionism is uncontested. As Stam (2001) writes social constructionism is neither a movement, a position, a theory, a theoretical orientation or an approach, although it has characteristics of all of these and has been described as each one in turn. In the section below, some of the key ideas that inform the field of social constructionism are presented. This is done through a presentation of the work of Burr (1995) in conjunction with the presentation of an earlier article by Gergen (1985) himself.

Characteristics of social constructionism

Burr (1995) outlines four features that are essential to the social constructionist framework. These features are very simplistic, in that they are presented in an introductory text on the subject. It is for this reason that they are presented here – they offer an overview of the key ideas within the field. In addition, the discussion of each feature is augmented by ideas drawn from Gergen (1985) who presents the same four features in a slightly more complicated manner. The four features identified by both texts are as follows:

Firstly: "A critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge" (Burr, 1995, p. 3). Springing up in opposition to positivist and empiricist models of the world, social constructionists are sceptical of everyday assumptions about how the world works, and the categories into which the world is ordered. Gergen (2001) explains that this means that, within a social constructionist worldview, claims about truth, knowledge, objectivity and insight are based on a specific way of seeing the world and making meaning of it. This includes those claims that are made by constructionists themselves. The way in which we experience the world is therefore not necessarily the way in which the world is understood. Our knowledge is not based on some sort of logical induction or reasoning about the world, but is based on a set of social processes (Gergen, 1985). A particular focus on language is called for, as that is the medium through which we both experience and express our conception of the world around us. "Constructionism asks one to suspend belief that commonly accepted categories or understandings receive their warrant through observation" (Gergen, 1985, p.267).

Secondly: "Historical and cultural specificity" (Burr, 1995, p. 3). This refers to the fact that the categories and concepts that are used are seen as being historically and culturally specific (Willig, 2001). This means that they change over time, as well as being different in different cultures. Thus, things that are seen as common-sense truths are actually specific to a particular place and time. It is possible to view those categories and concepts that are in use at a particular time as social artefacts that are produced through interchanges between people (Gergen, 1985). Our ways of understanding spring not from some natural process, but are rather the result of active construction on the part of social forces. Such categories as childhood, romantic love and even the self have been understood differently at various points in history (Gergen, 1985).

Third: "Knowledge is sustained by social processes" (Burr, 1995, p. 4). Therefore, there is no such thing as objective 'truth' – all truth is constructed through our social processes and interactions (Burr, 1995). Truths are contingent on many factors that are unique to a specific environment, and as such are subject to change. The degree to which something is regarded as truth at a specific time period depends not on its

empirical validity, but on the social processes which are in place to both construct and maintain it (Gergen, 1985).

Fourth: "Knowledge and social action go together" (Burr, 1995, p. 5). Each construction that is made allows for a different type of action – therefore these constructions can both include and exclude. A discourse can allow (empower) certain people (subjects/objects) space to speak and a way to speak, while at the same time it can silence other ways of speaking (Burr, 1995). The very act of describing or explaining world constitutes a social action, in that it has impacts on social processes (Gergen, 1985). The way in which something is understood impacts on the way in which it is used, and therefore the effect that it has on lived experience.

Together these four principles constitute a basic map of the key ideas within the field of social constructionism. It is possible to view social constructionism as way of viewing the world that currently enjoys a great deal of academic legitimacy and support (Stam, 2001).

Discourse

> A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light (Burr, 1995, p.48).

Within social constructionism, there are a number of key concepts. One of these is that of discourse. Discourse refers to a specific way of understanding language (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). It involves an understanding that language is the basis of thought and of selfhood, and that every piece of speech and text has multiple meanings and possibilities. Because of this, discourse leads us to consider that personal identity is temporary (Burr, 1995). Therefore, when interpreting language we can never take anything at face value but need to look at the larger structures in which

it is embedded (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). All words [signifiers] in language do not have fixed meaning, but are embedded in discourse (Burr, 1995).

Foucault related the idea of discourses to that of disciplines (bodies of knowledge) (McHoul & Grace, 1998). Language is seen as being problematic and not merely representational (Taylor, 2001a). At the very broadest level, discourse analysts are therefore suggesting that:

> 1.language is used for a variety of functions and its use has a variety of consequences;
>
> 2. language is both constructed and constructive;
>
> 3. the same phenomenon can be described in a number of different ways;
>
> 4. there will, therefore, be considerable variation in accounts;
>
> 5. there is, as yet, no foolproof way to deal with this variation and to sift accounts which are 'literal' or 'accurate' from those which are theoretical or merely misguided
>
> 6.the constructive and flexible ways in which language is used should themselves become a central topic of study
>
> (Potter & Wetherell, 1996, p. 35).

A more in-depth discussion of the contradictory field of discourse analysis is presented in the next chapter. In the context of this literature review, the factor that I wish to highlight is the constructive nature of discourse. A discourse does not merely represent reality, but actively produces the social entities and relationships that we conceive of as being part of that reality (Fairclough, 1998). In turn, therefore, it positions people in certain social positions. Fairclough (1998) argues that each instance of discourse is a piece of text, but is also a social practice and an example of a specific discourse.

What this means is that all discourses are actively trying to construct their objects in particular ways (Gergen, 2001). Each discourse will bring different things into focus, will raise different issues to be considered, and will have different implications in terms of what should be done. However, each of these discourses claims to be not merely a way of representing, but the 'truth' (Burr, 1995). In addition, each of these

types of knowledge is not a unitary entity but is full of contradictions, differential interpretations and conflicts of interest. These are not coherent and complete, non-contradictory bodies of knowledge (Parker, 1989).

This is a vitally important concept to grasp within the context of this piece of research, and it is worth quoting Burr (1995, p. 50) at some length:

Let us be clear about the status of the things people say and write, from the perspective of a poststructural social constructionism: these things are not a route of access to a person's private world, they are not valid descriptions of things called 'beliefs' or 'opinions', and they cannot be taken to be manifestations of some inner, essential conditions such as temperament, personality or attitude. They are manifestations of discourses, outcrops of representations of events upon the terrain of social life. They have their origin not in the person's private experience, but in the discursive culture those people inhabit. The things that people say or write, then, can be thought of as instances of discourses, as occasions where particular discourses are given the opportunity to construct an event in this way rather than that.

How then, do we determine which discourses are available to us? These vary according to culture and historical period (Burr, 1995). Discourse are not stable, they change over time (Foucault, 1994). Therefore, the discourses which people utilize are specific to their own specific historical period. Discourse needs to assess its way of being in the present and to find its place within that present. At the same time, it needs to be meaningful in order to be able to specify the mode of action through which it will be able to exist within the present (Foucault, 1994). Therefore, what we conceive of as our identities are constructed through the (often very limited) discourses that are available to us (Burr, 1995). This means that in any historical period it is possible to speak, write and think about a social practices and objects in ways that are specific to that period. A discourse it that which both enables and disables writing, speaking and thinking within that specific historical period (McHoul & Grace, 1998).

In particular, it is important to note that the idea of a unitary, integrated self is not seen as a universal Truth, but merely as an extremely powerful discourse within modern society (Sampson, 1989). Within social constructionism therefore, the self is seen as inherently fragmented and contradictory, its existence dependent on the discourses to which it adheres. Indeed, the concept of personhood has been shown to shift according to different cultural and historical factors (Sampson, 1989). Thus, the

self is a process and a paradox (Sampson, 1989). It is "constructed in discourses and then re-experienced within all the texts of everyday life" (Parker, 1989, p. 56).

According to Foucault (cited in McHoul & Grace, 1998) discourses have several components, which are clearly identifiable. These are *objects* (that which is studied, or procedure), *operations* (methods or techniques used to treat the objects), *concepts* (routinely used terms and ideas within the discipline, these may constitute a unique language), *theoretical options* (different assumptions or theories available within a discipline) (McHoul & Grace, 1998).

Drawing largely on the work of Michel Foucault and his understanding of discourse, the aim of this research undertaking is to identify the key discourses at work within the writings of people with tattoos. Thus, it is these writings, as manifestations of discourse, which will form the focus of this research. Within the work of Foucault, the term 'discourse' refers to various way of structuring social practice and knowledge (Fairclough, 1998). When we analyse discourse, we are looking at deconstructing those discourses, in order to uncover the way in which they work (Parker, 1988). It is particularly apt that the research is looking at the body, and the expression of the body through tattooing, as a site of discourse. This is because, according to Foucault (1979 cited in Gengenbach, 2003, p. 106), the body is the site of bio-power. It is directly involved within the political field, it is immediately impacted by power relations: it is marked, trained, tortured, forced to carry out tasks, forced to perform ceremonies and emit signs. Therefore, the body is where systems of power and discourse stop being abstract ideas and develop physical manifestations. It is the site where battles are fought and struggles are acceded (Padva, 2002).

Criticisms of social-constructionism

Before I turn to the conclusion of this chapter it is necessary to point out that social constructionism is not without its critics. In the early years of its existence, social constructionism was accused of nihilism and of being anti-scientific and was not considered acceptable within the academic world (Stam, 2001). However, as was

mentioned before, the field has gradually received more attention and more academic legitimacy. Stam (2001, p. 291) makes use of the following analogy to describe this shift:

> One of the main features of the constructionism 'movement' in recent years has been the sense that it has left the gritty, exciting and perhaps even dangerous downtown streets of academia and has settled comfortably into its suburbs. These suburbs contain many diverse but largely non-threatening neighbours, such that the term 'social constructionism' no longer leads people to draw their blinds or call out the dogs. Earlier outright dismissal has let to some attempts at tolerance, if not outright cohabitation and eventual re-evaluation.

This growing acceptance does not mean, however, that social constructionism is somehow above criticism. It is not possible to provide a complete review of the field in this chapter, as it falls outside of the immediate context of this research. However, some criticisms are discussed, as a way of ensuring that the research does not mistakenly provide a picture of a field that is beyond reproach. Maze (2001) provides a nuanced criticism of the construct of social constructionism. The ideas that are presented in the remainder of this section are taken from his 2001 paper.

Maze (2001) asserts that because social constructionism claims that all truths are relatively, this means that social constructionism cannot claim to be true itself. This is an old argument against social constructionism – that it is relativistic and nihilistic. Social constructionist authors go to great lengths to ensure that it is clear that they do not claim to be speaking the truth, thus refuting this argument. A quote from Gergen (1997 cited in Maze, 2001, p. 400) serves to illustrate this: "While constructionist critiques may often appear nihilistic, there is no means by which they themselves can be grounded or legitimated. They fall victim to their own modes of critique". However, Maze (2001) goes on to develop his critique of social constructionism by pointing out that one of the basic principles of the field is that language is performative. This means that language is not just a passive entity used for describing reality, but actively constructs reality through its use. Maze (2001) argues that writing about social constructionism is equivalent to performing a specific act or

presenting a specific world view, and that therefore the very act of theorizing social constructionism serves as a truth claim in itself.

Maze (2001) further criticizes the field of social constructionism by arguing that the work of Derrida and other founders of the deconstructionist movement is based on a basic misunderstanding of the work of the structuralist linguist Saussure. At the most basic level, Maze (2001) claims that Derrida misunderstands Saussure's concept of "full presence" and takes it to mean the existence of indubitable fact, without any possibility of error. It is this idea of scientism and realism as involving the presence of indubitable fact that social constructionism criticizes. However, according to Maze (2001) this claim to indubitable fact was never made by the fields of scientism and realism, and therefore the whole field of social constructionism is based on a flawed premise.

Conclusion

This brief discussion of social constructionism has sought to highlight a few key ideas within the field, without being able to present a full exposition of the intricacies of the field. The historical background was presented in terms of poststructuralism and postmodernism. Following this, some basic principles of social constructionism were introduced before the in-depth presentation of the very important concept of discourse. Finally, acknowledgement was given to some of the criticisms that have been levelled against social constructionism.

Chapter 4:

Methodology

Learning how to produce good-quality work … becomes a matter of honing practical research skills in the service of creativity, partly through engagement with methodological debate, partly through witnessing the work of more skilled practitioners … above all, good-quality work results from doing a research project, learning from the things that did and did not work, and then doing another, better one, that more fully integrates the creativity and craft skills of the researcher, and so on until a fully confident research style is developed (Seale, 2004, p. 410).

Introduction

In a qualitative study such as this, a description of the methodology necessarily involves more than merely a recitation of procedures undertaken, but rather takes the form of an extension of the literature review in some ways. As there is no set way of doing discourse analysis, the methodology chapter cannot only describe, in some factual manner, what a discourse analysis is but must also set out to explore the various connotations of the term, and the ways of seeing which are connected to them. As Macleod (2002) points out, this is an important part of the conducting of discourse analysis, otherwise the assumption might be made that discourse analysis is an uncontested methodology, which it is not – as will be made clear in this chapter.

One of the strengths of discourse analysis is that theory and practice are recognised as being inseparable. This inseparability makes the term slippery – as theory is constantly contested and reformulated, so too is practice (Macleod, 2002). Discourse analysis is constantly changing, being reinvented and redefined. It is therefore clear that the way in which I (as the researcher) view and interpret the methodology of discourse analysis impacts on the way in which I conduct the analysis, which in turn impacts on what I view as being meaningful in the analysis. A methodological discussion of discourse analysis is therefore also a construction of discourse analysis in a certain way (Macleod, 2002). The very process of defining what is meant by discourse analysis in this study becomes part of the nature of the research itself.

There is therefore a dual project involved in the writing of the methodological chapter in research, which calls itself discourse analysis. Firstly, there is a call to engage with the breadth of the field, to set out and to present the complexity of the term. However, the danger is that the sheer magnitude of the field could make it unmanageable. As definitions and theories build it can become ever more difficult to maintain a grasp on the material in terms of this specific study, with this specific researcher and this specific piece of research. The second project in this chapter is therefore to trace some sort of thread throughout the theory, to follow a line that traces towards usefulness for this particular study. Broadly put, the question becomes how to maintain the richness of the debated contradictions around discourse analysis, without becoming immobilised by them.

In the sections that follow in this chapter, a negotiation is attempted in reply to the above mentioned tensions. In the beginning, the cacophony of voices around discourse analysis is introduced: contradictory, confusing, complex and convoluted. There is no simple way of understanding them, no ultimate truth – they are presented as what they are: versions of truths, ways of seeing and ways of doing. This section offers no simple procedures and no easy distinctions. In particular, two strands of discourse analysis are discussed; that presented by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and by Parker (1992). The readers might feel themselves drowning in theories, ideas, philosophies – lost in a whirlpool of possibilities.

The voice of the rescuer that follows this confusion is that of this study and this researcher. Having braved the sea of texts, explored the continents of knowledge and travelled beyond the end of the world this researcher made a decision to establish a city at a specific point. The middle parts of this chapter speak about this decision, about the practical way in which certain ideas are drawn from the whirlpool and come to reside together in order to form a group of tools that are useful within the specific context of this research. This is discussed throughout the remainder of the chapter. The texts that form the body of this research are introduced in relation to this, and so are ideas about the possibility of evaluating the quality of a piece of research such as this. Before these specifics can be reached it is, however, necessary that we undertake the first section: a look at the contradictory and confusing world of discourse analysis.

Defining discourse analysis? A cacophony of voices

In the sections that follow, an introduction is attempted to the wide variety of texts and voices that identify themselves with discourse analysis. The term discourse analysis is not the exclusive province of social constructionism, or even of psychology (Potter, 2004) and the social sciences, but derives from many disciplines (Edwards, 2004). It is used in disciplines as diverse as housing theory (Hastings, 2002) and theology (Van Neste, 2002). The term is used by many different disciplines, and means different things to them.

Historically, there seem to be three major influences in the development of discourse analysis: structural linguistics, speech act theory and ethnomethodology (Traynor, 2004). Structural linguistics originated with the Swiss linguist Ferdinand De Saussure (Traynor, 2004) and challenged both the notion that words have meanings that correspond to objects that are outside of language, and that such meanings are assigned and made use of by human subjects in order to communicate ideas. Instead, language itself provides the range of categories and meanings that are available to humans (Traynor, 2004). Speech act theory, which was developed by Austin (1962 cited in Traynor, 2004), focused on the things which language does (language as performative) rather than merely on the truth or falsity of statements. Ethnomethodology refers to a type of research that focuses on how people go about achieving and maintaining membership of particular groups (Traynor, 2004). What all

of these roots have in common is a focus on language itself, not as a passive medium of conveying messages, but as a active shaper of events and meanings. Many disciplines make use of the term discourse analysis, to refer to the close study of language.

The term is used by linguists to describe the close reading of naturally occurring conversations (often referred to as conversation analysis) in order to discover the underlying rules and norms that govern conversation (Sacks et al, 1974, cited in Traynor, 2004). Growing from speech act theory (Austin, 1962 and Searle, 1969 cited in Hallett, Austin, Caress & Luker, 2000) this approach to discourse analysis views language as purposeful and functional and driven by culturally determined social norms (Hallett et al., 2000). For some, discourse analysis involves a way of gaining greater access to the true perspectives of the research subjects (Hallett et al., 2000). For others, the social constructionist backdrop to discourse analysis means that statements about true meanings are deeply problematic, and discourse analysis is about challenging commonsense assumptions (Madill & Doherty, 1994).

What social constructionism brings to discourse analysis is a further focus on language, as well as a focus on the way in which language produces subjects (not the other way around) (Traynor, 2004). Language is used to construct versions of the social world, and therefore it is not neutral and transparent, but is rather constitutive (Burck, 2005). Thus, this approach to discourse is focused on looking at language's place in social practices, and at the role it plays in undermining, making legitimate and defining the factual versions of the world (Edwards, 2004).

Traynor (2004) proposes that there are two distinct, although interconnected, uses of the term discourse analysis. He suggests that the term is used in studies of rhetoric, oral communication and speech pathology; but that it is also used, with a different focus, in the fields of the social sciences. Macleod (2002) characterises the various forms of discourse analysis as follows: "linguistic and conversational analyses, as well as ethnomethodological, Althusserian, Gramscian, social constructionist, psychoanalytic and post-structural variations" (p. 17).

Macleod (2002) writing from within the South African context, mentions four major sources which are frequently cited with regards to discourse analysis: Potter and Wetherell (1987), Parker (1992), Hollway (1989) and Fairclough (1992). Of these four texts Hollway (1989) and is not discussed in this chapter, as the approach is based on Lacanian psychoanalysis (Macleod, 2002), which falls outside of the scope of this study. In addition, the text by Fairclough (1992) relates more to synthesizing theory and method, and as such covers much the same ground as Potter and Wetherell (1987). It is thus with the texts by Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992) that this chapter confines itself, as they represent different approaches to discourse analysis from within a social sciences perspective. These texts are mentioned throughout the remainder of this chapter, and form the basis from which this particular understanding of discourse analysis is conducted. What the methods of analysis share are a focus on language as structuring and constraining meaning, and reflexive and interpretive styles of analysis (Macleod, 2002). They are, however, not synonymous and do have different focal points – as the discussion below concerning Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992) should serve to indicate.

Potter and Wetherell (1987)

Potter and Wetherell in a groundbreaking text in 1987 entitled *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* formulated an approach to discourse which focuses on everyday evaluations, descriptions and versions in both a theoretical and a methodological manner (Edwards, 2004). This approach has a strong grounding in linguistics and conversation analysis, as well as in ethnomethodology, speech act theory, analytical philosophy and semiotics (Macleod, 2002). Madill and Doherty (1994, p. 262) characterise this strand of discourse analysis in the following way:

This form of discourse analysis is interested in the functional and constructive use of language, attending to the variation and inconsistency in people's accounts revealed through this orientation. There is a particular emphasis on the rhetorical structure and negotiation of meaning within local interaction. This is a radically non-cognitive approach in that there is no appeal to 'inner workings', motivation, or intention on the part of the speaker.

This non-cognitive approach is one which has become very popular within social psychology, and which is characterised by many of the basic tenets of social constructionism – such as the focus on social processes not internal motivations. Thus, the focus is on activities and conversational pragmatics, not on individual

motivation. Research is re-focused so that it moves away from the individual towards the collective (Potter & Edwards, 1990).

According to Edwards (2004) the discourses (or versions) that are identified through discourse analyses that make use of this methodology have three major features. The first feature is construction; discourses are viewed as both constructed and constructive. Discourses are made from already existing linguistic resources and they offer or create new versions of the world, and new linguistic resources. The second feature is that discourse is always performative – everyday talk and text are actions such as "evaluating, criticizing, requesting, confessing, claiming, defending, refusing, and so on" (Edwards, 2004, p. 265). The third feature is that discourses are variable, and inconsistent. These three features are mutually implicated, in that they impact on one another in the shape and form of a discourse (Edwards, 2004).

During my search of the literature, I discovered two methods of discourse analysis that identified Potter and Wetherell (1987) and related ideas as the theoretical basis for their particular brand of discourse analysis. The first, used by Johnstone and Frith (2005) was developed through doing a discourse analysis of patients' experience of ECT. Edwards (2004) suggests the second approach in his contribution on discourse analysis in a textbook of qualitative research methods for the social sciences. In the sections that follow, I present these two methods together with comments about the way in which the ideas that constitute them play a roll in the conducting of this specific piece of research.

Johnstone and Frith (2005) in their article entitled "Discourse analysis and the experience of ECT" highlight what they see as four central tenets of discourse analysis, based on extensive reading of different analysts including Potter and Wetherell (1987). The four tenets are as follows.

1.)Discourse should be treated as a topic in its own right, rather than as a route to some social or psychological phenomenon behind the text.

In the context of this research, this seems to emphasise the fact that it is the texts themselves that form the data base (see below) and the aim is not to inquire into the

motivations of the authors of these texts. Therefore, questions about why this specific person decided to make a posting on this website fall outside of the area of interest of this research.

2.) Discourse is constitutive of, not simply descriptive of, social reality. The description of events is never neutral.

Thus, these texts are not a simplistic reflection of what people think about getting a tattoo, but form part of the reality of being tattooed and as such also constitute what it means to have a tattoo. This flows into Johnstone and Firth's (2005) third tenet.

3.) Discourse is a form of social practice …[language is viewed]… as constitutive rather than descriptive.

4.) Discourse is rhetorically organized.

(Johnstone & Firth, 2005, p. 191-2)

This means that a discourse promotes one version of social reality above others, and therefore it is by nature persuasive and tries to undermine competing versions. Therefore, it is not wise to accept statements made by a discourse as truth statements, but rather discourse needs to be interrogated in terms of what it promotes, and what alternatives it denies. It is therefore important that I, as researcher, avoid being drawn into the definitions which are offered by the website, but attempt to remain critical, and ask questions about what is being obscure by these discourses, and what assumptions are being made by them.

The other method that is closely based on the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987) is that proposed by Edwards (2004). He conceptualises these ideas as being analytical principles that guide discursive work, not as sequential steps, although they are presented here in sequential order, in order to make them easier to understand. The following material is taken from Edwards (2004).

1). The texts used should preferably be naturally occurring. Although this is not essential it does highlight the idea that discourse performs social actions. This is one of the great strengths of the study presented here, in that the Internet postings that are

used as data are naturally occurring; they were not generated for the purposes of this research.

2). These texts should be read in a certain way: "Ask not what state of mind the talk/text expresses, nor what state of the world it reflects, but what action is being done by sayings things that way" (Edwards, 2004, p. 267). This is similar to the earlier idea of Johnstone and Frith (2005) that internal motivations are not important to this type of analysis. As mentioned before, this means that this research is not about why people chose to make these postings; it is about what the postings say and what they accomplish by saying that.

3). It is important that the analyst considers the participants' concerns – the categories they use, the concepts they have. Ideally, this would be done through discussion with the participants, but that is not possible in this case as the postings are completely anonymous – not even I as the researcher know who my participants are. Triangulation (as discussed later in this chapter) becomes even more important in the context of this study, as the material is viewed by others it becomes possible to view the texts from many different viewpoints, not just my own. This feeds into the following point.

4). The researcher's concerns, categories and concepts must also be considered. Any information the analyst brings to the data should be evaluated to the extent that it is something that is handled or dealt with by the participants in a certain way. In this instance, my own views about tattoos and tattooing cannot have impacted on the way in which the texts were generated, as they are naturally occurring. It will, however, impact on the way in which I read the texts and the categories I create from them, and this is something which I need to remain aware of throughout the conducting of the discourse analysis, in order to try to be aware of my own impact on the conducting of the research.

5). "Focus on subject-object relations" (Edwards, 2004, p. 267). This involves looking at how descriptions of objects, events and actions in the external world become tied to descriptions of people and their mental states, and vice versa. For this research, the

idea of how the tattoo as an object becomes part of the self, and is used to describe the self, will be an interesting study in subject and object relations.

6). Attention should be given to the current writer/speaker's own reflexivity, and subject-object issues. What grounds do they have for knowing things, or telling things; what is done about the possibility of disbelief, or accusations of bias? This principle relates not to the internal motivations of the speaker, but rather to the way in which speaking this way allows for certain possibility and denies others. In particular, because all of the postings have been written by people with tattoos, it is possible that the postings will carry a bias towards positive discourses around tattooing, and it will be informative to make note of how negative concepts of tattooing are dealt with if they do occur within these postings.

7). Always ask how, not why questions: "What does it do, and how does it do it?" (Edwards, 2004, p. 267). On a very practical level, this means asking: "How does this text construct having a tattoo?" rather than, "Why does this text say this person got a tattoo?"

8.) Analyse rhetorically. This means asking "what is being denied, countered, forestalled etc, in talking that way?" (Edwards, 2004, p.267). As mentioned earlier, this means looking at the bias of these texts, and perhaps also looking at what is not said within these texts (see below).

9). Analyse semiotically. This is important because language is about differences – words have meaning because they have alternatives. Therefore, the word that is selected is important because it hides other options that might have been said. This does not mean that the speaker actually considered these alternatives; instead it refers to looking at the possibilities for difference that exist within language. As these are written texts each word can be closely critiqued, through looking at the other possibilities which were available to the text, but which were not utilized by the discourse.

10.) Analyse sequentially. This involves looking at the statements immediately prior and subsequent to a stretch of discourse or language – this is because discourses do

not occur randomly. The texts are not just random collections of words, like quotations, instead they constitute a sequence of actions that are performed in ways that are sequentially relevant. Importantly, this means looking not only at categories of content but also at each posting as a whole, looking at the way in which it develops narratively rather than just at the categories or ideas which it utilizes.

11). Deviant cases should be noted and sought, in order to further highlight the recurring patterns and to see what they contribute to the discourse.

Parker (1992)

The second approach identified by Macleod (2002) is based largely on the work of Parker (1992). In his 1992 text Parker outlines seven necessary and three extra criteria for identifying discourse. This method of discourse analysis draws heavily on the work of Michael Foucault, especially his notion of power (Macleod, 2002). Foucault's work is not a methodological framework but an approach that predisposes the reader to ask certain questions (Kendall & Wickham, 2004). Some authors view the analysis of power relations as being the central focus of this form of discourse analysis (Crowe, 2000). The interest is not in a specific interaction, but rather with how discourse comes to constitute objects and subjects (Potter, 2004). In this strand of discourse analysis, the possibility of a distinction between discourse and reality is questioned (Traynor, 2004). Traynor, 2004 (p.4) cites Ian Parker's (1992) definition of discourse as follows:

Discourses do not simply describe the social world, they categorise it, they bring phenomena into sight … once an object has been elaborated in a discourse, it is difficult not to refer to it as if it were real.

A widely used and recognized method for conducting discourse analysis is the twenty-step approach proposed by Parker (1992). Parker's steps are viewed not as a foolproof sequential method for conducting discourse analysis, but rather as providing a framework (Parker, 1992). Parker outlines seven necessary criteria for distinguishing discourse, and then also outlines three additional criteria that have to do with power, institutions and ideology. Each criterion has two 'steps'. Parker's twenty steps are useful in the analysis of discourse because they offer not only to identify discourse, but also provide a wealth of information about the identified

discourse. Through using them it becomes possible to describe more than just people in different contexts, or with differing images of the self, but to look at what these contexts and images represent, to describe how they are used and for what purpose, and through so doing to look at what they achieve immediately, interpersonally and socially (Potter & Wetherell, 1996). The twenty steps are as follows:

1) A DISCOURSE IS REALISED IN TEXTS
i) Treating our objects of study as texts which are described, put into words; and
ii) Exploring connotations through some sort of free association, which is best done with other people

This is an important concept, because it sets the framework on which the rest of the discourse analysis is based. Thus, the coding methodology described later in this chapter is a vital part of treating the objects studied as texts. Although coding is a separate activity, it should be informed by both discourse analysis and the deconstructive method (Macleod, 2002).

2) A DISCOURSE IS ABOUT OBJECTS
iii) Asking what objects are referred to, and describing them
iv) Talking about the talk as if it were an object, a discourse

Macleod (2002) characterises the first step in objectification as being simply the naming of something, the simple use of a noun brings an object into reality. Once the object has been constituted in reality, it can be discussed as a reality. In Foucault's work (1972 cited in Macleod, 2002) there are guidelines for how to go about finding objects. First, describe how the object came to emerge – what is the historical background to this noun? Second, describe how this object is delineated by authority – what does it mean, what does it not mean? Who may use this noun? Thirdly, analyses the grids of specifications, that is the way in which the object is subdivided and classified, the systems within which the object is constituted, the ways in which it is "divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified" (Foucault, 1972, p. 42 cited in Macleod, 2002, p. 22).

3) A DISCOURSE CONTAINS SUBJECTS

v)Specifying what types of person are talked about in this discourse, some of which may already have been identified as objects

vi) Speculating about what they can say in the discourse, what you could say if you identified with them (what rights to speak in that way of speaking)

This criterion can be thought of as identifying what types of self are allowed within the discourse (Macleod, 2002). These selves refer both to where people position themselves in the discourse (reflexive positioning), and where people position each other in terms of the discourse (interactive positioning) (Macleod, 2002). Macleod (2002) makes use of Foucault (1972 cited in Macleod, 2002) to expand this criterion to identify other questions concerning the way in which the discourse is used "Who is speaking? Who is 'qualified' to use this sort of language? and … [what] are the institutional sites from which the person speaks [?]" (Macleod, 2002, p. 22).

4) A DISCOURSE IS A COHERENT SYSTEM OF MEANINGS vii) Mapping a picture of the world this discourse presents

viii) Working out how a text using this discourse would deal with objections to the terminology

Macleod (2002) characterises this step as looking at the internal rules that govern what can and cannot be said within this discourse. According to Foucault (1972 cited in Macleod, 2002) these internal rules do not have to be logical or coherent, instead they can overlap and be contradictory, as well as shifting at various times and in various circumstances. Therefore, it is possible for a discourse to change over time, discourses are not set in stone but are variable.

5) A DISCOURSE REFERS TO OTHER DISCOURSES

ix) Setting contrasting ways of speaking, discourses, against each other and looking at the different objects they constitute

x) Identifying points where they overlap, where they constitute what look like the 'same' objects in different ways

This criterion is strongly linked to criterion six, in that both refer to the limits or the boundaries of a discourse (Macleod, 2002). A discourse will always presuppose the

existence of other discourses, contradictions within a discourse raise questions concerning what other discourses are in play (Parker, 1992).

6) A DISCOURSE REFLECTS ON ITS OWN WAY OF SPEAKING

> xi) Referring to other texts to elaborate the discourse as it occurs, perhaps implicitly, and addresses different audiences (in children's books, advertisements, jokes, etc.)
>
> xii) Reflecting on the terms used to describe the discourse, a matter which involves moral/political choices on the part of the analysts

Macleod (2002) suggests that this can be seen when the discourse comments on its own language, by saying things such as 'don't get me wrong' or 'for lack of a better word'. Derrida's (1978 cited in Macleod, 2002) notion of absence and presence is a useful concept in this regard. According to this theory, presence is always marked by absence – a word is always shadowed by other words that might have been used, other things that could have been said. Therefore, it is useful to pay attention to implicit themes, which may be present only in the absence of certain words or ideas (Macleod, 2002).

> 7) A DISCOURSE IS HISTORICALLY LOCATED
>
> xiii) Looking at how and where the discourses emerged
>
> xiv) Describing how they have changed, and told a story, usually about how they refer to things which were always there to be discovered.

This criterion serves as a reminder that discourses are not timeless (see criterion five) but are constituted by discourses that have occurred previously (Macleod, 2002). Discourses do not suddenly appear fully formed out of thin air, like a genie from a lamp; instead they develop gradually and their emergence can be traced and investigated in order to arrive at a more complicated understanding of the discourse. Discourses are historically embedded and have an effect on both current and future discourses (Wodak, 2004). The literature review presented previously provides an overview of the historical background of discourses connected to tattooing.

These then are the seven necessary and sufficient criteria for the identification of discourses. These form, in a sense, the structural aspect of the analysis as they are about identifying and highlighting the existing discourse (Macleod, 2002). The three further criteria - concerning institutions, power and ideology (Parker, 1992) – can be seen to be the deconstructive aspect of the analysis (Macleod, 2002). Thus, in the first part the discourses were highlighted, in the final criteria the discourses are interrogated. Therefore what is investigated is the way in which these discourses are privileged, the way in which they access power and shape ideas. These are the effects of discourse, not just a description of discourse. Discourses, as conventional and institutional ways of speaking, express societal power relations, and these societal power relations are in turn influenced by discourses (Wodak, 2004). It is the purpose of critical theories to not only to describe these discourses, but also to challenge them in some way, through looking at that which they obscure and hide. Deconstruction is not about pointing out that these discourse are 'wrong', 'stupid' or 'weak', it is instead about making explicit what is implicit in the discourses themselves. It is about looking at how what is not written is systematically related to that which is written (Macleod, 2002). Deconstruction is not about what is true or false, it is about opening up spaces and as such it is can never be complete, but remains always temporary and interminable (Macleod, 2002). Such deconstructive work may bring to light competing meanings within texts, and latent and self-declared content are contrasted (Wodak, 2004).

8) DISCOURSES SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS

xv) Identifying institutions which are reinforced when this or that discourse is used

xvi) Identifying institutions that are attacked or subverted when this or that discourse appears

9) DISCOURSE REPRODUCE POWER RELATIONS

xvii) Looking at which categories of person gain and lose from the employment of the discourse

xviii) Looking at who would want to promote and who would want to dissolve the discourse

10) DISCOURSES HAVE IDEOLOGICAL EFFECTS

    xix) Showing how a discourse connects with other discourses which

    sanction oppression

    xx) Showing how the discourses allow dominant groups to tell their

    narratives about the past in order to justify the present, and prevent

    those who use subjugated discourse from making history.

Throughout the analysis, Ian Parker (1992, p.4) suggests that the following ideas be kept in mind: "When discourse analysts read texts, they are continually putting what they read in quotation marks: "Why was *this* said and *not* that? Why *these* words, and where do the connotations of the words fit with different ways of talking about the world? A study of discourse dynamics takes off from this to look at the tensions within discourses and what they reproduce and transform in the world".

Discourse analysis in action

The two strands of work discussed above (Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) have influenced most of what is published under the heading of discourse analysis in the social sciences, and especially within psychology and affiliated disciplines (e.g. sociology). The question addressed in this section is how research that uses discourse analysis looks – what is done with discourse analysis. Edwards (2004) differentiates two types of research in psychology that make use of discourse analysis.

The first he refers to as analysis that develops the notion of "interpretative repertoire" (Edwards, 2004, p. 266). Such analysis focuses on controversial topics that have clear ideological impacts, such as gender (Edwards, 2004). It is topics such as these that Wodak (2004) identifies with critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis looks at relationships of dominance, control and discrimination and the way in which they are manifested in language. The focus is on the way in which social inequality is expressed through language and discourse.

The second type of research he identifies as discursive psychology (Edwards, 2004) that focuses its attention on the close analysis of everyday things, such as conversations and newspaper articles. In discursive psychology "there is a prime

concern with what people know, think, feel, understand, want, intend, and have in mind, as well as their personal dispositions, and so forth" (Edwards, 2004, p. 266). This type of research highlights the way in which the description of an event is bound up with actions, such as blaming and justifying (Hepburn & Potter, 2004).

Discursive psychology highlights three core features of discourse (Potter, 2003 cited in Hepburn & Potter, 2004). Firstly, an action orientation – viewing actions as not being freestanding, but embedded in broad practices. Secondly, that discourse is situated sequentially (is influenced by, and influences what comes before and after), institutionally (institutional identities and tasks are relevant to what takes place) and rhetorically (descriptions resist attempts to counter them). Thirdly, discourse is both constructive and constructed (Hepburn & Potter, 2004). This means that discourse constitutes things such as social relationships, identities of groups and objects of knowledge; but that it is also constructed by the very things it constructs, as they serve to maintain it. As such, discourse contributes both to the maintaining and the transforming of the status quo (Wodak, 2004). Discursive psychology is further characterized by an emphasis on both constructionism and anti-realism (Potter, 2004). Researcher reflexivity (considered in the section of validity and reliability) is also very important in this approach (Potter, 2004).

However, this still leaves the question of what it actually means, and how discourse analysis looks in a very practical, pragmatic manner. In an attempt to pin down discourse analysis, I read through numerous articles published in peer-reviewed journals that listed discourse analysis as their methodology. The topics included discourses used in children's books of HIV/AIDS (Blumenreich & Siegel, 2006), a discourse analysis of the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-IV TR (Crowe, 2000), an analysis of a political debate (Potter & Edwards, 1990) and the analysis of asylum archives (Mills, 2000). The disciplines ranged from nursing (Hallett et al, 2000), to psychology (Johnstone & Frith, 2005), and from psychotherapy (Madill & Doherty, 1994; Crowe & Luty, 2005) to sociology and education (Welch, 2003).

My reading revealed that the literature had been correct, and that there was no standard methodology amongst these pieces of research, all of which identified

themselves as examples of discourse analysis. What each of these articles did have was "a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge" (Burr, 1995, p. 3) which reminded me of Burr's description of social constructionism. In addition, they all included quotes from the researched materials, not just descriptions of this material. They also read closely, in that nothing was taken for granted and each statement was questioned and critiqued. There was no similarity in the type of texts used: children's books, newspaper articles (Potter & Edwards, 1990), interviews (Rodner, 2005), naturally occurring telephone conversations, psychotherapy sessions (Crowe & Luty, 2005), and even published articles (Johnstone & Frith, 2005) were all used as texts of investigation.

All of these articles seemed to identify discourse analysis as being a close reading of text, which highlights aspects of the texts that would normally be taken for granted, or ignored by commonsense understandings of these texts. Thus, this type of research regards language and text as primary research resources (Madill & Doherty, 1994). Language was also viewed as creative, producing new objects and not being simply reflective of the world. In addition, it became apparent that large amounts of text are not necessary in order to do meaningful analysis – small sections were often found to be representative of broader social assumptions and values. A good example is an article by Hepburn and Potter (2004) which analyses the opening sentences of calls to a help centre.

Drawing together the stands, narrowing the field.

This is the point in this chapter at which we pause and draw breath, and consolidate knowledge and information. The discussion in the previous section began with a broad discussion of the concept of discourse analysis, before narrowing slightly to look at two particular theoretical approaches: that of Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Parker (1992), and the contributions which have been made by these theories towards arriving at a methodology of discourse analysis. In the final section, the focus moved from theory to practice, looking at two approaches which have been identified within discourse analysis (critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology) before

ending with a broad survey of the literature which describes itself as discourse analysis, and looking at the commonalities between these articles.

In this section, an attempt is made to draw together all the many and various strands from the previous sections and to try to construct a definition of discourse analysis, and a way of doing discourse analysis that is useful for this text, and this researcher. This is not to say that I have sifted through the above discussion and discovered the Truth. The point of the above sections was to emphasise the complexity, continuity and temporality of discourse analysis – the way in which it is constantly shifting and evolving. It would be hypocritical of me, therefore, to claim to pluck from the rolling mass some sort of stability or truth. Not only would it be hypocritical, but it would also run counter to the ideas espoused by this piece of research about the constructed and provisional nature of truth claims.

Instead, this section points towards more pragmatic considerations, as to how the preceding information can be made useful, can be bent to a specific goal or a specific need. In order to do this, I first made use of a very useful synopsis proposed by Macleod (2002), which she bases on an extensive reading of numerous conceptions of discourse analysis, during the course of research for her doctoral thesis. She identifies three aspects of discourse analysis that are common to most definitions. These are commented on below.

(1). An underlying regularity. This focuses on the idea of a discourse as being something that is coherent. These coherent statements tend to cluster around culturally available understandings as to what constitutes a topic. (2) The constructive aspects of discourse. This looks at discourses as not being descriptions of the social world, but as actively constructing it and determining what form of reality emerges. This relates to Parker (1992)'s idea, mentioned earlier, that discourse allows us to speak about the world as if it were real. Discourses allow us to comment on social identities or selves, social relationships and knowledge and belief systems (Fairclough, 1992 cited in Macleod, 2002). This also encompasses the idea that discourse eliminates and distorts alternatives, and in this way is both constructive and restrictive. (3) Implications in terms of meanings, practice and lived experience. This relates to the impact of discourse. Discourse is not just a theoretical construct, but has

effects in the 'real' world, and these impacts feel real, they are experienced as reality. The last of Parker's (1992) steps, concerning institutions, ideologies and power relations are aimed directly at deconstructing these real world effects.

What these three components of discourse analysis identified by Macleod (2002) offer is a way of structuring understandings of discourse analysis. The table that follows is my own attempt to map the three methods of discourse analysis discussed earlier in this chapter: Parker, (1992); Edwards, (2004); Johnstone and Frith, (2005), in terms of Macleod's (2002) broad components.

Component 1: An underlying regularity	**Component 2:** Constructive aspects of discourse	**Component 3:** Implications in terms of meaning and practice
*Look at the participants' concerns, categories etc (Edwards, 2004). *Look at the researcher's concerns, categories etc (Edwards, 2004). *Note deviant cases (Edwards, 2004). *A discourse is realised in texts (Parker, 1992). *A discourse is a coherent set of meanings (Parker, 1992).	*Discourse is constitutive of, not simply descriptive of, social reality (Johnstone & Frith, 2005). *Discourse is a form of social practice … constitutive rather than descriptive (Johnstone & Frith, 2005). *Texts should be read in a certain way – looking at actions constituted, not thoughts of author (Edwards, 2004) * Look at the participants' concerns, categories, etc (Edwards, 2004). *Look at the researcher's concerns, categories etc (Edwards, 2004). *Focus on subject-object relations, and how the external world becomes tied to internal meanings (Edwards, 2004). *Look at reflexivity – what version is being constructed and what is being denied (Edwards, 2004). *Always ask how, not why questions (Edwards, 2004). *A discourse is about objects (Parker, 1992). *A discourse contains subjects (Parker, 1992).	*Discourse is rhetorically organized (promotes one form of social practice above others) (Johnstone & Frith, 2005). * Analyse rhetorically – what versions are being denied (Edwards, 2004). * Analyse semiotically – what could have been said instead (Edwards, 2004). *Analyse sequentially (Edwards, 2004). *A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking (Parker, 1992). *Discourses support institutions (Parker, 1992) *Discourses reproduce power relations (Parker, 1992). *Discourses have ideological effects (Parker, 1992). *A discourse is historically located *A discourse refers to other discourses

What this table serves to illustrate is the way in which these ideas about discourse overlap, and offer different ways of understanding similar concepts. For example, Potter's (1992) ideas about discourse containing subjects and objects are related to Edward's (2004) emphasis on subject-object relations. It is therefore not a matter of choosing which method is more correct, but of acknowledging the overlaps and the complexities, and drawing from them what is useful in terms of the present study. The table above illustrates to me the overlapping nature of many of the definitions and methodologies, and is something which I have made use of in order to guide my own analysis in the results chapter that follows. Through making use of Macleod's (2002) three guiding components, and looking at the way in which different authors conceptualise the manner in which to go about looking at each component, I feel that I found a way to utilise the complexity of the literature around discourse analysis, without becoming bogged down by it.

It is necessary at this point to acknowledge that my own subjective needs and ideas have played a role in my decision to approach the research in this manner. Feeling confused by the vast array of data, my table provides me a space through which to structure my understanding of the methodology. There is a subjective dimension in any piece of researcher, created by the researcher's own unique contribution to the research (Johnstone & Frith, 2005). At some level, all research relies on decisions made by the researcher in terms of type of data, methodology used, interpretation of results and so on. Burck (2005) explains that the researcher's assumptions and beliefs about both epistemology and ontology shape the form that the research takes, in terms of what the researcher believes can be known, and how they go about discovering it. What I am doing here is making explicit this normally implicit aspect of research, by highlighting my own role in the research process and transparently acknowledging the process through which I arrived at my own particular pragmatic way of doing discourse analysis.

In keeping with this openness around my own motivations for the study, it is apt that I reveal my own investment in the study. I am currently completing my MA in Clinical Psychology degree, and this research forms part of the requirements for the course. Therefore, it is important to my personal goals that this piece of research be undertaken. My theoretical orientation is broadly post-modern which accounts for the

theoretical bent of this research, and my background in literature makes the use of written texts a comfortable medium for me. I have a tattoo, and this makes the topic of particular interest to me.

A pragmatic approach:

In the end, it became necessary for me to take a practical stance towards the decision of what would be most useful to in the context of this piece of research. I originally decided to follow Parker (1992), for a number of reasons. Parker's (1992) is a widely accepted and referenced form of discourse analysis, as will be clear from the references to it which have been made throughout the chapter. In choosing to use this approach I therefore allowed myself to be guided by trends within discourse analysis. The approach allows not only for the identification of discourse, as so many of the other approaches do, but goes further to propose an interrogation of those discourses. Through yielding more data, the study becomes complicated and rich – and ultimately, rich analysis seems to be one of the main goals of discourse analysis.

Although I will make use of Parker's (1992) as my main methodological backdrop, it is important that the rest of the methods, procedures and concerns mentioned in this chapter continue to play a role in the analysis. The table I constructed using Macleod's (2002) principle components serves as an alternative manner in which to interact with Parker's (1992) steps, while remaining aware of other strands of work that reflect on the same ideas in different ways. Therefore, I have made use of this table as a way in which to guide my own thinking and analysis.

This use of several different methods, or ways of defining things also serves another purpose within the context of this research. The concept of triangulation will be fully explained later in this chapter, but at this point it is important to note that the use of more than one research methodology, or keeping in mind different ways of doing discourse analysis, serves as a form of triangulation. Therefore, it helps to ensure that the analysis that is conducted is of a high quality.

Intermission

Up to this point, this chapter has been focused on the idea of discourse analysis itself, without examining any of the other factors that play a roll in methodology: data collection, ethics, reliability and validity, amongst others. The field of discourse analysis is so broad that it threatens to overwhelm all attempts to make it practical and applicable. However, through drawing together many overlapping strands and ideas a pragmatic decision was taken as to the way in which this particular discourse analysis will be conducted. In the sections below, the focus is once again narrowly on this piece of research, in terms of the specific considerations and conditions that make it possible.

To begin, a discussion is entered into around the nature of the texts that serve as the raw data for this research. This is important because it is these texts that are core to understandings of discourse generated in the following chapter. Thus, the remaining sections of this chapter look at clearly delineating the procedure that was followed in order to produce the data presented in the results chapter. As such, the discussion focuses strongly on the nature of the texts used, before moving on to look at the nature of the sample itself. Following this, the procedure undertaken is discussed in terms of the data collection and coding methods used. This discussion should be linked to the presentation of the actual results of the coding, presented in the results chapter. Finally, the ethical implications of this particular study are discussed. The last section of the chapter broadens in scope once again, to look at reliability and validity issues related to qualitative research. These will be discussed in relation to this particular piece of research in the results chapter.

The texts

As described above, the notion of discourse is a complex one, and one that is not necessarily easy to access. The first step, however, in identifying discourses around a topic is to identify texts in which the discourse is manifested. These texts can be a variety of materials. In fact, text should be understood in a much broader way than the normal definition of text as a piece of writing. Fairclough (1995, p. 6 cited in Crowe & Luty, 2005) speaks about texts as having an interpersonal function. Through the way in which texts represent the world and social action, they come to constitute both social subjects and the social relations between these subjects.

 Macleod (2002) further points out that the boundaries around texts are artificial and based on pragmatic considerations, not on actual distinctions. Thus, the number of texts used and the type of text chosen are pragmatic decisions, which do not necessarily mean that the texts represent a specific and complete body of knowledge. In this study in particular the use of these postings as opposed to the websites themselves or actual interviews is a pragmatic decision; as is the number of postings to be used or the order in which they will be reviewed. The pragmatics of selection will be balanced against Fairclough's (1992 cited in Macleod, 2002) suggestion that the texts selected should ensure diversity and avoid homogeneity.

The initial idea for this study was to make use of interviews with people who have tattoos. However, as I delved into the field I realized that the interview was the most common way of presenting theories on tattooing, and as such it might be more useful to try a more unusual method of data collection, in order to access a wide variety of discourses surrounding tattooing. In addition, the interview as a method of data gathering is itself not flawless, but carries with it its own difficulties. The conducting of an interview means that certain ideas are foregrounded, while others are

backgrounded. The researcher's own interests, ideas and opinions play a significant role within the interview, no matter how unstructured the interview may appear. This is not a factor that is necessarily unique to interviews, as mentioned above the researcher always constitutes a vital part of the form that the research takes. However, it does indicate that perhaps alternative forms of research could yield access to alternative ways of thinking, and that therefore it is definitely worthwhile considering different types of data, instead of sticking to the more conventional route of the interview.

As described above, discourses are realized in texts and therefore it is not necessary to use conventional methods of data gathering to access discourse. Instead, the accessing of discourse necessitates the opening of a space in which discourses are manifested – that is, identifying the texts. This is best done with naturally occurring texts, in other words, texts that were not generated with a specific study in mind. In the past, this has lead to the analysis of books, newspaper reports and conversations. The use of naturally occurring texts has several advantages. The following summary is taken from Potter (2002 cited in Hepburn & Potter, 2004, p. 182):

> Virtues of working with naturalistic materials:
> 1. It does not flood the research setting with the researcher's own categories
> 2. It does not put people in the position of disinterested experts on their own and others' practices, thoughts and so on …
> 3. It does not leave the researcher to make a range of more or less problematic inferences from the data collection arena to the topic …
> 4. It opens up a wide variety of novel issues and concerns that are without … prior expectations…
> 5. It is a rich record of people living their lives, pursuing goals, managing institutional tasks, and so on.

The Internet as research context

The Internet provides yet another space to discover naturally occurring texts, and a space in which discourses can be manifested. It has created a new space and a new tool for communication and social relations. The concept we refer to as 'the Internet' is not a single entity, but rather refers to a multitude of experiences and domains (Markham, 2004b). Technically speaking, the Internet is a collective name for a group of domains. These domains include www (the world wide web) and ftp (file transfer protocol), amongst others. In everyday terminology the World Wide Web is often considered to be synonymous with the Internet. This is because the World Wide Web contains websites, and it is these that are most accessible to the public at large.

Markham (2004a; 2004b) looks at the Internet from the perspective of the social sciences, and at the ways in which it can play a role within research in the social sciences. She identifies several different ways of viewing the Internet. The Internet can be experienced as a tool, a place or a way of being (Markham, 2004b), as a medium for communication, a network of computers or as a context of social construction (Markham 2004a). By looking briefly at these ways of experiencing the Internet, a suggestion is given as to the great versatility and scope of Internet research.

When viewed as a tool the Internet becomes an information conduit, conveying data from one place to another. In this way the Internet extends one's reach, complicates existing notions of time and space and expands the senses (Markham, 2004b). A practical example of this is the way in which I was able to access journal articles for this research from my own home, in the middle of the night – something that was not possible before the digital age. As a place, the Internet exists as a separate environment, a new sociocultural milieu (Markham, 2004b). This is very apparent in the way my friends say goodbye to each other in the real world with the phrase: "I'll see you on facebook". The third way in which the Internet can be conceptualised (according to Markham (2004b)) is as a way of being, creating Internet identities that are then destroyed, embellished and modified.

The Internet as a tool of communication brings into being a new way of interacting and of being in the world (Markham, 2004a). Seeing the Internet as a network of computers leads to new ideas about geographic dispersion (distances collapse),

temporal malleability (conversations can be carried on for weeks, with accurate records; archiving is automatic), and multi-modality (visual input, as opposed to auditory input, becomes primary) (Markham, 2004a). Viewing the Internet as a scene of social construction means looking at the complex way in which cultural and technological aspects of the Internet overlap, constructing new possibilities for social life. In terms of social constructionist theory the Internet provides us with social constructions in textual form, as discursive interactions. It is possible to view social construction in action, as an unfolding process and not just a theoretical premise. Websites and website archives provide a place to examine how social realities are displayed and developed over time (Markham, 2004a).

Markham (2004a, 2004b) in her articles on doing Internet research with Internet participants speaks of the Internet as being a new way of doing research, a new space for conducting interviews. However, the possibilities of the Internet as research area go beyond the translation of oral interviews into text based ones. Numerous websites serve as sites of discourses, new places where discourses are played out and expressed. It is possible to construct a new identity with the Internet as it offers anonymity and an environment that is exclusively discursive (Markham, 2004b).

Sample

A search of the Internet revealed a website which contains a lot of information concerning tattoos and tattooing. In particular there is an open invitation to post individual stories and experiences concerning all aspects of tattooing. Currently, there are almost six thousand of these experiences posted on the site, each one an account of having a tattoo or of being tattooed. This is a very large body of texts which is in the public domain, and which therefore served as a database through which to begin to access discourses in use around the experience of being tattooed/having a tattoo/getting a tattoo. It is perhaps easiest to think of these postings as being similar

to the letters page in any popular magazine. It is a place where people can air their views over a particular topic, while remaining completely anonymous.

The anonymity does, however, mean that it is not possible to accurately state the demographics of the particular sample. The one key inclusion criteria in this study is that the individual has a tattoo – this will be virtually guaranteed by making use of a website which allows for anonymous postings about what it feels like to have a tattoo/get a tattoo. Noesk, Banaji and Greenwald (2002) point out that any Internet samples are likely to under represent those who have no access to the Internet, such as the poor and minority groups. Thus, the population being accessed is probably fairly privileged, in that they can afford the Internet. Siah (2005, p.119) cites research done about Internet surveys that states that individuals most likely to fill in a survey tend to be "predominantly white, young, well-educated males with at least a college degree, who live in metropolitan areas, and who belong to the middle to upper socioeconomic status".

The number of people making use of the Internet is enormous. Siah (2005) states a survey that indicates that in December 1999 an estimated 106.1 million Americans made use of the Internet. According to Wikipedia (Global internet usage, www.wikipedia.com) 1,114,274,426 people made use of the Internet, as of March 2007. English is the most commonly used language on the Internet (Global internet usage. www.wikipedia.com).

Whatever the exact figures are in terms of how many people have access to the Internet, what is certain is that this number is large. What this means, in terms of this study, is that of these millions of people who have access to the Internet, six thousand chose to leave a record of their experiences on this particular website. It is these six thousand postings that form the data pool from which this research is be drawn. They are investigated as text using the ideas of discourse analysis described above. Thus, the point of the research was to access the discourses, and not to try to make any statements about the type of individuals who made postings. In keeping with social constructionist theory, people (in the context of this study) are viewed as being "historically and culturally relative, and … constructed within language" (Madill & Doherty, 1994, p. 266).

Data Collection and Coding Procedures

The large number of postings on the website means that some sort of selection was needed in order to keep the data to a manageable size. The easiest and least bias way of doing this was simply to make use of the most recent postings first, moving backwards until a point of saturation was reached. Saturation is defined as the point at which additional items of data were not providing any new information. It was not possible to know before the research had been conducted what the point of saturation would be for this particular piece of research (Hepburn & Potter, 2004).

Due to the sheer mass of the data, a form of coding was undertaken, simply for the sake of coherence. In the first place, it proved useful to make use of a few (approximately 10-15) of the most recent postings and to scan those for themes (a preliminary analysis) that were then used as guidelines for interpreting the rest of the data. I followed the coding strategy suggested by Wetherell and Potter (1998) which involves simply photocopying all the material, and sorting it into rough categories – ambiguous cases being sorted into more than one category. The categories produced by this form of coding tend to be broad and overlapping, rather than narrow and distinct, as they would be in a content analysis (Taylor, 2001a). The reason for using these categories was to sort the material in accordance with recurring patterns and organizations. Macleod (2002) categorises these categories as "thematic chunks" (p. 21) a visual image that highlights the bulky and therefore imprecise nature of these initial categories. The procedure for establishing these categories is largely reliant on the researchers own intuition – I also made use of the material from the literature review to guide me. As Potter (2004) points out "[t]here is nothing sacred about such codings and extracts [can be] freely excluded and included in the course of … research" (p. 216).

Following the initial preliminary analysis, more of the texts were analysed, in accordance with the established categories. Thus, the analysis of these texts served to either confirm the categories or modify them as new data became available. The actual conducting of a discourse analysis is reliant on the following of hunches, and on repeated revision of analysis in order to gain new insights from the texts.

In the beginning of the results chapter, the categories identified by this coding are presented. They are presented in the results chapter as they form a vital backdrop to the discourse analysis conducted, in terms of the way in which the raw material was interrogated.

Ethical concerns

As the proposed research does not involve interaction in the present with individuals, the potential for harmful consequences are nil. The postings on the website are available to the public, and as such are already in the public domain. Those individuals who wish to remain anonymous have already protected themselves through the use of aliases on the website. Furthermore, my aim was not to identify any of the postings as belonging to specific individuals, but rather to look at shared discourses and meanings. In keeping with this aim, the postings were selected for inclusion in the study based on their age, which further reinforced the maintenance of anonymity. The most recent postings were downloaded first – until a point of saturation was reached. This research was also granted ethical approval by the ethics board of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria.

Seale (2004) makes the point that one of the greatest difficulties with qualitative work from within a social constructionist stance is that it can no longer appeal to a great

truth-value as justification for its existence. Without the overwhelming striving for truth, the justification for doing research has to be found elsewhere, in order to ensure that practices of ethical research are upheld. The striving for knowledge, as well as an acknowledgement of the value of careful and committed scholarship and what that entails: rigorous argument, coherent links between claims and evidence, considering all viewpoints before taking a stance, and asking important not trivial questions (Seale, 2004, p. 409-410) are ethical considerations which can be useful in guiding the conducting of social constructionist research.

In the case of this particular piece of research, the conducting of the research is ethically justifiable in a number of different ways. The research is unique, in that it makes use of a body of texts that have not previously been accessed for research purposes. In this way, it contributes something new to the field, and as such is ethically justifiable. In addition, the topic chosen is one of interest to many people. The rising popularity of tattooing has drawn comment (both positive and negative – as can be seen from the literature review) from many spheres. This piece of work adds to that body of knowledge, expanding what is already known.

Reliability and Validity: a qualitative perspective

Reliability and validity are concepts that are important to more traditional quantitative forms of research; there are other criteria that are used to evaluate the quality of qualitative research. Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman (2004) suggest that reliability and validity are concepts which are used to refer to the quality (transparency of the research approach) and the credibility (validation of results and findings), and that standards of quality and credibility can be used to evaluate qualitative work. The research also needs to conform to standards of practice applicable to qualitative research. The following can serve as criteria through which to evaluate the standard of qualitative work (Seale et al., 2004, p. 407):

> *completeness of descriptions (Miles et al., 1994: 279);
> *saturation of categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967);
> *authenticity as certification of the researcher's presence in the
> setting;

*ecological validity (Cicourel, 1996);

*consistency, 'with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Hammersley, 1992: 67);

*credibility as a bridge between a researcher's interpretation and 'reality' (Agar 1986; Hammersley, 1990:57,61; Miles et al., 1994:279);

*plausibility as the consistency between the researcher's findings and theories accepted by the scientific community.

Seale (2004) looks at ways in which quality can be evaluated within qualitative research. The twin concepts of 'inner' and' outer' dialogue are useful in this regard. The outer dialogue is connected to the external aspects of a research problems – its political and practical relevance, its consequences and purpose. Inner dialogue refers to the internal logic of the research, the flow from research questions to literature to methodology to research to results. Ideas from philosophy, methodology and social theory can all help to enhance this inner dialogue. From post-structural philosophy come ideas around relativism and the constructed nature of truth claims. This does not mean that 'anything goes'. Seale (2004, p. 411) states that a "moral commitment" to a wide variety of viewpoints and openness to dialogue lies at the heart of post-structural philosophy. Social theory can be useful by directing the researcher to topics which are not commonly spoken of, and which differ from commonsense understandings. Methodology is useful, but should not be the only influencing factor, Billing (1988 cited in Seale, 2004, p. 412) speaks of the "individual quirkiness" which identifies each scholar's own unique, creative way of doing research. It is important that this creative quality not be lost through a blind adherence to rules and procedures (Seale, 2004). Given this unique quality, Seale (2004) further suggests that we can learn from practice by asking certain questions: "Firstly, we can ask how important or relevant the topic is for some community. Secondly, we can ask whether the claims made are plausible given our existing knowledge of the subject. Thirdly, we can ask whether the credibility of the claims is supported by sufficient evidence" (Seale, 2004, p. 414).

Macleod (2002) highlights the importance of research reflexivity in conducting a discourse analysis. Reflexivity, in this context, refers both to the researcher being able to evaluate their own role in the research, and to a close scrutiny of discourse analysis itself (Macleod, 2002). The first of these concepts, evaluating the role of the researcher, has already been touched upon throughout this chapter. It is not possible to avoid the impact of the researcher on the study, rather it should be acknowledged as a necessary aspect of the study.

However, Macleod (2002) also cautions against an over-emphasis on self-referentiality that can undermine the research itself by suggesting that it is nothing more than a fictitious account constructed by the researcher. The presence of the researcher must be acknowledged, but that does not mean that the research itself should consist of nothing more than the researcher's own opinions, without any reference to other sources of knowledge, such as texts and colleagues, in order to arrive at a more rounded discussion of the topics. Triangulation will be used to try to control for researcher bias (that is, my own views and opinions – my own discourses). Triangulation means that the data is viewed by more than one person, in order for multiple viewpoints to be generated (Taylor, 2001). In this case, the texts will be discussed both with my supervisor and with another student, who is also in the process of conducting a discourse analysis. It is important to note that triangulation does not mean that the subjectivity of the researcher will be eliminated, it is understood that subjectivity forms a part of all research, and can never be fully eliminated. What it does provide is a way to account for the activity of the researcher in the research process (Burck, 2005). Triangulation can also refer to the number of methods used. In the discussion above, the laying out of several methods of discourse analysis serves as a form of triangulation. By looking at many different methods it is possible to view strengths and weaknesses, and add breath and scope to the research (Kosut, 2006).

Macleod's (2002) second statement about reflexivity, that it needs to render discourse analysis accountable, is echoed by Burck's (2005) concern that, in social constructionist discourse analysis, an awareness must be maintained about the representation of the other. It is important that the research be careful monitored in terms of its representation of the other, in order to avoid "replicating unhelpful

processes of 'othering'" (Burck, 2005, p. 242), and thereby merely reinforcing dominant stereotypes. Macleod (2005) points out that there is no necessarily connection between progressive or critical politics and discourse analysis, and that discourse analysis could just be used to reinforce the status quo.

Potter and Hepburn (2004) outline the following four procedures that can form part of the validation of a discourse analysis. The first procedure concerns participants' orientation. What this means is that it must be possible to see within the texts the action orientations that the researcher has identified. The second procedure involves a close analysis of deviant cases. These cases can be used to test the robustness of a generalization. Coherence is the third procedure. This relates to the extent to which the analysis makes sense and works with previous studies in the field. This does not mean that research has to agree with what has gone before, but it does indicate that if the findings of this particular piece of research are radically different to what has gone before there needs to be a good explanation or reason for it. The final procedure involves one of the most fundamental features of discourse research, that of readers' evaluation. The analysis must be presented in such a way that it is possible for the reader to access the materials evaluated, and to be able to follow how the researcher conducted the research and arrived at the conclusions given.

A final comment about evaluating the discourse analysis refers to a statement by Jonathan Potter (2004, p. 204):

[discourse analysis is] hard to describe formally and it takes time to learn. But that does not mean that the claims are necessarily hard to evaluate – if you cannot easily say precisely how someone has learned to ride a bike, you do not have so much difficulty saying whether they have fallen off or not.

Thus, in the final analysis, evaluating discourse analysis is about judging whether it works or not, and whether or not it makes sense.
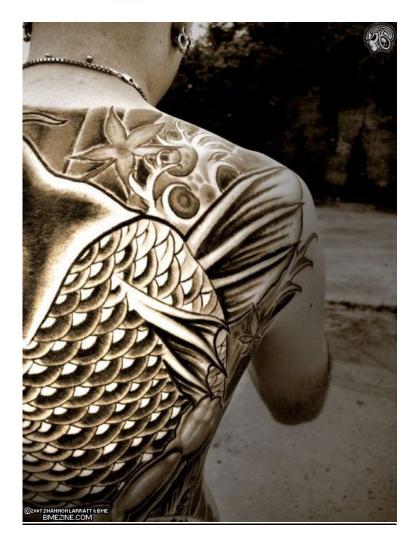
Summary and concluding comments

This chapter has been a long journey, spanning the entire spectrum of topics from theoretical formulations of the concept of discourse analysis, to practical considerations such as methods of coding. The format of this chapter sought to emphasis two twin concepts. In the first place, an attempt was made to provide a

glimpse of the vast and contradictory field of discourse analysis, and to introduce the many different strands of which it is composed. This was done in order to make it clear that the field is not simplistic, and that it is not possible to simply state that one is going to do a discourse analysis. However, concomitant with this sweeping overview comes a need to refine broad themes and ideas down into workable and practical approaches that can be used by this researcher, for this research project. This is the second concept that was carried across in this chapter. The idea that, despite a cacophony of ideas and voices, it is possible to draw from it that which is useful for the moment, in order to avoid immobilisation and promote forward motion. A table was offered which combines the ideas of Macleod (2002), Parker, (1992), Edwards (2004) and Johnstone and Frith (2005) into a set of guidelines that helped me to conduct the discourse analysis.

Once the field of discourse analysis was addressed, the chapter turned its attention to other concerns that form part of the conducting of research. The raw material (the data) was described with particular attention to the role that the Internet plays in the creating of new subjectivities and ways of being. Following this sampling, coding, ethics and considerations as to reliability and validity were discussed.

It is now time to turn once more from the theoretical to the practical. The next chapter contains the produce for which this chapter provided the bedrock. It is an example of discourse analysis in action, and also contains comments about the ethical implications of this study, and concerns about the study's credibility and quality.

Chapter 5:

Results and Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter the results of the discourse analysis conducted are presented and discussed. Building on the material reviewed in the rest of this research report, the chapter makes use of the methodological discussion of the previous chapter, as well as the breadth of information from the literature review to offer a close reading of the specific texts that formed the database for this research. In total fifty-two website postings were used in the analysis. The preliminary analysis and the coding strategies are discussed in the first section of this chapter. Following this, the chapter moves onto an in-depth presentation and discussion of the three discourses that were identified within the data:

- Tattoos as definition/redefinition of self
- Getting a tattoo
- The tattoo artist as expert

In each case textual extracts are included with the discussion, in order to allow the reader to interact with the texts themselves. This also ensures that the my interpretation of the texts is not reified as truth, but rather stands alongside them as a possible reading rather than as a definitive explanation. The closing sections of this chapter move towards a consolidation of data and discourse that is finally presented in the concluding chapter. These sections look at the overlaps between the discourses identified, and the way in which they relate to the literature review; as well as presenting guidelines concerning the manner in which the quality and credibility of this research can be evaluated.

Preliminary analysis

As was described in the methodology chapter, a preliminary analysis was conducted prior to the actual coding for discourse analysis. The analysis consisted of four postings, which were all written during September 2007. These were read several times, and discussed with another student who is in the process of conducting her own discourse analysis. It was agreed that the postings had considerable overlap, and were similar enough to constitute a number of themes, while at the same time being distinct enough to allow for the analysis of differences. The initially agreed upon themes were the importance of pain, the personal relevance of tattoos, and ideas around falling in love with tattoos. All of these categories proved to be useful in the further analysis, however more categories were added as the research progressed.

Reading and coding

In the end, the complete data set used for this research constituted fifty-two postings, all made in August and September 2007. The number of postings analysed was limited to fifty-two because this was the point at which saturation was reached. Approximately the last ten postings I coded did not create any new categories. The fifty two postings where felt to have yielded sufficiently rich and varied data in order to provide a suitable backdrop for the conducting of the discourse analysis.

The first step involved reading through the texts sequentially and narratively. Through so doing I began to get a broad 'feel' for the texts as texts. It became clear that these texts were speaking the same language, as certain words and phrases appeared regularly. These phrases and words included the following: tattoo artist, studio, my tattoo, I love it, the pain, meaningful. The repetition of language points towards the presence of a specific discourse or system of possibilities which makes it possible to speak in that way, and to say those things. Thus, the narrative of the texts pointed me towards a broad feel for certain discourses and specific ways of speaking.

After reading through these postings several times, I reorganised the texts in order to be able to relate to them in a different manner. As such, I sorted the texts into thematic chunks, as was suggested by (Macleod, 2002). My themes were broad and overlapping, and tended to expand as new categories emerged from the data. Once all fifty-two texts had been sorted, the following categories had been identified. These categories are presented in no specific order.

- Appeals to history (I've always wanted a tattoo) – thirteen postings[3]
- Personal relevance – thirty-six postings
- Dissatisfaction with tattoos/bad experiences – thirteen postings
- Tattoos as part of the self – fifteen postings
- Tattoo process, pain – forty-seven postings
- Falling in love with tattoos, being addicted – forty-three postings
- Tattoos in response to self-harm/depression – three postings
- Tattoos as art – thirty-three postings
- Tattoos and price – sixteen postings
- First time tattoo, virgin tattoo – fourteen postings
- Disapproval from others, practical considerations – fifteen postings
- Professionalism, expertise, health and hygiene – thirty-seven postings
- Community of the tattooed – twenty-three postings

These categories were overlapping, and represented a different way of looking at the data, rather than a definitive statement about the texts themselves. By looking at the

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3 Refers to the number of articles (out of 52) that I identified as containing this particular theme.

texts in thematic, rather than narrative sequence, themes became apparent and commonalities emerged which were not necessarily obvious when the texts were presented in their initial format.

The analysis presented below is drawn from both the narrative and the sequential reading of the data, as this dual analysis provided richer material than what any single approach would have provided.

Below, I identify three discourses that became apparent to me in my reading of the data. These discourses were identified in consultation with another student, who is also using discourse analysis as a methodology, and my supervisor. Thus, although the work presented below is my own, and as such necessarily contains my own bias and my own peculiar and individualistic way of presenting my ideas, it has benefited greatly from the contributions of others.

In the section below, I have loosely followed Parker's 20 steps, as well as my own constructed table as a way of presenting the data, in order to allow for some degree of coherence in the manner of presentation of the three discourses. However, this is not to suggest that Parker's steps have been followed in any formulaic manner, and other theories and ideas have been used where relevant, as was discussed in the methodology chapter.

Finally, it is appropriate to mention that within the discussion of the discourses that follows I have attempted to include as many extracts from the actual data as possible. This serves to provide the reader with samples from which to evaluate my statements, and on which to base their own conclusions. The aim is to set out in a very practical and tangible manner the way in which these discourses were identified within the texts, and the manner in which they are manifested within the texts. In keeping with this, the extracts have been reproduced exactly as they were written in the postings. This means that grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors have not been corrected.

Discourse 1: Tattooing as a definition/redefinition of the self

This discourse featured very prominently throughout the texts, and was manifested in several ways throughout the texts. This discourse is about the way in which tattooing/ being tattooed/ having a tattoo serves as part of a construction or a reconstruction of the self. In other words, the way in which tattoo becomes part of the self, and as such becomes part of the way in which the self is described. The tattooed self becomes a new identity, a new definition – one which encompasses the pre-tattoo self, but which is also greater than that self.

On initial examination, this discourse is manifested in several different ways of speaking about tattoos. In my initial sequential coding, these were variously categorised as involving personal relevance, tattoos being part of the self, falling in love with tattoos, tattoos in response to self-harm and depression, first tattoos and tattoos as art.

On my preliminary reading of the texts, one of the first things that struck me was the large number of times a particular phrase was repeated:

> *I loved it instantly*

> *I fall absolutely in love with this*

> *I love it so far*

> *I love it!*
> *Instantly I fell in love with it.*

I fell in love with it

I fell in love with my new tattoo

I've fallen in love

I love it a lot

I love my tattoo

Each of these extracts contains, almost identically, the exact same idea or reference – that of falling in love, or being in love. It was this identification of the concept of love of tattoos that served as the starting point for the uncovering of this discourse. Through discussion with a colleague, we began to brainstorm what is implied through the use of this term. In general, the idea of falling in love most commonly applies to two people who meet each other, fall in love and then form a new entity – the couple, which contains both the people as individuals, but is also a new (reworked) identity. In addition, falling in love frequently implies that one finds what is lacking in the self in another (the idea of opposites attract) or that one loves that which is the same as the self (two peas in a pod). In this case, therefore, it could be said that one is either falling in love with what was not part of the self before and now is, or with an aspect of the self. In either case, one is actually falling in love with the self as you would like it to be – the anticipated self.

The notion that this was an important concept within the discourse was further strengthened through deviant cases. That is, people who had not fallen in love with their tattoos:

… To be honest I was never overjoyed with it or in love with it

… if you don't love it right away you won't ever love it

In both of these extracts, the implicit message is that one should fall in love with your tattoo, and that if this is lacking than the tattoo experience is incomplete or unfulfilled.

Through this train of thought, we began to explore the ways in which the idea of falling in love with your tattoo is related to ideas around the redefinition of the self through tattooing, and the creation of a new entity – the tattooed self.

Parker (1992) states in one of his steps that a discourse is a coherent system of meanings. Therefore, the next logical step for me, after having identified this discourse, was to look at the range of meanings that it contains, and the way in which these are related to each other. In other words, it involves asking what the world which is constructed through this discourse looks like.

Both Parker (1992) and Edwards (2004) propose a search for both subjects and objects that are at work within a particular discourse. In essence, this is asking questions about what is being constructed by this discourse, and how is it being constructed.

I began to realise that certain objects were constructed. At the most basic level, these objects are the tattoos themselves. A description of what the tattoo looks like, and often what the tattoo means to the individual writing the text is expressed.

> *I decided that my first tattoo was going to be the logo of my favorite Black Metal band Emperor, the icon E logo was bold and I thought it would make a nice tattoo, with the possibility of expanding it at a later date if I wish to.*

> *We decided to get the celtic symbol for eternal love and we wanted 'forever love' written across the top and our anniversary date across the bottom.*

> I decided to get a cross with a banner wrapping around it and at the top of the banner it says 'Angel'. Underneath the cross it has the dates that my brother died. I chose this because he was like my best friend and I miss him so much and since I decided to get it on my forearm; I can look down all the time and remember all the fun

times that we had. All the conversations that I will never have with him and this way I always know that he is apart of me now. :D

Two or three inch spider on my outer forearm. I have spider web scars on my legs so this is in keeping with a theme. Also my father has a wicked spider tattoo from when he was in Vietnam.

In each of these extracts, the motivation given for being tattooed varies. What is consistent is the description of the tattoo as an object which is representative of something else, and which as an object contains within it meaning which has been ascribed by the person getting the tattoo. Thus, the tattoo is not conceived of as a neutral symbol, but rather as something that is laden with meaning. The tattoo is therefore constructed in terms of what it will physically look like, but it also constructs meaning through the way it looks. Thus, the physical presence of the tattoo signals the presence of an emotion or thought that is constructed as meaningful to the individual with the tattoo.

Tattoos can also be described as objects of art. Sometimes this goes along with a description of personal relevance, and sometimes they are described as being art for arts sake. That is, they are constructed as being meaningful through their beauty. Whatever the case, tattoos are constructed as something which is desirable.

I know that no one will never understand just how beautiful they are, because only I can really understand exactly why they're so beautiful.

Most of my tattoos mean something, or represent something significant that I went through, accomplished, or dealt with. But within the last 6 months or so, I decided I wanted something just because it was beautiful.

It's a great feeling having a piece of artwork that means something to you on your body for all to see.

I know everyone says tattoos are permanent and should mean something personal, but mine don't. having a tattoo is a very personal thing for me. To

walk around with it is a deep enough meaning for me. I love art. But I can't draw, I can't take a good photo so I walk around tattooed instead.

Tattoos are the objects of this discourse, in that they are the things that are constantly described, spoken about, referred to, and invoked. Tattoos are therefore objects that carry meaning. The meaning that is ascribed to the tattoo is something that, in the context of this discourse, comes from the speaking subject – the person who has the tattoo.

This concept of tattoo as art was one that featured very strongly within the literature review. The use of art as a legitimising discourse involves the movement of tattooing from the fringes of society into the aesthetic mainstream (Kosut, 2006). What the discourse identified here points to is that tattooing as art is only one aspect of the redefinition of the self. Instead of being a major justification for tattooing, as is evidenced by some commentators within the literature review (Kosut, 2006; Wohlrab, Stahl & Kappeler, 2007), tattoo as art emerges as within this discourse as being part of the redefinition of self.

There is also an additional, implicit object constructed within this discourse, and that is the person without the tattoo. Before becoming tattooed the individual is described as object in that they are something which does not speak within this discourse, and which does not have power. Instead, they are passive bodies that wait for the inscription of tattoos to bring them to life.

I always knew that I wanted tattoos, they were always so beautiful on other people, I wanted to make my body beautiful too.

I'd known for a while – since I was about 11 or 12 – that I'd probably start tattooing myself eventually.

These extracts position the body as something that is incomplete without tattoos. In many ways, therefore, the desire to be tattooed constructs an inevitability about the acquiring of the tattoo. In other words, through always desiring a tattoo in order to complete the self the discourse demands that the self be tattooed in order to be

completed. In this way, getting a tattooed is constructed as an inevitable part of the development of the self. Often, specific body parts are mentioned to be tattooed. These areas are passive locations waiting for tattoos rather than constructed as active participants.

I love the idea of knuckle tattoos.

In every one of the above extracts the meaning that the tattoo as object holds is directly ascribed by the person who is tattooed – that is, the person with the tattoo gives meaning to the tattoo within this discourse. Therefore, the main subject within this discourse, the subject who has the right to speak, is the tattooed person. It seems almost as if the untattooed subject is incomplete, as if they are born with blank space just waiting to be filled. It is as if the two halves (the untattooed self and the tattoo) come together to make a whole – and that through joining the untattooed body with the tattoo, a complete self is born.

It is me in ink. It represents everything I am and that I stand for.

I am a work in progress and I like it this way!

I put my feet together and they looked like they belonged together even more than they did because they belonged to my body. They were beautiful.

It's hard to really describe – in all honesty, it felt like a step towards completion.

It felt like I had finally found a piece of myself. It felt so right!

It feels good to have new hands,

It was just my skin, but I loved it more than ever.

I am glad to be finally covering my skin like I always wanted to.

My now finished sleeve is not only a big, visible tattoo that will need to be kept covered at work and asked about over and over again by people who do not know me. It is a statement, a proof and my own achievement of some sort.

This tattooed subject speaks within this discourse of the self. It is the tattooed self that can comment about tattoos, can reflect on the process of attaining tattoos, and that can speak to the untattooed about the process of tattooing.

I hope this tale has been useful, happy tattooing everyone!

People if you want it done just go for it.

If you are thinking about getting a tattoo, go for it. It was one of the best experiences in my life and I will never forget it.

If you are thinking of getting your first Tattoo but are scared, DO IT!!! Its totally not that bad and You will fall in love with it!!

It is these tattooed selves that carry the most power to speak within this discourse. Through having gone through the process of becoming tattooed, they have created a new self who is defined as distinctly different to the previous self. It is important to note that an untattooed self cannot speak within this discourse - they have not gone through the process (see discourse 2 below) and therefore they do not have speaking power.

In addition, not only do those who are not tattooed not have power to speak within the discourse, they also do not have the power of evaluation. Because being tattooed is about redefining the self, in the context of this discourse, it is impossible for anyone but the self to evaluate the 'effectiveness' of the tattoo. Thus, this self is not dependent on external evaluation as to whether or not the tattoo is beautiful, it is about an internal evaluation.

I just looked down at my swollen and red knuckles and smiled. This tattoo I had truly done just for me, fuck what everybody else thought. I felt so liberated. No regrets.

The idea that only the tattooed self can evaluate the self is very interesting in the context of wider social discourse around the evaluation of the body. In general, most Western discourse assumes that it is the watcher or the viewer who determines meaning (think of the common saying: beauty is in the eye of the beholder). Thus, the self is evaluated by the other, and it is society that carries the power to determine whether that physical self meets accepted requirements of beauty. In the discourse presented here, society is disempowered in some ways as it no longer has the power to determine the whether or not the tattooed self is beautiful. This power resides within the tattooed self.

However, as in any discourse the range of constructs is limited in what the speaking subject of this discourse may and may not say. By allowing the saying of certain things, the discourse also denies the existence of others. As an example, it becomes virtually impossible within this discourse to express dissatisfaction with tattoos, or to regret becoming tattooed. However, on occasion a type of regret is expressed:

After the euphoria of having a tattoo I started to notice things about it I disliked.

A stupid mistake

I'm very glad that it is small. I'm glad that it won't be hard to cover. Which in a few short days is exactly what I intend to do.

I had a tattoo done when I was 21, drunk and stupid.

Someone forgot to tell me back then that the tattoo would outlast the relationship.

Although these extracts seem to be expressing dissatisfaction with tattoos, in point of fact they are doing so in a very specific manner that actually serves to legitimise the discourse of tattoos as being about a redefinition of the self. In each of these cases, a narrative reading of the texts from which the extracts are taken indicates that the dissatisfaction is not with the decision to have a tattoo, but rather with the way in which the tattoo turned out – in many cases, the stories told are of inexpert artists and unprofessional studios. Hence, the dissatisfaction is expressed not in terms of regret about getting a tattoo, but in terms of dissatisfaction with the actual process through which the tattoo was obtained. As will be clear in the discussion of the next two discourses, this implies a great deal of power in the obtaining of a tattoo, and not just in the finished product. What it does not, however, provide is the option for regretting the decision of having a tattoo at all. Instead, the type of regret expressed within this discourse actually serves to reinforce the prevailing construct of the discourse of tattoos being essential to a redefinition of the self.

What world is presented within this first identified discourse? Within this discourse the world of those with tattoos stands expressed as a wonderful place, where one is able to discover true meaning and true understanding and true fulfilment. The gateway to this world is being tattooed, and this provides one with an instant recognition of one's place within this world.

Instantly I fell in love with it. It was beautiful.

I love it! It is absolutely me and absolutely perfect.

I couldn't even explain how happy I was.

I could not stop smiling, and I was just so happy with my decision.

I looked in the mirror and saw it, its gorgeous. Solid black, calligraphied and permanent.

I love my tattoo and can't wait to get more!

I take the first look at my new tattoo and I almost burst into tears. It was perfect. It was exactly what I wanted.

I drove home in a state of ecstasy.

I've fallen in love. One looking in the mirror and I can barely hold still again, but now it's out of pure joy.

Thus, having a tattoo provides an immediate experience of pleasure, of meaning and of wholeness. This is expressed through the use of the word 'love' or the expression 'fall in love'. Both of these carry connotations of romance that are more normally related to relationships with other people, but in this instance they come to epitomise the degree to which being tattooed changes the self, or recreates the self. Thus, it is possible to fall in love with the self – to open up a relationship. The idea of falling in love is also interesting because it speaks of the beginning of a relationship – the start of a process that is assumed to continue and deepen. This idea, of tattooing as the beginning of a new order of being, is expressed in the following extracts.

… obvious that I was a tattoo virgin

The journey to my first tattoo

I lost my virginity on my 18th birthday under the needle of Claudia Baca.

I was a virgin to the tattoo needle up until Wednesday, August 22, 2007.

First time

Therefore, it is obvious that through becoming a tattooed individual a new self has emerged. One that is full of wonder and awe. This is beautifully expressed in the following extract:

> *I haven't been this happy with my arm since I learned how to masturbate with it.*

The joining together of the concepts of masturbation and tattoo emphasizes ideas around the pleasure of the self, and discovering pleasure in the self. This is not about external evaluations of the goodness or badness of tattoos, this is about the way in which it recreates a self who can begin to experience pleasure within their own bodies, and begin to explore that pleasure.

It is therefore possible to postulate that objections to this discourse would be dealt with through a focus on this interiority of discourse. Only the tattooed self, as the redefined self, has the ability to state what they feel, and therefore any other objections are always external and therefore always outside of the discourse. There is therefore a sense of exclusivity attached to this discourse. This inability of those outside of the discourse to understand is emphasised by the comments on the practical considerations involved in choosing to become tattooed:

> *I love tattoos and I wanted to share that love with the world. Over time ,I worked my way down my arm, but stopped at the wrists so i could wear long sleeves and cover the art up if I had to.*

> *I can wear a T-shirt and no one can see any of them, another point to consider, if you want to be a freak show and have yours on the outside then have at it but that isn't my deal, I had these done for me, not the general public and gawker's.*

> *I definitely didn't want to get some of them yet. Those are to come when I have a solid job and an idea of the tattoo tolerance of the people around me.*

I also have several tattoos. All are in discrete places, that can be easily uncovered if I want to, but for work purposes (I work in a hospital), they need to be covered.

The above extracts imply several things. Some of them speak of the idea of tattoos as private and personal and therefore not intended for mass public consumption. Other of the extracts however, also implicitly give power to other discourses. By acknowledging that tattoos need to be covered, and that not everyone is accepting of tattoos these extracts speak to long-standing discourses, mentioned in the literature review, of the negativity and deviance associated with tattoos.

He flatly told me that if he had know I had any visible tattoos he would not have hired me … period.

I removed the bandage at home and showed my parents, being polite folks pretended not to be totally repulsed.

I guess the lesson I learned was that if you want all doors left open, one can have no visible body art. The myth of 'it shouldn't matter' is just that. It does matter to the majority of people who do the hiring and firing. Unfortunately that is the world we still inhabit.

I hate tattoos and I hate the thought of my son having a tattoo.

Therefore, although they may not like it the power of the dominant discourse is constantly acknowledged. The way in which tattoos are constructed by the mainstream as deviant is implicitly implied throughout the stories of tattoos.

I wonder to what extent the dominant discourse of tattoos as negative and deviant fuels this discourse around tattooing as being about the definition of the self. Through being deviant and rebellious, the attraction of this discourse as non-mainstream may provide a further source of power for this particular definition of the self as being outside of the mainstream of power. Thus, tattooing provides a space for an expression of selfhood that runs counter to that which is expected by the dominant

discourse. Thus, the discourse presented here provides the space for a subject to access a powerful discourse around deviance and being outside of the power and control of mainstream understandings of what it means to be tattooed.

> *Once I came up with a design they didn't hate, I was given reluctant permission.*

> *I felt, for the first time since I had stolen a beer a smoked a cigarette, really bad-ass.*

This discourse of redefinition of the self does not stand alone, but also connects to other discourses and other ways of speaking. The most obvious example of this is the way in which the texts which contain this discourse are posted on a website alongside photographs of the tattoos themselves. Through combining the verbal and the visual, these texts further reinforce this new self. It is not only written of, it is displayed – the tattoo and the flesh are reproduced in a photographic image, as something which is presented alongside the verbal expression of the birth of a new self, as a visual correlate of it.

A discourse is historically located, and it is interesting to look at the conditions of possibility that have allowed for the emergence of this discourse. The first thing that should be noted is that the growth of the Internet (as described in Chapter 3) plays a large roll in the way in which this discourse is discussed and shared. Instead of being simply a personal experience, through the medium of the Internet it becomes possible to share the experience of becoming a new self with a seemingly unlimited audience. Through the expanding of the size of the audience, it also becomes possible for the discourse to gain more power, as it moves beyond the individual and the specific into the global theatre. In other words, this discourse speaks about redefining the self, but it speaks to an audience of more than the self – it speaks to an audience of millions.

> *Thank you for reading this. As I said I like the whole show and tell atmosphere.*

Show and tell – the nursery school expression that means to bring something of personal value and share it with others, is perhaps a specific way in which this discourse reflects on its own way of speaking. This is contrasted to the previous comments, about hiding tattoos – now tattoos are revealed. This conflicting energy of hiding and showing is reflective of the way in which tattoos are constructed within this discourse both as things which are deeply personal and as things which are visually available for a wider audience. The idea of hiding and showing can be broadened to refer to the Internet context itself, as the forum provides for the presenting of the tattoos themselves, but the identity of the individuals posting stories and pictures remains hidden. In addition, this website, although open to anyone who cares to look for it, is also likely to be accessed mainly by those people who are interested in tattooing. Thus, for those who are not interested in the subjects the tattoos remain hidden, while the websites broadens access to those already within the community of the tattooed.

Aside from the Internet, there are other conditions of possibility that make this discourse possible. One of these, as commented on extensively in the literature review, is the rise of the whole body modification industry. It should be remembered that tattooing is only one type of body modification, and that other types of body modification – piercing, scarification, branding – are also displayed on the same website. In some ways these other forms of body modification form an extension of this discourse as many of the texts around these topics also make use of the idea of body modification as a specific way of redefining the self.

> … getting amazing artwork done on their bodies, whether that is through tattooing, piercing or scarification, it doesn't matter.

In some ways this discourse takes the object of the tattoo (as discussed earlier) and shifts if from its old meanings of deviance, negativity or group identity into something that is richly personal, and about an individual essence not group cohesion.

It is time now to move on to the last part of this discourse analysis, which Macleod (2002) describes as the deconstructionist aspect of discourse analysis. It is important

to note that this is a logical continuation from the previous comments, which moves on to look at the wider context of the discourse.

As with all discourses, the discourse around tattoos as a definition/redefinition of the self finds institutional support in several different ways. In particular, as mentioned above, body modification has become very much an industry, with commercial and economic aspects and ramifications. As such, therefore, a discourse that promotes tattooing (for whatever reason) promotes this particular industry and as such is valuable to this industry. This is made very obvious in the one posting which I discovered which refers to home-tattooing, and not professional tattooing. At the end of the posting, the website administer includes this particular comment:

> Note: Using a flame does not sterilize needles nor is it advisable to use t-shirt to wipe up blood. Proper sterile products should always be used when tattoing. Also it is never advisable to drink excessively before being tattooed

The implications of this statement are interesting. Aside from the fact that the tattoo was done at home, the posting is typical – it speaks of the pain of being tattooed, the aftercare and falling in love with the tattoo. All of these are typical themes within the postings (pain and aftercare will be discussed below, in connection with discourse two). What this statement by the administrator implies (it is interesting to note that out of the fifty-two postings included in this study, this was one of only two to carry an administrator's note) is that the process of tattooing must be connected to the tattoo industry, and if it is not then it does not have the right to speak within the discourse. The disapproving tone of the administrator is obvious. The power of the tattoo artist will be discussed extensively in the third discourse highlighted.

Through defining the self as new and complete only with the addition of a tattoo, the discourse identified here redistributes power in a particular manner. Traditionally, as will be clear from the literature review it is the non-tattooed who speak, and who pass judgement (either positive or negative) on the tattooed through means of research conducted. In this discourse concerning the redefinition of the self, it is only the tattooed self who holds power – the non-tattooed other does not have speaking power

within this discourse, because, no matter how much research they conduct they will never have the intimate knowledge of what it feels like to be a tattooed self. This is an aspect of this discourse that is acknowledged within mainstream literature. Several of the authors cited in the literature review are tattooed, and they mention this as an added reason why they have insight into the process – as such, therefore, they are agreeing with this discourse that it is impossible to understand being a tattooed self unless you are tattooed. For example Vail (1999), includes within his article the information that he has a tattoo.

Therefore, it is obvious that it is the tattooed self who wishes to reinforce and maintain this discourse, as it provides power to that self. Instead of being marginalized and deviant, within this discourse the tattooed self is dominant and centralized. It is therefore important to this discourse that this construction of the tattooed self remain strong, and that the tattooed self remain a positive force, combining the best aspects of both the tattoo and the previous self. It is because of the incredibly powerful position that is available to the self within this discourse that the tattooed self does not critique the discourse – for example, it is not possible for this self to regret having a tattoo.

> *I never have and never will regret it even when im so old and shrivelled you have to stretch the skin to see it.*

It could not be clearer that in the final analysis the discourse presented here is not only about how beautiful the tattoo is, although this does play a role. What this discourse is about is embracing a new self, one who is defined through the addition of a permanent marking and who will now continue into the future – as the tattooed self.

Discourse 2: Getting a tattoo

Connected with the first discourse, this discourse focuses more specifically on the process that is undertaken in order to redefine the self. The physicality of the tattoo takes on a new meaning in this discourse. It is the experience, the process, of being tattooed that is central to this discourse.

Once again, the body of the self features as an object within this discourse. However, unlike in the first identified discourse, the body here is experienced not as a blank canvas waiting to be filled, but as the medium through which the rite of passage is expressed.

> *As she put the needle to the top of my foot, I felt a quick sharp pain*

> *I think part of the tattoo was to see if I could do it: get a massive piece on some of the more sensitive portions of my body without chickening out*

> *If you are going to have it done, experience the process and don't try and mask the pain with drugs or anything else, the pain is part of the deal and should be relished as much as the finished product.*

It is through the body that pain is experienced, and by subjecting the body to pain it becomes possible to relate to pain in a new way

> *Tattooing the inner upper arm was painful at times but nothing serous – closing my eyes and focusing on the pain really helped as I could focus not*

that much on the physical level of the sensation but rather on its mental implications to analyze and somehow 'tame' it.

Pain itself therefore becomes an object within this discourse, as it is that which needs to be tamed. To tame something implies that it needs to be brought under control and harnessed, in order to be made useful to the subject of the discourse.

In this discourse, it is going through this process of pain that allows the subject to speak. The fact that they now have a tattoo means that they have overcome pain, and have therefore passed through the gates into a new way of being. It is impossible to get a tattoo without experiencing pain of some sort, and therefore the pain experienced forms an important part of the discourse around getting a tattoo.

The speaking subject in this discourse speaks of the pain as a rite of passage, as something that has already been overcome. There are different ways of speaking about pain. Each posting describes the pain experienced in a different way, as each experience of pain is unique to the person getting the tattoo. Therefore, although the experience of pain is universal within this discourse, each subject relates to the pain differently and is able to speak of it in a different way. For some, the pain is less than expected:

> *Once the tattoo started I thought to myself it was not so bad. I could only describe it as a scratching sensation. The pain came in spurts.*

> *It was relatively painless and quick, and quiet an emotional experience – I felt this was a big turning point in my life.*

> *It didn't hurt to my surprise, I didn't feel much. I guess its true, your body does produce endorphins to help with the pain. It felt like a really annoying vibration.*

> *It was completely bearable*

> *It hurt a bit but nothing I couldn't handle.*

If they hurt that bad people wouldn't get them.

For others, the pain was excruciating:

It hurts horribly

Rib Cage tattooing sucks. Its that simple

From the time she first put the needle to me I knew I was in big trouble.

I won't spend any time denying the fact that a needle to the ribcage hurt something awful, much less to the base of my armpit and hipbone. It got ridiculous.

It hurt A LOT, but I whimpered a little bit

We cracked on with the armpit first, which proved to be by far the most painful area I have ever had tattooed … It felt like Justin was clawing away at my flesh with a red hot poker for the whole of the time he was tattooing the armpit. Trust me … it's one hell of an experience to have.

I didn't scream too much

Terrible pain, but beautiful in the end.

It was BAD! I screamed to stop, I felt faint, and I started sweating really badly. I got dizzy an even thought I was sitting in a chair, I felt like I was spinning. The radio was playing and all of a sudden it sounded soo loud, and then silent, and then loud again. I thought I was going to throw up,

For others, the pain sensation is something unique:

Now I've felt some weird shit in my day, but nothing like a group of needles repeatedly hitting your shin. I'm not saying it hurt, I'm not saying it didn't, it was just hellaciously fucking weird.

I then sat and watched the needle sting and stain my skin millions of times in complete bliss … until she got right above my ankle with the outline. My eyes crossed, brain twitched, and teeth ground. "What an amazing new pain!" I thought to myself.

Wow what a surprise and intense feeling I can't describe.

The nervousness soon faded when the needle first touched my arm. The familiar buzzing of the tattoo machine lulled me as I watched bright colors merge with my flesh.

But the pain ceased and I started to get the same rush.

Just before the top part of my foot felt fine it almost felt good. It was like a certain type of adrenaline rush, one you could never get from running a mile or so.

Whatever the actual experience of pain, the idea of pain is something that was almost universally commented on within the fifty-two postings (forty-seven out of the fifty-two commented on this). Therefore, it is obvious that speaking about pain is important in the contexts of the postings.

On a very superficial level, it is obvious why this is so. One can only discuss what the pain felt like if you have had a tattoo – therefore, this is a realm of words and experience which can be only be accessed by a certain grouping of people, those with tattoos. Through commenting on the pain itself one is marked out as belonging to that group. Having gone through the pain (however it was experienced) gives the subject permission to speak. In addition, the experience of pain is different for each subject within this discourse so that the position of the speaker is one of personal power, as the subject describes his or her own unique experience of pain.

It is important to note that the pain is not dependent on the meaning of the tattoo, or the image being created – the aspects of tattooing which were considered salient within the first discourse discussed. Instead, it becomes important as an object in itself – not as just as means to an end (having a tattoo), but as an experience which in itself allows the speaker access to a particular discourse.

What is this discourse the speaker is allowed access to? This discourse revolves around the idea of rite of passage or ritual involved in getting a tattoo. In some ways, this is reflected in the way in which these postings are structured. Presented in narrative, the postings move from the initial desire for a tattoo, focusing on the process itself, and then finally ending in triumphant ownership. What the first discourse I identified looks at is the combination of the desire for a tattoo with the triumphal ownership, and the way in which this comes to create the subject of that discourse – the redefined tattooed self. What is identified in this second discourse is the meanings and the language around the middle portion of the narrative – the acquisition of a tattoo, and how that is constructed in order to create a sense of ritual and belonging.

If the pain itself is the first object in this discourse, the remaining object would them seem to be the body itself. Importantly, this is the body not the self – that is, it refers to the physicality of the individual, not to emotions or cognitions. Remarks about the location of the tattoo reflect this:

> *I love how in this setting people you just met start removing their clothes and showing themselves to you.*

> *During the first three days my arm and wrist were visibly swollen and quite sore but I did not get in the way of my workout or other everyday activities. On day 4 shedding the old skin began.*

As can be seen from the above quotes, the body remains an object even after it has been tattooed. Thus, the tattooed body is an object within this discourse, just as is the pain that produced that body. Who then can speak within this discourse?

Obviously, the speaking subject within this discourse is the owner of the tattooed body, and the bearer of the pain. In this way, within this discourse the tattooed body is not part of the self but instead is a product of a process that in itself is defining of the self.

Through undergoing the process of being tattooed, a subject gains speaking rights within this discourse, and may say almost anything about their own experience of the process. Not only is the physicality of the pain extensively commented on, but so too is the healing process of that other object – the body:

> *The tattoo healed really fast, and there where little to no scab.*

> *It healed really well and I took as good care of it as I could, polysporin twice a day.*

> *Over the next couple of days the lower half of my arm swelled up a fair amount, the skin sore to the touch. I maintained a strict routine of washing the tattoo first thing in the morning with warm soapy water, then lightly massaging in Bepanthen ointment once the tattoo had been patted dry with a towel.*

> *The tattoo was covered lightly in cling film and this was taped down to my arm. An hour after being tattooed this covering was removed and I lightly washed it with soap and water and applied a mild antiseptic cream that the tattooist had recommended.*

> Healing was pretty standard for the tattoo. Once I got home I took off the cling film and gave it a wash with warm soapy water and gave it a dry pat. Then I put a thin layer of lotion on and pretty much left it alone. I put a thin layer of lotion on every morning and night to keep it fresh.but I myself am I big fan of the leave it alone method! It didn't really scab that much, my skin seems to flake instead (is this a good thing?) the itching was madness, it was hard

>   to not scratch something so itch that was so close. But I knew if I
>   did I'd be ruining my arm. About 10 days later, all was healed.

Thus, the subject in this case has the power to speak about both objects – the body and the pain - with authority and with assurance. He may say almost anything about the experience – that it hurt, that it didn't, that it healed, or didn't – it is having gone through the experience which is important to the accessing of this discourse.

Once again, as with the previous discourse, a person without tattoos may not speak in this discourse. It is by definition an exclusionary discourse in that is requires that the subject undergo the process before they may become a speaking subject. It therefore clearly positions people with tattoos as expert, and those without tattoos as inexpert. Within this discourse as well, the more tattoos the subject has the greater that subject's speaking power. They may then compare the processes for the various tattoos, and comment on the degree of pain for each and the various degrees of difficulty of healing.

My first and second tattoo: choosing aspects and comparative healing

> *For healing, the first time I used A&D ointment as per usual*

> *… the healing requires a lot of TLC over any other tattoo I've gotten*

The world this discourse presents is quite clearly mapped into two types of subjects – those with tattoos and those without. Those without tattoos have no speaking power, while those with tattoos have varying speaking rights depending on the number and size of tattoos that they have.

> *It's pretty nice to have a decent piece when people are all standing around and comparing ink.*

>   "Oh yeah. Go big or go home, right?" I joke. (The girl previously
>   rubbing her shoulder blade glares at me a little. I assume her tattoo
>   is small and feel superior).

Because it is impossible for those without tattoos to speak within this discourse they cannot raise objections to the discourse. Those who may speak within the discourse may say anything they please about the process because they have undergone the rite of passage, they have gotten a tattoo. The discourse is however, not only about the marking of the body but also about the process that was undertaken to achieve that marking:

> *If you are going to have it done, experience the process and don't try and mask the pain with drugs or anything else, the pain is part of the deal and should be relished as much as the finished product.*

> *… i don't regret the pain, after all what doesn't kill you makes you stronger!*

Thus, once again, ideas of a rite of passage are contained within this discourse. As mentioned before, the idea of tattooing as a rite of passage, or as a sign of membership or entry into a certain group is one which has been linked to tattooing for a long time - in terms of traditional tattooing such as Maori tattooing, and in terms of the beginnings of Western tattooing with sailors. Thus, although in these discourse the possessing of a tattoo is what allows one access to the discourse, the similarity is that the tattoo itself serves as a rite of passage, providing access into a new discourse – a new way of speaking. This idea of the rite of passage aspect of becoming tattooed is reflected in the following extracts:

> *I'd wanted a tattoo since I was 15*

> *I wanted a tattoo since I was 16*

> *I got my first tattoo on my 18th birthday*

These extracts are also reminiscent of the first discourse discussed in this chapter, as they point towards the idea that the body in incomplete without a tattoo, and that acquiring a tattoo is part of the process of growing up and becoming a complete self.

The discussion of this second discourse has focused to this point on the idea of a rite of passage involved in becoming tattooed, which transmits meaning through the process of becoming tattooed. This idea of a rite of passage is something that has been extensively commented on in other settings, in terms of the alienation from group experience and desire for a sense of group belonging that is so prolific within Western culture. In terms of tracing the historical development of this discourse it is possible to see how it emerges from mainstream discourses of alienation and isolation and attempts to counter them through offering links to older discourses concerning rites of passage, and a sense of belonging within a group. Thus, the idea of tattooing as providing meaning and belonging which is an aspect of this second discourse is reflected in historical underpinnings of tattoos as allowing access to certain groupings, for example biker tattoos or Maori tattoos. In this case, the community that is joined is a community of people with tattoos.

This discourse about getting a tattoo has far reaching ideological effects. In as much as it speaks of the ability to ascribe meaning through a physical process it reflects an ongoing body concern that is very prominent within Western thought at the moment. Speaking of the experience, the moment as being as important as the end product reinforces ideas about not caring about the future, and valuing the present moment above a projected and imagined future. Indeed, in some of the extracts it was shown how getting a tattoo involves the realisation of an anticipated future, connected to the idea of always having wanted to be tattooed.

In this way, it becomes possible to see how this discourse around getting a tattoo can both reinforce and subvert power relations. On the first level, it subverts power relations by providing the highest level of subjectivity to those who would normally be on the edges in the mainstream – the heavily tattooed. Thus, within this experiential discourse it is these individuals who carry the most power. However, it also enforces power relations in a far subtler manner. It does this through the implicit assertion that it is only those with experience that have the power to speak – therefore recreating the image of the wise old sage as powerful, and undermining the ability of the young and the new to carry meaning within a discourse. In this way, it is no different to more mainstream discourses which value age and experience.

This second discourse therefore revolves around speaking the process of being tattooed. Tattoos and bodies (both tattooed and untattooed) are objects in this discourse; it is the self who has undergone the process of being tattooed that speaks within this discourse. The discourse is therefore about a rite of passage, the process of being tattooed about which the speaking subject speaks. The discourse is necessarily exclusionary, as those without tattoos cannot speak. What this discourse does is to provide a space within language that is available only to the privileged few, thereby placing them in positions of power in relation to this discourse.

Discourse 3: The tattoo artist as expert

The third discourse that was identified as running through the postings was one which is significantly different to the discourses commented on above. This is a discourse which is present around the edges of the above discourses, and which makes different ways of understanding tattooing possible. In this discourse, the tattoo artist features as the prominent subject, having the ability to transmit meaning and belonging, two of the key characteristics associated with being tattooed by the preceding discourses.

What are the objects that are constructed by this discourse? The first of these is the person being tattooed. In this discourse, far from being the speaking subject these tattooed bodies represent the objects that are at the mercy of the tattoo artist.

> *Unfortunately what I wanted in a tattoo didn't really matter. The "artist" at Advanced didn't think I should have a white tattoo because it wouldn't show up well and absolutely refused to do it in white.*

I was a little surprised when he said "Cool, but maybe you should think about this a little more." He didn't want me just rushing into something that I would regret later, and given the circumstances, I'm glad he cared and didn't just tattoo me to make a quick dollar.

Stogga, Dave's second in command, instead of letting me get my original designs done, enlarged them by 30% so that as I got older, it wouldn't distort as much.

In these extracts, the tattoo artist has the ability to determine whether or not the tattoo will be done, and also to make decisions regarding its appearance and placement. The people getting the tattoos are represented as being bodies within this discourse, bodies that will become the canvas on which the tattoo artist will perform his or her art.

It is therefore the tattoo artist who features as the primary subject within this discourse, the one with the most power. As the above extracts show, the tattoo artist wields immense power in terms of this discourse. The position of the artist is powerful because of the manner in which the tattoo itself is constructed, as mentioned in the discussions surrounding the two previous discourses. It is having a tattoo that allows these discourses to be accessed, and therefore it is only through the tattoo artists as giver of tattoos that a subject can access the discourses discussed previously. The tattoo artist is bestowed with the power by those who want a tattoo or want more tattoos, by virtue of having a certain skill: the ability to tattoo. The awareness of the crucial role of the tattoo artist is brought across in the following extracts:

I wanted to make sure I found the right artist for the job. I am an artist myself, so I did not want a half hearted artist or a money hungry guy. I wanted a guy that shared the same passion in art as I do. Basically I needed a guy who knew what he was doing and was doing it because he loves to

This is where Divine intervention came into the picture, the artist was not only good but truly gifted.

112

It was all worth it, though, and also made me realize, over and over again, what a great job Slawek had done – all elements of the design fit one another, all of them are connected and seem to climb up around my arm as if it was the most natural thing in the world to have it there!

When I went into the tattooing room, I told the artist, whose name was Ted, that I couldn't have drawn it better if I had been able to. He was very humble about it, saying playfully that that was why he did this for a living.

It is clear that the tattoo artist plays a very important role in the way in which a tattoo is experienced – the beauty of the tattoo is linked to the artist's expertise. This also makes it a very dangerous proposition, in some ways, for the other subject within this discourse – the person being tattooed. This person has the ability to choose a tattoo artist:

My dad recommended him, so that's the place I chose

Ask them who did their tattoos, who they'd recommend. The main thing to do about any body modification is to DO YOUR RESEARCH! Search the Internet, ask around, find out who's good, what the price is and where they are.

I decided on Way Cool cause they are fairly reputable and they have nice artists and nice employees working there.

Artistically I also admired the tattooist's work and he has a very good reputation.

I wanted the best of the best to do it, Trey. He is a known tattooist around these parts.

Being that I had never been tattooed before, I wanted to look around and find someone that not only shared my vision in what I wanted my tattoo to be, but used their own creativity to make it even greater.

I was told about Modern Savage, an award winning studio in Wakefield, by a friend who swore by Dave's work as the best to be found. Again, I did my research; most modern (and decent) tattoo parlours will have a website, with pictures demonstrating the best of their work, and maybe a review or two.

Making the incorrect decision regarding a tattoo artist can have disastrous consequences:

When he had done coloring me in, he informed me that since I was the last person he tattooed, he didn't even have to take the needles out of the gun … since the PREVIOUS TIME I WAS THERE. I left as soon as I could … and ended up with a staph infection that left me with two huge abcesses and a prescription for antibiotics.

After the euphoria of having a tattoo I started to notice things about it I disliked … Although I love my tattoo very much I wish I had gone somewhere else, found another artist that was more willing to work with exactly what I wanted and somewhere that could have given me a bit more ink for my money. Next time I will definitely do more research before I pick a shop.

The moment I sat in the chair I began to fell nervous. The girl who was doing my tattoo looked like she had only maybe done a few before this and didn't look like she was very sure what she should be doing. I was ready to walk out the door then but I decided to give her a shot and she might be 100 times better than I thought she was going to be. Well I think maybe I should have listened to my gut instinct … [it was] a stupid mistake.

The outcome of being tattooed is therefore associated with the skill and expertise of the tattoo artist, it is something over which the person getting the tattoo has little control. As such, therefore, the subjects within this discourse are very unevenly

weighted. Initially, the power within this discourse seems to be negotiated as the untattooed individual chooses a tattoo artist. However, once the choice of artist has been made the power shifts entirely into the artist's hands. Although the person being tattooed is able to express a wide range of concerns and ideas around being tattooed it is the virtually silent (within these texts) tattoo artist who is the central figure within this discourse.

The world of this discourse revolves around the figure of the tattoo artist. This figure can be male or female and is portrayed as a gatekeeper figure that can convey meaning and emotion through their actions. Surrounding this figure are the tools and implements that form part of their trade: the studio, the instruments, the portfolios. All of these are in some ways constructed as extensions of the artist figure, as they flesh out his world and his sphere of influence. In some ways, this world is a world of competing tattoo parlours, vying for supremacy and control. The person seeking a tattoo enters this world, and chooses between artists and studios, but once the decision has been made the power shifts, and resides almost entirely within the closed world of the artist and his studio.

Where does the power of this artist come from? The artist as expert discourse draws very strongly on many other discourses, and as such gains power through the association with these discourses, which are mainstream and commonly accepted constructions of the world.

The first of these mainstream discourses revolves around the idea of art as being something which is important, valuable and admirable and which creates meaning. As mentioned in the literature review, the very use of the words artist and studio connect this discourse to the wider discourse of the art world. In the following extracts, this connection to art is made explicit:

> *She gave me two portfolios to look at. I excitedly looked through them as both had beautiful work … I was in awe.*

They started recommending studios, and I finally decided on Premiere. All of my other tattoos are in black and grey, and were done elsewhere. But Premiere has a reputation for doing amazing color work.

The pictures on the site were amazing. Dave's speciality being bio-mechanical and he looked like an expert on shading

Every page I turned had me "oohing" and "awing" over color, technique, and creativity. It, or rather "he" was exactly what I had been looking for all that time. Stacy Knight, I told the girl this was the one,and she agreed this was a good choice; he had an amazing use of color.

For me it was magic at work, for him it was just a trifle.

Each of these extracts comments on art as being something that is specialized, a talent available only to a few. As such, therefore, the tattoo artist's position is reified by links to the discourses of art and the art world.

Another way in which the artist becomes the expert in this discourse is through his relationship to discourses around professional conduct and professionalism. These links range from basic things like making appointments and working from a place of business (not a house) to more complicated implications involving subject specific knowledge about tattooing and the tattooing process.

What I didn't realize at the time was artists of his caliber book up pretty solid for six months.

… she gave me the speech about all of the needles being brand new, and everything not new being completely hospital sterilized.

I was impressed at the close details paid in making sure everything was clean and protected.

The place itself is VERY clean, situated on a main road and its well known in the local community for being good.

He explained further on, telling me what happened when the needle goes into the skin, and I found it so interesting. Even though I had a basic idea of what happened it still made me quiet with awe.

My first time in the shop was great. It was very bright and clean, and both people working, including my artist, were really helpful.

He was really cool about showing me the needles and how they've never re-used and basically explaining how important cleanliness and sterility are in that particular tattoo parlor which eased my fears a lot.

As is clear in the above extracts, the tattoo artist is clearly positioned as expert in relation to other, more mainstream, discourses about art, professionalism and hygiene.

The discourse of the tattoo artist as expert is further reinforced through the way of speaking about it that is presented within the texts studied. Each of the texts carries a block in the corner that contains information that is felt to be essential to the posting. This block is labelled "at a glance". Although it is possible to put personal identifying information here, all of the postings are either posted anonymously or under pseudonyms. However, there is space to include the name of the artist and the studio – and in the majority of cases, this information is included. Thus, in a very concrete way on this website the tattooed individuals fade into anonymity, becoming bodies on which the named and therefore identified tattoo artist performs her art.

This discourse is also capable of reflecting on its own way of speaking in other ways. A good example is the following extract, copied from a sign hanging in a tattoo studio:

Cheap work ain't good and good work ain't cheap.

In this instance, the juxtaposition of these two statements provides a backdrop to insure the importance of the culture of professionalism that helps to define the tattoo

artist as expert. In addition, it is the quality of the work by the tattoo artist that legitimises the experience of being tattooed, as expressed in the first two discourses (one must instantly fall in love with your tattoo, you must undertaken the process of being tattooed) and therefore the tattoo artist serves as gatekeeper, allowing entry into the discourses identified previously in this chapter.

The position of artist as expert is reinforced through the artist himself advertising as an artist, and through the reputation of the artwork. In the following statement, the position of the tattoo artist as expert is again confirmed, this time through an appeal to a deviant case:

> *The 'artist' was a girl of no more than twenty. It was obvious to me that she had somehow stumbled in to this career. She hadn't been doing this long, this was evident by her almost total lack of tattoos on herself.*

How did this discourse of the artist as expert come to emerge? In some ways, it is tied to Western trends of the development of the professional over the tradesman. By this I refer to the way in which it is common to speak of people as if they were professionals, instead of tradesmen. Think of the common substitution of home executive for housewife, and landscaper for garden designer. Through the use of a different title, a different feel is given to the job description. It is therefore not surprising that those who administer tattoos have undergone the same transformation.

However, there is more to the development of this discourse. As was commented on extensively in the literature review, tattooing has become increasingly popular within mainstream culture, and as such strives to gain power within these cultures. As such, therefore, it needs to access power from other discourses that are more powerful. As mentioned above, the discourse of art is very powerful and by identifying the tattooist as an artist access to the power of that discourse is made possible.

Speaking of the growth of the tattoo industry points us towards the way in which this discourse supports institutions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is important to the tattoo industry that they are seen as a vital component of tattooing. Thus, the previously commented on extract about the dangers of home tattooing. Therefore, the

discourse of the tattoo artist as expert reinforces the dominance of the tattoo industry as a commercial and consumer entity.

> *I would like anyone who is considering letting someone tattoo them at their house or a friend of a friend type deal … be extremely wary. Obviously I cannot tell anyone what to do, but I would advise everybody that unless they are 100% sure that everything is legitimate and safe, stick with a reputable artist at a reputable studio.*

A further consideration in terms of industry and institutions involves the cost of tattooing:

My friend's tattoo would cost $140 and that mine would cost $230

I payed him for £50 his work which I thought was very reasonable,

Before we begin she says I get 50 bucks an hour, at the time, in
1992, that was a lot of green.

Each of these extracts accepts, without question, that one should pay for a tattoo. Thus, despite the focus on art, meaning and belonging that is constructed in other discourses, the idea of tattooing as an industry which requires the same criteria as other industries – i.e. payment for services rendered – is not critiqued. As such, therefore, the more expert the tattoo artist appears the more specialized the service rendered and the more the commercial tattoo industry is supported.

As has been commented on throughout this discourse, the tattoo artist as expert is a position that occupies considerable power. As such, the distinction between inexpert and expert is maintained within this discourse, with power residing firmly within the hands of the expert. In order to maintain this position of power, the discourse needs to be constantly reinforced. This is also connected to the maintenance of the tattoo industry. There is therefore a tension within this discourse, which is not necessarily resolved.

On the one hand, the tattooist is portrayed as an artist with all the associated ideas that come from mainstream culture about art for art's sake, and the disavowal of financial and other motivations. However, this contrasts with the way in which the tattoo artist is linked to the tattoo industry (i.e. a good artist will work from a reputable studio, be booked up in advance, and charge for his work). Therefore, the consumer and financial motivations for confining the ability to tattoo to the elite is the underbelly of this discourse, and it is not commented on. Thus, the power of the tattoo artist resides with the power of the industry, and discourses that recognise the tattoo artist as expert are maintained in order to allow for those institutions to continue existing.

What are the ideological effects of the maintenance of this discourse? As was mentioned in the literature review, a focus on the elite aspects of tattooing undermines the discourses of tattooing which predominate on a more grassroots level. By making the tattoo artist an elite and expert figure, those who cannot afford his or her services are denied access into the discourses – they are further marginalized. Thus, there remains on the edges of this discourse the groups of subjects who are not spoken about, whose very existence is denied by this discourse.

In conclusion, this discourse constructs the tattoo artist as expert through the use of other powerful discourses such as art and professionalism. In addition, the power of the tattoo artist to impart belonging and meaning in other discourses serves as a further source of power to his position. As such, therefore, the individual receiving a tattoo is an object (as a body) and a relatively powerless subject within this discourse, at the mercy of the tattoo artist. The tattoo artist as expert discourse is reinforced and maintained through its relation to industry and institutions within the consumer driven tattoo industry. As long as the position of tattoo artist as expert is maintained, the industry can use it as a way to justify its existence. Therefore, the tattoo industry is both constructed by, and constructs, the tattoo artist as expert. What this discourse ignores or invalidates are all those individuals with tattoo, or giving tattoos, who are not covered by the industry. Thus, in many ways, this discourse is saying that only a certain type of tattoo is legitimate and that tattoos which do not form part of this discourse are not authentic and do not carry the same meaning as their own tattoos do.

Discussion

In this section, I wish to attempt a kind of synthesis with what has gone before. I have outlined three discourses that I identified as being prominent within the texts. These three discourses have each been presented in the preceding section. With each discourse, I have attempted to provide a coherent explication of the internal logic of the discourse – what is constructed, how is it constructed and what purposes this construction serves. It has been a conscious attempt on my part to include within this discussion as many direct quotes from the texts as possible, in order to give the reader a feel for the texts themselves, and for the way in which the statements made above are connected to these texts.

In this section, I wish to take a step back and look at the discourses from a more distant perspective. In some ways, the previous section was a very hands-on approach, wrestling and engaging with the texts themselves. This section takes a step back and looks at the way in which the discourses have been represented here, and how these discourses are tied to one another, and to pre-existing systems of knowledge.

The first meta-comment to make about the discourses identified is that they all made use of the same basic objects and subjects, constructed in different ways. That is, the tattoo, the untattooed body and the tattooed body. Thus, they are referring to what was already there to be discovered (Parker, 1992), and are constructing them in different ways according to the needs and the truths of the particular discourse. For me, this is an example of exactly what it means to say that the world is constructed, or brought into being, through language and discourse. These objects have no set meaning – instead, each discourse constructs them in such a manner that they become useful and meaningful within that discourse, that way of speaking.

A further salient characteristic of the discourses above is the way in which, almost without exception, they refer to professional tattooing. There were only three texts (out of the fifty-two) that did not speak of professional tattooing. Of these three texts one referred to a tattoo which had been done by an ex-boyfriend in her youth which she sorely regretted and which she had had redone by a professional tattoo artist. The second text narrated an experience of being tattooed by a friend in his house, and ended with the narrator getting an infection from bad hygiene practices. The third text involved a girl who had allowed her friend to tattoo her, and was very happy with the tattoo. This was the text that contained the heavily critical voice of the website administrator, condemning homemade tattoos. Thus, it is clear that all of these discourses are therefore presented in relation to professional tattoo artists, and (by association as was made clear in the discussion of discourse three) the consumer tattoo industry as a whole.

Thus, this finding echoes the concerns from the literature review about the way in which this new way of speaking about tattoos, this new wave of tattooing is marginalizing and obscuring other meanings and narratives about being tattooed. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the type of person likely to leave a posting on the Internet is likely to be part of the middle to upper class. Thus, these discourses are about this new wave of tattooing, and other possible understandings of being tattooed continue to be marginalized. They are completely absent in this discussion, as they were absent in the postings themselves.

The types of discourses drawn on by the three discourses discussed here are also those discourses identified with this elite, middle-class tattooing in the literature review. The strong focus on the tattoo artist as artist, and the tattoo industry as art industry are examples of this. Also related is the focus on tattoos having to have personal meanings.

Once again, therefore, this research is accessing the privileged tattoo population, the new wave of tattooed individuals. This is not the margins, or the underbelly – this is the mainstream of the tattooed world. Therefore, although many may still consider tattooing deviant, it is clear that in these discourses and ways of speaking it is

mainstream, and serves to obscure and marginalize other ways of speaking about tattooing and tattoos.

Relation to Research question

The research question posed at the beginning of this research concerned the accessing of discourses around being tattooed, within the writings of people with tattoos. As will be clear from the discussion in this chapter, this is exactly what has been done. However, this should not be mistaken for a complete answer to a simple question. The research question posed in this research is open-ended and does not have a single unitary answer. In this instance, three particular discourses were identified. If you changed the researcher, used different texts, or did this at a different time you might discover different things. Thus, although this piece of researcher definitely adds to the body of knowledge around tattoos, it would be incorrect to assume that it has in any way delineated a specific body of knowledge, or a correct way of thinking or speaking about a topic. As with all discourses analysis research, results are temporary and inconclusive.

Evaluating the research

The final section of this chapter involves evaluating both the quality and the credibility of the research that has been presented in this chapter, and throughout this piece of research. As explained in the methodology section, the criteria for evaluating a qualitative piece of research are different to the criteria for examining a more traditional quantitative piece of research. This does not mean that it is impossible to evaluate qualitative research, and several guidelines were given as to how this might be done. In this section, I make use of these guidelines to look at ways in which it is possible to evaluate this research.

Seale et al. (2004) suggests that one should look at the completeness of the descriptions given. I feel that this is one of the greatest strengths of this particular piece of research. An effort has been made in all the chapters to present not only the

facts or the bare bones of descriptions, but to engage with the complexity and debate that surrounds many of the topics. An effort has been made to include not only that which is simple, but also to muddy the waters a little through not backing away from contradictions and confusion. In this chapter, the discourses themselves are presented in such a manner that every aspect of them is commented on. They are therefore not merely spoken of but are spoken about and discussed. Every effort has been made to describe the identified discourses fully and completely.

In continuing to evaluate the presentation of the discourses themselves Seale et al. (2004) goes on to suggest that a further criteria which can be used is that of the saturation of the categories. As should be clear from sheer quantity of quotes used during the presentation of the discourse, saturation in this case involved making sure that the categories themselves were rich and full. In addition, speaking of the categories used, it is important that there is consistency in the use of these categories (Seale et al., 2004). In this case, I as the primary researcher mostly carried out the categorization on my own. However, in the initial stages I asked a fellow student, who is also doing discourse analysis, to help me to establish the initial categories.

Credibility according to Seale et al. (2004) refers to the bridge between the researcher's own interpretation of the results, and 'reality', as constructed in the academic literature on the topic. This does not mean that research necessarily has to agree with established knowledge, but it does mean that if the ideas identified in the research differ markedly from established ideas, there must be a reason or an explanation for this. In this particular case, the discourses I identified are related to the ideas presented in the literature review in a number of ways, as was discussed previously. Nothing that I have said contradicts the ideas contained within the academic literature on tattooing. The discourses identified seem to connect themselves more to the second strand of thought identified in the literature review, which relates to a positive view of tattooing which is promoted by the new wave of middle class tattooing. This also relates to the plausibility of the research (Seale et al., 2004) in that it connects this piece of research to already established research.

A further four procedures for evaluating qualitative research are suggested by Potter and Hepburn (2004). They suggest firstly that qualitative research be evaluated in

terms of participant's orientation. This refers to the whether or not it is possible to see the things that the researcher has identified in the texts. In this case, it is not possible to ask the participants for their opinion on the research, due to the anonymity of the texts. Therefore, within the context of this research participants' orientation towards the research is difficult to determine. However, as an alternative the use of more than one person to look at the postings (triangulation, discussed elsewhere) means that the viewpoints of people other than the researcher are included in this study, and this provides some confirmation that it is possible for people other than the researcher to identify the discourses which were highlighted.

Potter and Hepburn's (2004) second procedure involves the analysis of deviant cases, in order to test the robustness of the generalizations that have been made. In the discussion of the discourses above, I have tried to provide examples of deviant cases and explain how they serve to highlight the generalizations and constructions that are being made by the discourses.

The third procedure, coherence, is closely related to what Seale et al. (2004) call plausibility, in that it connects to the way in which the research results relate to the literature on the topic. More broadly, coherence also refers to the internal logic of the research – does the theoretical background match the methodology, and is the literature review conducted in such a manner that it addresses the research question? Is the research conducted in accordance with the methodology, and does it make sense? I have tried to make this piece of research internally coherent and logical, but ultimately I am too close to the research to judge it impartially. This relates to Potter and Hepburn's (2004) forth procedure: reader's evaluation.

In the final analysis, it is the reader who determines the quality of a piece of work. Is it possible for the reader to understand what the research means, and to judge for themselves the conclusions drawn by the researcher? In this way the reader forms an integral part of any piece of qualitative research, in terms of their ability to comment on the research and evaluate it. It could be said that this involves the reader's own construction of the research in terms of usefulness, coherence, credibility and quality.

Summary and conclusions

This chapter has looked in detail at three identified discourses: tattoos as definition/redefinition of the self, getting a tattoo, and tattoo artist as expert. It has also provided an overview of the methods used to access these discourses. In the final sections, the chapter turned towards a discussion concerning the possibility of evaluating this particular piece of research.

In the chapter that follows, all the strands of this research report are drawn together, and evaluated. The strengths and limitations of this study are presented, along with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6:
Conclusion

Introduction

In this final chapter of this research report an overview is offered of the material covered in the report itself. Instead of attempt to merely repeat or summarize what has been said, the chapter aims to synthesise the material presented previously in such a way that it forms a coherent body of knowledge. Therefore, within the context of this chapter what is important is not just what has been said in each of the previous chapters, but how these chapters relate to each other, and come to constitute a single object. The format of this chapter is quite simple. Through presenting key ideas from each of the previous chapters, the reader is reminded of the core features of this research report, and shows the way in which these features build on each other and relate to each other. Finally, concluding comments are made about the nature of this research, as well as recommendations about possibilities for future research.

Conclusions from the literature review

The extensive review of the academic literature on tattooing presented at the beginning of this research report highlighted several key features of tattooing that resonated throughout the rest of the report. In essence, what the chapter portrayed was a picture of tattooing as being about more than just ink, about more than just a

pretty picture inked into the skin. Instead, the review accessed widely varied readings of tattooing, which positioned both the tattoo and the tattooed person in many different ways. These included positive and negative readings of tattoos, a discussion of the specific position of the tattooed female body as well a wide ranging presentation of various theoretical understandings of what it means to be tattooed, and the motivations for being tattooed.

What came out very strongly in the literature review was the presence of a new wave of tattooing that is linked to middle-class ideas and norms about individuality and selfhood. This was seen in the linkage of tattoos to art, consumerism and individuality discourses (Atkinson, 2004; Bengtsson et al., 2005). A lot of the literature presented in the latter part of this section focused on this new wave of tattooing.

What this focus on middle-class tattooing serves to obscure is the continuation of more traditional, deviance based understandings of tattooing (DeMello, 1995). Thus, tattoos are still used by bikers and prisoners as expressions of group identity, but this is something that does not feature prominently within this new wave of theorizing about the changing identity of the tattoo. Thus, the literature review noted this as an area of tattooing which is obscured and remains hidden even within the recent explosion of scholarship in the field of tattooing.

Conclusions from the methodology

Usually the methodology chapter is a short chapter, devoted to a rather simple presentation of the methodology to be used. This was not the case in this research report. Instead, the methodology chapter served as an extension of the literature review in many ways as it presented a survey of the vast and varied field of discourse analysis. This was linked strongly to the chapter that covered the theoretical grounding of this research. The discussion of discourse analysis in the methodology chapter contributes to this research in that it provides a sense of the contested nature of any piece of research. This is in keeping with ideas presented by Macleod (2002) whose article of discourse analysis served as a point of departure for much of the

discussion in the chapter. Results produced by a piece of research are always dependent on the methodology used. In a very basic sense, if you ask a certain type of question you get a certain type of answer. Usually, the impact that the choice of methodology has on the results of research is downplayed, and the methodology is presented as a neutral way in which to access knowledge. In this case, the contribution of the nature of the methodology used to the nature of the results is made explicit through a detailed description of the way in which the decision to use a certain type of methodology, a certain understanding of discourse analysis, was arrived at. Thus, the specific pragmatic conceptualisation of discourse analysis that was used during this research is acknowledged as being a contributing factor in the production of the results.

Conclusions from results

In the results and discussion chapter, three discourses that were identified within the fifty-two postings used were presented in detail. The first of these discourses concerned tattoos as defining or redefining the self. This discourse was initially identified through the frequently repeated idea of falling in love with tattoos that was contained within the postings. Moving on from this initial observation, the discourse was shown to contain a very strong speaking subject, that of the tattooed self that combined the untattooed self with the tattoo, both of which were identified as objects within the discourse. This tattooed self was very powerful within the discourse, and was able to attach meaning to the tattoo as well as able to express their own way of being within the discourse. Access to this discourse is available only to those who have tattoos, and therefore the discourse is by nature exclusionary.

The second discourse identified concerned the process of getting a tattoo, or of being tattooed. Manifested in the narrative of the postings, this discourse involves the person with tattoo (who is separate from the tattoo, unlike in the first discourse) as being able to speak about the process that was undergone in order to get the tattoo. In this discourse, it is the act of having a tattoo, rather than the meaning attached to the tattoo, that forms the central focus. Once again, those people who do not have tattoos are automatically excluded from this discourse.

The third discourse identified looked at the figure of the tattoo artist, and how they are positioned as expert. This is done through their relation to art, but also through the construction of the tattoo artist as being a necessary medium through which to access the acquisition of a tattoo. This discourse constructs the idea that without a tattoo artist it is impossible to have a tattoo, and therefore impossible to access any of the previously mentioned discourses around tattooing. The way in which the artist is constructed to occupy a position of power within this discourse was extensively explored. In addition, the discourse supports the body modification industry and is therefore in turn supported by the this industry.

All three of the discourses discussed presented tattooing and tattoos in different ways. What they have in common is the construction of two specific types of subjects – the tattooed and the untattooed. The untattooed have no power within any of the discourses identified, because they have not experienced being tattooed or having a tattoo. Even within the third discourse, although the person being tattooed is less powerful than the tattoo artist, they still remain more powerful than the untattooed person, who is effectively invisible within this discourse.

A further commonality within the three discourses identified is the way in which they construct tattoos as being positive. In the first discourse they are part of a new self, in the second they are rites of passage, and in the third discourse tattoos are objects of art and beauty bestowed by a tattoo artist who has the ability to convey access to other discourses. These positive readings of tattoos are linked to many of the ideas expressed in the positive readings of tattoos within the literature review.

A third aspect of commonality within these discourses is their exclusive nature. Within each of the discourses only a specific type of subject may speak, and others are constructed as having no power within the discourse. As such, therefore, each of these discourses necessarily obscures other ways of reading and other ways of seeing.

Drawing together the strands

What this summary of conclusions from each chapter provides is an overview of the main ideas contained within this research report. What is important to note is the way in which they build on each other. Together, the literature review and the methodology delineate the field in which this research report positions itself. By making explicit the role of the researcher in designing the methodology the constructed nature of this research is emphasised.

Together, the literature review and the results from the discourse analysis point towards the presence of a large body of work around being tattooed, and imply the presence of a large population of tattooed people who are verbal, active and highly visible. It is this group of tattooed people who are the easiest to access, and (as was pointed out in the literature review and confirmed in the results) this type of tattooing is strongly linked to middle-class ideas around individuality and the right of the individual to make meaning.

Studies like this one, and many of the studies mentioned in the literature review, have contributed significantly towards the increased mainstreaming of tattooing. Tattoos are, in the context of this research report, not seen as deviant but presented as legitimate ways of experiencing the world, free from the labels of pathology, deviance and non-conformity that have dogged the field for so long.

This points towards the broadly positive reading of tattooing that is presented by the discourses discussed, in addition to the studies in the literature review. Each of the three discourses identified sees tattoos as being positive, both in the way in which they construct the tattoo and in the way in which they construct the meaning of having a tattoo. Thus, tattoos are portrayed as not only non-deviant but also as positively empowering and powerful. Tattoos are not neutral within any of the discourses presented, nor are they positioned as such within the literature review.

As has been mentioned before, this overwhelming positivity towards tattooing and tattoos involves the obscuring and ignoring of types of tattoos that do not meet the

expectations of this discourse. In particular, biker tattoos and convict tattoos remain hidden within worldview presented by the positive readings in the literature review and the three discourses identified.

The nature of this research

It is important to note, in this concluding chapter, that in actuality this research has concluded nothing at all, if one is to understand concluded as meaning finished. This report has not categorically proven anything. This is because to prove something true is necessarily to prove something else false, and that is a project that is alien to the entire ethos of this report.

What is provided instead of truth claims are partial and provisional claims, which point towards certain ideas and directions that are felt to be interesting or informative. Their claims are provisional and partial because there is always room for other and different claims. These could be about the discourses highlighted here, about other discourses that could be identified as related to these discourses, or about those discourses that are obscured by this way of speaking and seeing. Discourses are never complete or finished; they are ever changing and growing. Therefore, this research does not provide a complete exposition of a certain discourse but instead looks at discourse from a particular angle at a particular point in time, with the understanding that changing the angle, changing the researcher or viewing the discourse at a different time would change the nature of the results presented here.

What this research does to is expand the ways of speaking about tattooing that are available within academic discourse by pointing to other ways of speaking that might be useful. Thus, it provides a space in which to expand the range of questions that can be asked about the field of tattooing and the range of understandings that are generated, rather than definitively answering any specific question about tattooing as a practice.

Recommendations

This research accessed what is to me a fascinating area of study. The popularity of tattooing currently is by no means fully accounted for, and there remains a great deal of room for a wide variety of studies to look at the field. The range of possibilities open to such studies is endless, as it is also a field that is fairly easily accessible. It is recommended that the field of tattooing be more fully explored within the psychological literature.

An area of particular interest is the website that was used as data source in this research. The website used contains over six thousand postings, of which only fifty-two were used within this study. It is therefore possible that a broader reading of these postings, perhaps one that positions them in chronological order, would be able to access a wide range of different ideas around tattooing. In addition, the proliferation of websites that are about tattoos means that the amount of raw data available on the Internet is virtually unlimited. Several interesting questions could be addressed. What are the differences between postings about tattoos and postings about piercings? Are there differences in the way various tattooing websites present tattoos?

A further recommendation concerns the nature of the research context used in this research, the Internet. The sheer amount of data available on the Internet is impossible to quantify. Websites about almost any topic can be found. The interesting thing about making use of the Internet as the primary research context is that it provides an enormous amount of naturally occurring data, which is freely available for study. This data is ideally suited to being used for discourse analysis as it is naturally occurring and language and text based. Through the analysis of Internet data it is possible to trace the development of discourses in terms of how the various subjects and objects within the discourses come to be constructed.

It is also recommended that future research could perhaps focus on trying too access those discourses that are hidden by the dominant discourses around tattooing presented here. These discourses include understandings about biker tattoos and convict tattoos, as was mentioned earlier.

A final recommendation is that future research may attempt to engage more actively with the research participants within Internet studies. In particular, this might be done through emailing the addresses listed in the postings, in order to access the participants more directly. Ethical concerns would obviously come into play.

Conclusion

In the end, this research aimed at providing a broad discussion of the field of tattooing, backed up with a detailed look at postings taken from a particular website and analysed using a particular methodology, that of discourse analysis. The aim was not to answer questions as to the motivations for tattoo, or the ultimate meaning of having a tattoo but rather to look broadly at the different ways of speaking about tattoos that are available. Through the literature review and the conducted discourse analysis, this goal was met.

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