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Author(s): Sarah C.E. Riley and Sharon Cahill.
Article Title: Managing meaning and belonging: young women's negotiation of authenticity in body art.
Year of publication: 2005
Citation: Riley, Sarah CE and Cahill, S. (2005) 'Managing meaning and belonging: young women's negotiation of authenticity in body art' Journal of Youth Studies, 8(3), pp 261-279.

Link to published version DOI: 10.1080/13676260500261843

Publisher statement:
This is an electronic version of an article published in Journal of Youth Studies, which is available online at: www.tandfonline.com with the open URL
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13676260500261843

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Managing meaning & belonging: Young women's negotiation of authenticity in

Body Art

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Managing meaning & belonging: Young women's negotiation of authenticity in

Body Art

Abstract:

It is a common sense ideology that appearance is vertically representative, in that the outer surface reflects the inner self. This paper explores the impact of this ideology on women's understandings of their Body Art. Meaning and belonging were identified as central themes in accounts produced from two focus groups with young women in Glasgow, Scotland, who had piercings and tattoos. Meaning was constructed through two alternative accounts. First, that Body Art is meaningful because it represents a particular and valued subjectivity (brave, independent, different). Second, that the current popularity in Body Art endangers the vertical representation of the first account, making Body Art meaningless. To claim a meaningful relationship with Body Art our participants drew on discourses of sub-cultural knowledge, 'Othering', authenticity and rights. These discourses show that authenticity continues to be an important account in youth cultures. Authenticity both worked to produce a meaningful personal identity, but also a "mythical mainstream" that denied other young women discursive space from which to explore alternative subjectivities through Body Art.

Keywords: Body Art, women, identity, Othering, authenticity, youth culture

Managing Meaning & Belonging: Negotiating Authenticity with Body Art

Introduction

In its most popular forms of piercings and tattoos, Body Art is an established aspect of contemporary youth consumption practices in the UK and other industrialized nations. The current interest in Body Art has been traced to what can be considered a renaissance in Body Art that started in the 1960s, a renaissance that incorporated a diversity of people, including those involved in gay scenes, S&M, the avant garde, hippie culture, and the working class (Rubin, 1987). In the mid 1980s Body Art had become incorporated into fashion culture, associated with the music industry, celebrities and fashion designers. By the 1990s, Body Art was a normative aspect in the appearance of participants of particular youth subcultural scenes, such as clubbers, ravers, and 'new age travellers', finally spilling over to become an established part of youth culture by the end of that decade (Featherstone, 2000).

In this paper we examine the meanings used to explain participation in Body Art that were drawn upon by a group of young women in Glasgow, Scotland. These meanings are analysed in terms of the role of Body Art in enabling particular identities. We examine these identities within the context of Body Art having become an established and normalized youth practice, which has the potential to decouple previous associations of Body Art with counter cultural or rebellious identities (Fisher, 2002; Sullivan, 2001).

Historical references to Body Art show it to have had multiple meanings and uses. For example Body Art demonstrated virility and courage for the

Romans, aided sexual pleasure in the Karma Sutra, and was used to reduce visible bulges in the fashionable, but tight trousers worn by Britain's Prince Albert. This multiplicity of meanings is recognized in contemporary analyses that highlight the ambiguity in reading Body Art symbolically. For example, Finkelstein (1997) argues that Body Art "can be seen to recuperate the practices of 'primitive' peoples, but they can also evoke a technoculture in which semi-criminalized individuals are identified by numbers and body-brandings" (p. 162). This association of Body Art with "primitives", slaves, and criminals is a historical legacy from western culture's Imperialist and Christian inheritance. People with Body Art have been considered problematic through a racist ideology that negatively associated Body Art practices with activities considered uncivilized, it is not "the rational choice of an enlightened individual, but constitutes instead a primitive response more usually associated with the uncivilized behavior of 'savages'" (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995, p. 139). Body Art is further problematized, in that for some Christians it is considered to be an act that defaces the image of God. This association of Body Art with the "uncivilized" provides the framework for the dominant representation of Body Art within contemporary western culture as negative, problematic, deviant and pathological.

In psychology, the negative associations of Body Art have worked to create a climate that problematizes Body Art. Psychology has in general tended to ignore issues of embodiment (Sampson, 1998), and Body Art is no exception. However, the work that has been done has tended to approach Body Art as symptomatic of psychopathology, either in terms of health risks (such as HIV infection) or in

terms of sexual or criminal deviancy, (see Cahill & Riley, 2001 for a review). In this perspective BA was also linked to mutilation and abuse (especially for women). While the relationship between self mutilation and experience of past physical abuse maybe strong, we along with others (e.g. Ferguson, (1999) and Sullivan (2001)) reject the notion that Body Art should be automatically understood as mutilation. Indeed, Ferguson's summary of the evidence to the British Medical Journal argues that it is a "widely held misconception that most people get pierced for self harm" (p. 1627). Similarly, elsewhere Riley has argued "(m)utilation may be an important analytical tool in understanding certain practices of Body Art, but it cannot, and should not, be the only one … not allowing for alternative understandings of Body Art … fulfils the traditional (and I would argue oppressive) academic standpoint to Body Art, which has approached the subject … with the question 'What particular pathologies do these people have?" (2002, p542).

The pathologizing of Body Art has not been so dominant elsewhere in the social sciences. Academics in sociology and anthropology have noted the deviancy stereotypes, but have argued that people with Body Art often did not fulfil them. Instead their research focused on what Body Art symbolized and the reasons for getting involved. Much of this work highlighted the role Body Art played in identity projects (Sweetman, 1999), exploring the role of Body Art in the production of group, dyadic, and personal identities, represented for example, in tattoos of navy insignia, lover's names or one's zodiac sign (e.g. Sanders, 1989). Such work theorized Body Art as a vehicle for the active construction of identity

in response to living in our socio-historic period, which Giddens (1991), for example, would described as high modernity. Shifts in social structures has meant that people who live in industrialized nations experience a greater level of insecurity than in the past, which has led to the body becoming an important site for self identity. This "tightening relationship between the self and the body" (Shilling, 1993, p. 7) means that the body becomes both an important resource in the production of individualized identities and a social symbol of the person's self-identity. For some analysts the increase in Body Art is a sign of an open society in which people have greater freedom to play with identity; while for others, it is evidence of increased alienation, of a people who have little but their bodies to turn to for some sense of control (Rubin, 1987). Whichever perspective taken, of Body Art representing a story of psychological health or of damage, these theorists were drawing on an understanding of 'vertical representation' to make sense of Body Art.

Vertical representation is the idea that our outer surface reflects the inner self, and can be understood as providing a common sense ideology (Billig et al., 1988) that structures our sense making on Body Art. Writing on tattooing, Sullivan (2001) discusses vertical representation when she describes how tattoos are often considered to represent a person's personality or type. In academic and other literature she notes that tattoos are understood as representing a problematic personality. This understanding enables a counter discourse in which people with Body Art argue that Body Art represents a celebrated rebellious personality. Sullivan (2001) notes that these oppositional positions are part of the same

argument, in that they share a "depth model of the subject" (p. 20) in which there is a causal relationship between interiority and exteriority.

In our earlier work on young women's experiences of Body Art, we also identified vertical representation as a framework employed by our participants to make sense of their Body Art (Cahill & Riley, 2001). Our 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 (Geertz, 1984), a similar argument identified in Widdicombe & Wooffitt's (1995) work with Goths, Punks and Hippies, for whom "aspects of appearance are … construed as vehicles through which to exhibit the 'true' self" (p. 145). In positioning their outer appearance as harmoniously reflecting their inner person, the participants in our previous work were able to use the authentic self to construct themselves as psychologically healthy, because they were people who were "in touch" with themselves. Arguing that Body Art reflected a person who was in touch with themselves served to inoculate our participants against the discourses of deviancy and pathology more often associated with Body Art. In this paper we examine the use of Body Art in the construction of particular identity projects by analyzing the content of our participant's "authentic" selves. We do this by asking two questions: What are the subject positions enabled through Body Art? And, what kind of discursive work is involved in negotiating these positions?

Method

Our data comes from an opportunity sample recruited through personal contacts, approaching women in bars, and placing advertisements in pubs and

clubs. 15 women came to one of two focus groups held at the home of one of the authors (SC) in Glasgow, Scotland. In keeping with a discourse analytic approach, the authors' aim was not to present material from a representative sample, but to access some of the repertoires available that young women use to make sense of their Body Art (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Our participants were aged between 16 and 31, the majority being under 25 years old. Using UK Census ethnicity categories, most of the participants defined themselves as 'white British', two as 'mixed ethnicity' and one person as 'white-other' (French). Navel, mouth, eyebrow, nose and tongue piercings were the most common, with eight participants having more than one piercing. While tattoos were less prevalent, five women had more than one tattoo, the most common areas for them being on the arms, shoulders and back. No participants reported engaging with more 'extreme' forms of Body Art such as scarification, brandings, body modification or flesh hangings.

Our analysis examines women's experience of Body Art as a negotiated practice using a feminist social constructionist approach (e.g. Willott & Griffin, 1997) in which identity is conceptualised as being constituted discursively (Lewis, 2003); as something that we do, rather than something that we are (Griffin, 1989); and as culturally, historically and politically located (Hall, 1987). We draw upon Foucauldian notions of power to explore the plurality of cultural meanings in everyday common sense making to examine the "subtle, pervasive and ambiguous processes of discipline and normalization through cultural representations" (Davis, 1997, p. 11). However, we are as equally concerned with pleasure,

freedom, and transgression, as we are with constraint, compliance, and domination. We therefore employ a form of analysis that explores what is enabled and disenabled in discourse, using a multi-level form of discursive analysis that examines the orientation of talk to its local interactive contingencies while situating it in its wider structural context (e.g. Riley, 2002a). This approach analyses talk in relation to construction, function and the rhetorical organisation of accounts. Speakers are understood as drawing from discourses available in their social milleu to make sense of themselves. Since there are many ways to describe a state of affairs there will be variation in participants talk, what is important therefore is not the 'truth' of the account, but what particular reality the talk is creating at that moment and the consequences or function of constructing that particular reality. We also drew on 'Post-Subcultural' theorizing (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003), in particular Thornton's (1995) concept of taste cultures, in which the mobilization of subcultural capital is understood as creating status, boundaries and identities. The discursive psychological approach described above was thus used to examine the discursive management of subcultural capital in the production of meaning and belonging for our participants.

The extracts we present are exemplars of a body of instances of the themes we identified. Some extracts are presented as examples of a theme, with others we work up a more detailed analysis to show the warranting practices of these accounts. Focus groups were employed to provide access to the interactive nature of everyday sense making, and so our analysis also includes an examination of group dynamics where appropriate (Wilkinson, 1999). All participants were given

pseudonyms except for the researchers, Sharon and Sarah. All places, such as piercing studios and nightclubs, were also given false names. (See appendix for transcription notation).

Analysis

We describe four themes. First, our participants drew on an account in which Body Art represented a particular kind of subjectivity that involved what we called "being your own person". In the second account, "cultural dilution", the subjectivities enabled through Body Art were described as being threatened by the popularity of Body Art. The way the threat to identity from the popularity of Body Art was negotiated is examined in the third and fourth themes, "mobilizing subcultural knowledge' and "Othering", respectively.

Managing meaning 1: Being your own person.

Extract 1

Sharon: I saw it as part of being <u>brave</u>, because I always go on my own (.) and it's kind of a bit like (.) I am my own woman and I can go and do exactly what I want and I can do it on my own [general agreement murmurs] I don't need anybody to come and hold me hand (.) do you know what I mean?

In extract one a subjectivity of being brave, independent ("I always go on my own", "I don't need anybody to come and hold me hand") and agentic ("I can do it on my own") is produced through the action of going to have Body Art done without being kept company. Being brave and being independent enough to make the decision and plan the action to have the Body Art is positioned as something positive and deliberate amounting to individual ownership of the action and

therefore of the end product. There is also an implication that this subjectivity is gendered, since "I am my own woman" could be read both as a statement of autonomy and as a claim against an understanding of femininity that is less compatible with traits of bravery and independence.

Extract 2

Yolanda: I was the only person in the class with their nose pierced (.) I felt really cool.

Extracts one and two are examples of the many comments our participants made about Body Art representing a subjectivity of being brave, independent, different or cool. The power of Body Art to enable such valued subjectivities can be seen in our participants' use of "cool". It is extremely difficult to successfully make a claim to be cool, since you are vulnerable to counter claims that you are not. That Body Art could enable such a claim to be maintained (the others did not challenge these statements) shows just how powerful it is as a symbolic system. While in extract one Sharon draws on an identity of being female, in extract two Yolanda does not gender herself, positioning either herself or the notion of 'cool' as ungendered in that instance.

Examining the 'being your own person' subjectivity further, we explored what our participants said they were not, as much as who they said they were. Thornton (1995) argues "the logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn't" (p. 105), and what these women most emphatically are not, if you will allow us to make a cultural reference to the film *Grease*, is Sandra Dee.

Extract 3

Moira: the girls I went to school with (.) my high school (.) erm (.) none of them have got anything pierced apart from their ears (.) they're totally (.) no tattoos (..) you know (.) they hardly drink, they don't smoke, they just (.) they're very (..) I don't know (.) I suppose perfectly acceptable (.) if you want to put it that way you know (.) they don't do anything.

The subjectivity ascribed to women with Body Art is one that can be understood as challenging traditional feminine positions. Our participants talked of using their bodies to demonstrate and experience acts of bravery, independence, and action; resisting more traditional notions of femininity that are defined in terms of fragility, dependence, and passivity (Bem, 1993). It is possible to challenge our standpoint and see our participants as reproducing traditional femininity by engaging in harmful or painful practices in honour of the beauty myth (Wolf, 1991). Jeffreys (2000) for example, makes such an argument, describing body art as a harmful cultural practice that is legitimised through discourses of self-help, liberation and/or beauty and placing Body Art "on a continuum of harmful cultural practices that include self-mutilation in private, transsexual surgery, cosmetic surgery and other harmful western beauty practices" (p. 409). However, we argue that our participants are doing something more than practicing modern forms of the beauty myth, primarily because their actions are not directed towards an evaluation by the male gaze. Indeed, in our previous work we describe how the male gaze is described a highly problematic as it positioned these women within discourses of sexual deviancy (Cahill & Riley, 2001).

We also support our standpoint that our participants can use Body Art to resist traditional notions of femininity, by locating our participants' accounts within a wider discussion that questions the dominant feminist positioning of fashion as oppressive. For example, both Craik (1994) and Wilson (1992) have argued that fashion can be used to critique the dominant social culture and allow participants to explore alternative forms of embodied subjectivity. "(W)hen fashion is understood in aesthetic terms (as a manner of ordering, categorizing and enchanting the lived milieu) then … it assumes a more radical potential" (Finkelstein, 1997, p. 161).

In his seminal book on subcultures Hebdige (1979) argued that each subculture is a product of its time, and while our participants may have used Body Art to challenge traditional femininities, as with all of us, they did not stand outside their culture. We situate our participants' accounts in their socio-historic context and note that the celebration of the individual that is part of western culture (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995) is reflected in the subjectivities our participants claim through Body Art.

Extract 4:

Rachel: I do feel a bit of a different person [without her piercings in] and don't (.) am conscious of (.) because when I don't have it in people weren't looking and staring at me I'm just sort of another person you know (.) do you know what I mean? (.) that's why I kinda like I don't know

[

Yolanda: I think it's kinda

Rachel: but I do kinda prefer ma face I do (.) more (.) I don't know ma face does

look different when I don't have it in

[

Yolanda: yeah you are more interesting

For our participants Body Art demonstrates a person who is different, who

not only possesses traits such as bravery, but also demonstrates them in their

behaviors. Indeed, we could argue that our participants drew on a social

constructionist understanding that being brave is not something you are but

something you do (e.g. Gergen, 2001). Body Art becomes, then, a site in which

one can engage in acts that celebrate and empower the self.

Extract 5:

Lisa: you meet a lot of people like this [mimes shy] and they just need to like

come out of their shell and one piercing or something would do that (.) you

know=

Tina: because it gives them a bit of power (.) like they are changing

Moira: I think that was me really

[

Kit: I found it really expressive

In extract five Body Art is constructed as a medium that allows powerful

and personal transformation. Lisa starts this account by stating that "you meet a

lot of people". In saying "a lot of people" she presents her account as a common

situation and not gendered, an argument that is strengthened with the word "you",

which positions her call to knowledge, not as a singular personal experience, but

one shared by the group. The single generalized act of "just one piercing or something" that can enable change ("come out of their shell") positions Body Art as powerful enough to be an almost magical act, an understanding taken up by Tina who takes over Lisa's story "because it gives them a bit of power". Here power is constructed not in terms of control, but as the opportunity to be a particular type of person. This account gives us a sense of a person experiencing personal development, "come(ing) out of their shell" to become open and creative. That Body Art can enable personal transformation is an account that resonates with Moira and Kit, the two younger members of this focus group. In extract 3 we found Moira condemning the girls in her school "they don't do anything". Can we locate Moria's as a Sandra Dee – she admits that "I think that was me really"- she took the opportunity to be a different person through engaging with Body Art. While, in extract 3 Moria's comparison group is female, and so we may read a particular gendered identity being rejected (she doesn't want to be a girl that doesn't do anything), Body Art is also positioned in non-gendered terms, allowing young people to experience the feeling of being individual and interesting (extract 4) or enabling self-development and expression (extract 5).

We can situate the account of Body Art as empowering within a Modern Primitives argument, in that Body Art can be understood as producing a context that provides a challenge and an opportunity to show bravery (Vale & Juno, 1989). Certainly, some of our participants described Body Art as providing such a venue, as in extract six below.

Extract 6:

Laura: [talking about tattoos] it's definitely addictive and it's definitely sexy

getting it done (.)

Moira: yeah

Laura: I know it's (.) you're in control of the pain (.) you get used to the pain until

its not pain any more and

Lisa: it feels good because it's something (.) you're taking power of your own

body

The extracts above work to show a theme of Body Art as representing an

empowered subjectivity, an identity project that enabled creativity, freedom and

power. However, when our participants noted the popularity of Body Art among

young people, a second, and contradictory, theme emerged. We called this second

theme "cultural dilution" as it described how the ability to read particular

subjectivities through Body Art becomes threatened. After all it is difficult to be

brave, independent and different if so many other people are being brave,

independent and different in exactly the same way.

Managing meaning 2: cultural dilution.

Extract 7:

Kit: do I really want everyone to be walking down the street an' an' and just think

"oh another one" you know (.) I did want to be different in a way

Extract 8:

Lisa: there's no magic about it [Body Art] so it makes it less extreme (.) you know

it's just (.)

Sarah: hmm

Lisa: like doctors surgery or something

Sharon: so do you think there is no magic about it?

Lisa: now yeah yeah (.) for some people it's lost (.) for some people there's still a bit underground there (.) it's still used (.) pleasure piercing (.) play piercings like and er even flesh hangings (.) still happen

Sharon: uh huh

Lisa: but like you go to a piercing convention and you see a flesh hanging! I think that's insane (.) you know

Sharon: uh huh

Lisa: you're not meant to be=

Sharon: its very commercial

Lisa: yeah (.) fashion has brought people [to Body Art] with totally different ideas and with different consciousness than me and they're getting pierced and I think (.) fuck where're these people coming from.

In extract eight, Lisa again raises the possibility of understanding Body Art as magical (see extract five above). However in this context she rejects an understanding of Body Art as magical by equating the act of Body Art in terms of being as institutional and conventional as going to the doctors. The magic and mysterious nature of Body Art when understood as an underground practice associated with modern primitivism is lost as Body Art becomes incorporated into the dominant culture, represented in this case as going to the doctors. Later in the

focus group, Moria also drew on this account when questioning the validity of Body Art available in the everyday context of the market.

Having established that Body Art has lost its magic, Lisa then explores the counter argument, considering particular Body Art practices to represent an active underground that can still give Body Art meaning and not relegate it to a supermarket style (Polhemus, 1995). However, her considerations of flesh hangings and their use as human decoration at conventions ("I think that's insane") leads her to construct a "sandwich" structure argument of account – counter claim – account (Riley, 2003), which enables her to support her original position that meanings are no longer shared between people who practice Body Art ("and I think (.) fuck where're these people coming from").

The argument that there are multiple meanings in subcultural practices as more people engage with them was also identified by Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) in their study on Goth, Punk and Hippy subcultures. Widdicombe & Wooffitt's participants described their particular subcultures as having a unified ideological past, which they compare to themselves as present day members, who they describe as having multiple and personal meanings attached to their participation. Widdicombe & Wooffitt interpret this rhetoric as allowing their participants to inoculate against being positioned within a collectivist identity, which "implies a loss of individuality and consequently implicates self-inauthenticity" (p. 205). In extract 8 above, we argue a different warranting is in effect. Lisa differs from Widdicombe & Wooffitt's participants because her claim on the past shared consciousness (or ideology) is a personal one. This allows her

to claim authenticity, in terms of being someone who understands the original meanings of Body Art practices and who can therefore warrant her claims and concerns about shifts in meanings and the lack of a shared ideology.

The discourse of cultural dilution makes vulnerable an understanding of Body Art through vertical representation, since changes in Body Art practices mean that Body Art no longer represents a meaningful relationship to one's identity, rather it is a commercial activity done for fashion. Our participants drew on two accounts to negotiate the threat from cultural dilution to their "be your own person'" subjectivities that they presented through Body Art. Our participants positioned themselves as having belonging or rights to a discourse of meaningful Body Art first, by demonstrating sub-cultural knowledge and second, by positioning others as without meaning.

Managing belonging 1: mobilizing subcultural knowledge.

The claim for an authentic identity in relation to Body Art was gained through the use of exclusive language and information about Body Art. For example, the group showed knowledge and membership of the contemporary Glasgow Body Art scene, such as describing how they were recognized by a person that ran a respected piercing studio, or that they had knowledge of the history of Body Art. These arguments worked to show that they had been part of the scene for some time, allowing them to claim that their Body Art had a meaningful relationship to their identities, since such knowledge and claims to longevity demonstrate commitment, interest and authenticity (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995).

Mobilizing subcultural knowledge thus enabled these participants to avoid being

positioned within the cultural dilution discourse.

Extract 9:

Moria: yeah, I'm going to Space [a piercing studio] tomorrow

Tina: right

Lisa: who works there now?

Moria: I don't know exactly

Lisa: Karen?

Moria: short dark hair (.) got her lip done there=

Lisa: <u>short</u> dark hair?

Moria: its short now there (.) lots up her ears (..) very tall

     [

     Lisa: tall girl?

Moria: yeah

Tina: she's just changed her hair [laughs]

Lisa: yeah (.) she's changed her hair

Extract nine is an example of our participants demonstrating social

knowledge. When Moira cannot answer Lisa's question of who works at the

studio neither of these women finish the conversation. Moira ends her comment

with some ambiguity as to her ignorance, she "doesn't know exactly", which

opens up the possibility for Lisa to ask "Karen?". Since Moira has stated she

doesn't know the people that work at this studio she cannot name them, so she

does the next best thing and gives a description, the woman's appearance in terms

of hair and facial piercing. When a debate ensues about the length of the woman's hair, there is a slightly longer than usual pause (..) and then they both describe a less changeable aspect of the woman, her height. Tina joins the conversation recognizing they are discussing the same woman, and then Lisa finishes this part of the discussion making it clear that she knows this woman ("she's changed her hair").

Considering the group dynamics, we note that Lisa was particularly experienced in the Body Art world, being a tattoo artist herself, and we saw her work up her expertise through such questioning of the other women.

Within the focus groups generally there was sometimes a measure of competitiveness about cultural knowledge, and who could present the most authentic story. We argue that this demonstrates the importance of cultural knowledge and that it is important because such talk enables the participants to position themselves as having 'subcultural capital'. Thornton (1995), drawing on Bourdieu (e.g. 1984), uses the concept of subcultural capital to argue that the knowledge and behaviors people have determine whether they are accepted and can claim membership of social groups. Subcultural capital involves knowledge and social skills, knowing the right people and being able to successfully interact with them, this allows observation, inclusion and ultimately the ability to create one's own social and cultural capital. Social and cultural knowledge of Body Art, which in this example was of the local scene, thus allowed our participants to claim a meaningful and authentic identity.

Managing belonging 2: "Othering".

A second way our participants maintained meaning was to construct another group, to which they did not belong, as being the ones without authenticity. The discursive act of positioning a group of people as different (and usually inferior) to you has been explored through the notion of 'Othering' (e.g. Said, 1978; Hall, 1997). As Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) argue "(o)ne of the primary resources for establishing one's own claims for authenticity is to undermine the authenticity of other people's motivations for joining a subculture" (p. 151). The 'Other' for our participants were people who were 'unthinking' consumers of Body Art for fashion.

Extract 10:

Moria: believe me that its [Body Art] come into fashion now (.) yeah I know I've only had my piercings really recently (.) but it was a change in my life you know I changed from this really (.) sort of straight laced person (.) do whatever my friends did (.)

Sarah: hm

Moria: and now I mean I walk into my local pub and (..) its (.) [the pub] totally different and everyone (.) but erm there's a girl in my class and she's a very lovely person (.) but she is (..) not into (.) like (.) [to Kit] how'do describe Kerry?

Kit: e:rm (.) well you know there's like Apaché, the Maze [nightclubs] [laughter] on a Saturday night [laughter] … [the group then discusses if Apaché is a bad club and agree it is on a Saturday]

Moira: and she saw my tongue pierced and she was like 'oh (.) I really think that's nice (.) you know I think I might get it done' (.) and I was like to her "you should

probably think about it for a bit (.) because its not the kind of thing that you should just (.) get done" and er (.) two weeks later she came back and she said to me "do you mind that I got it done" and I was like "no of course not its up to you" but inside I was absolutely seething that she had just taken it so light heartedly [Moira is interrupted by a doorbell, that Sharon gets up to answer] ... she saw mine decided it was nice and wanted it done and just got it done (.) but sounding really nasty she's not the kind of person that could get it done, thought's like a novelty almost.

In extract ten Moira negotiates entitlement and meaning to Body Art. She starts by stating that Body Art has become fashionable, but in doing so she is vulnerable to being positioned as someone whose participation in Body Art is motivated by fashion since she does not have longevity in the Body Art scene and so could be understood as part of this recent trend. Moira inoculates against being positioned as a "fashionista" by raising the possibility that she is part of this recent trend ("yes I know I've only had my piercings really recently"), but then rejects this argument by positioning her Body Art as deeply meaningful, significant, and personal ("it was a change in my life"). Having established her meaningfulness in relation to Body Art, Moria then develops a critique of others who have recently engaged in Body Art.

Moira presents a narrative in which she enters the everyday communal public location of the local pub (bar) to find that Body Art no longer acts to differentiate a person from the norm, instead "it's totally different and everyone". We read this statement as suggesting a notion that everyone in the pub now has

Body Art. Moira, however, does not develop this account, but instead explains her position with a story of another woman's engagement with Body Art. This story that acts as an example of cultural dilution, in which someone (Kerry) according to Moira fails to engage with Body Art in a meaningful way. To describe Kerry, Moira enlists the help of her friend Kit, who "Others" Kerry by negatively locating her within another arena of subcultural knowledge that might be shared by cool young women, nightclubs. The naming of these two clubs, Apaché and the Maze, works as a collapsed social act, in that in two words the focus group participants are expected to understand what kind of person Kerry is, and that she has low subcultural capital. However, initially Kit's talk is only partially successful. While there is some laughter that demonstrates a shared understanding with Kit, there is also a rejection of this position, Lisa overtly disagrees "no (.) I've been on a Sunday and that was actually all right". The group then discusses their experiences of this nightclub and conclude by positioning it as having variable subcultural capital, depending on the night. That this conclusion was retro-actively presented by Kit herself "well you know there's like Apaché, the Maze (.) [laughter] on a Saturday night" suggests to us that she may have seen disagreement on Lisa's face, and inoculated against disagreement by adding the caveat of "on a Saturday night".

Moira then takes up her story about Kerry. Having established the low subcultural status of Kerry, Moira describes how Kerry saw Moira's tongue piercing, described it as "nice" and was informed that Body Art was not something to enter into in such a frivolous manner "it's not the kind of thing that

you should just (.) get done". However, this is what Kerry does, much to Moria's chagrin. It is interesting to note that in this story Kerry is also aware that her piercing might be problematic to Moira, and, perhaps much the same way as you might buy the same dress as a friend, Kerry asks of Moira "do you mind"? There is room here therefore for this story to be one about the irritation of imitation however it is contextualised specifically about Body Art "she's not the kind of person that could get it done". In this way Kerry is positioned as not belonging or having meaning in relation to her Body Art, instead she is positioned within a discourse of fashion as frivolity (Finkelstein, 1997) and thus her involvement is light-hearted and motivated by an unthinking personality "thought's like a novelty almost".

Moira's account shares much in common with Widdicombe & Wooffitt's (1995) Goths, Punks and Hippies who established the shallowness and triviality of others through a characterization of the motivations of these others in terms of either fashion, a lack of interest in subcultural values, or as a transitory involvement. In comparison, "(g)enuine members have a personal moral investment in the subculture and their commitment is characterized as deep and protracted, and based in intrinsic feelings, desires or other aspects of themselves" (p. 155).

In the above extract, as with much of the data (see for another example, extract 3) Moira's comparison group is female, so although much of her talk regarding Body Art is not explicitly gendered, there is an implication that a female identity is being worked into these accounts of authenticity and subcultural

capital. For our participants a gendered identity in relation to Body Art appears to act as a master status identity, ever present, but rarely explicit.

Conclusions

It has been argued that in the current socio-historic position (whether one chooses to call it late modernity, high modernity or postmodernist) shifts in social structures have led to a focus on individual identity projects becoming central in the production of self. Identity projects have often focused on the body, and the increase in Body Art can be related to this (Sweetman, 1999). In this paper we examined the kind of selves being constructed though Body Art, and identified a subject position of 'being your own person', someone who is independent, brave, and even cool. This self was understood as meaningful and able to claim belonging to a meaningful identity through claims of subcultural knowledge and 'Othering'. The meaningful self was therefore contrasted with an 'Other', constructed as people who practiced Body Art as part of its rise in popular culture and whose practices were related to fashion and consumption. The discourses of authenticity, subcultural knowledge and Othering thus enabled the mobilisation of subcultural capital through boundary making, status construction, and identity production. The ability to make one's Body Art based identity meaningful thus rested on the ability to claim authenticity.

The tension between behaviours motivated by fashion/consumption and those by 'authentic' identity projects is a historic one. For New Subcultural Theorists authenticity was central since an authentic subculture was one generated at street level, rather than as a commercial enterprise, given that subcultural

practices represented a "creative resistance of their [working class] subordination and to dominant culture and its values" (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995, p. 19). Authenticity was also understood as central for members of youth subcultures, for example Hebdige (1979/1997) argued that as a subculture becomes popular members often make a distinction based on authenticity between those who are understood as having a valid claim to subcultural membership and those who are somehow less authentic, the "hangers on" who form an "unimaginative majority" (Hebdige, 1997, p. 141).

However, this emphasis on authenticity was subsequently challenged. For example, McRobbie (1989) rejected the position that youth subcultures originate in an authentic state and then become colonized by the media and those with a commercial interest. McRobbie argued that it ideologically suited both academics and participants to understand subcultures in this way. Instead, she argued that commerce and subcultures are far more symbiotic. For example, McRobbie discussed shops that sold Punk clothes and accessories (particularly Malcolm McClaren's shop) to argue that even the most anti-consumerist of subcultures engaged with commercial practices very early on in its origins. Other examples include the way bands need and use the media to publicize their gigs, as much as the media needs to demonstrate knowledge of youth movements to show they are in touch with future trends. Similarly Clarke (1981/1997), while not rejecting the authenticity account completely, also draws on the interrelational nature of style and media to critique traditional youth style research for over crediting the initial members of a subculture with creativity at the expense of those who appropriate it

once it has become a marketed product. The relationship between members of a subculture and those with wider commercial interests is further cemented in more recent theorizing of consumption. Identity projects that are part of the neo-liberal subject situate consumption as central in the production of contemporary selves (Lodziak, 2002), a position most clearly articulated in the (albeit playful) maxim seen in some UK department stores 'I shop therefore I am'. From this theoretical perspective then, the discourses of authenticity versus consumption found in the accounts our participants used to make sense of themselves, would not be expected.

Billig (e.g. Billig, et al., 1988) argues that it is useful to examine people's accounts in terms of dilemmatic thinking, in that the way we argue and think is often structured through a binary or 'dilemmatic' rhetorical format. The distinction between authenticity and consumption enabled our participants to produce two dilemmatic accounts. First, participants' talk constructed a dilemma of "in-group versus public". A narrative was produced in which Body Art was the domain of an in-group, people who were socially connected, knew each other, or of each other, and who shared values and social knowledge. Body Art is then understood as moving into the public domain, becoming the practice of people who relate to Body Art in a manner that is casual, disrespectful and has no shared values. The in-group is attributed meaning while those considered as public are positioned as meaningless. The ability to bestow meaning is enabled through the second form of dilemmatic thinking that of "meaningfulness versus fashion".

Body art was constructed as meaningful if it is done in the name of personal values or identification with a youth subculture or taste subculture (what our participants would have called the "underground" or "body art scene"). In comparison, those whose engagement with Body Art is attributed to fashion are not given entitlement to claims of personal values or group membership and therefore have no claim to meaningful behavior. As Widdicombe & Wooffitt (1995) note in their study "authenticity was warranted through the description of more genuine motivations, for example, the emergence and realisation of deeply held personal feelings and desires" (p. 156)[i].

Finkelstein (1997) argued that "there has been a strong intellectual tendency to condemn fashion as a frivolity" (p. 152) and we can see this understanding being used to work up our participants' constructions of Body Art. By absenting an account of fashion as liberating, in the sense that identities can be constructed through consumption, access to Body Art and participating in its practices, such as being tattooed, is not enough to be understood as meaningful. From a social psychological perspective this can be interpreted through conventional assumptions about authenticity and sincerity, since judgments of meaningfulness are based on what motivates the person to do the act, not the act itself (Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). For subcultural theorists, such as Thornton (1995), it is the ability to demonstrate cultural knowledge, social network membership, and social skills that make one's acts meaningful and hence are understood as subcultural capital. It is this subcultural capital that our participants drew on to position their acts as authentically motivated, a positioning that allows

them to create cultural and social stratification, to label others as "fashionista" and themselves as meaningful. Authenticity remains, therefore, an available discourse because it functions to enable a claim to a positive subject position (brave, independent etc.).

In the absence of consumption-identity arguments those who became constructed as engaging in Body Art for fashion were understood as inauthentic. We draw parallels between this account and what Thornton (1995), in her study of clubs and music, identified as the "mythical mainstream".

Discussing music preferences, Thornton (1995) describes how people position their own music tastes as positive by comparing themselves to others that they call the "mainstream". The mainstream are people who enjoy chart music as meaningful, in the sense that they claim it to be something other than light entertainment. Thornton argues that the mainstream does not exist, and hence is mythical, but that the concept is used to create an inferior other, a tasteless person, who is without subcultural capital. We argue that a similar working occurs in our study through the accounts of authenticity and cultural dilution.

Furthermore, Thornton notes that the people most likely to buy and enjoy pop music, the mythical mainstream, are young working class women. She argues that the critique against these women is no accident, but an act that draws on class prejudices and sexism.

In our study too, we can explore the impact of not giving discursive meaning to the "fashionistas" and the absence of accrediting creativity to those who appropriate their style from the market (Clarke, 1981/1997). Kerry, the

young woman in the pub that Moira is so infuriated by, who also comes from a culture where young women "don't do anything" (see extract 1), but who has entered a piercing studio, had her tongue clamped, pierced, fitted with a large bar, has been unable to eat solids for a week, and returned to have a smaller bar fitted once the swelling has gone down; is not entitled to have her practices attributed to individualism. Her piercing is not empowering, she is not understood as using Body Art to aspire to something different, she cannot make a claim to be cool.

A discourse analytic approach is interested in what particular reality an account constructs and in the consequence or function of that construction. In this paper we have identified the continued use of the authenticity account in making sense of participating in youth taste cultures, and have argued that it functions to legitimate a claim to a meaningful relationship with Body Art. Authenticity works to provide an exciting and valued identity (brave, true to self, independent). However, while authenticity was used to empower and define our participants, it could only exist in contrast to an alternative negatively valued subject position, the 'Other' or fashionista. Authenticity is thus a discourse that also works to divide young people, allowing women to devalue other women by denying them meaning.

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Appendix: Transcription notation

The transcription notation is used is as follows:

(.) a pause of less than 0.5 second

(..) a pause between 0.5-1 second

[laughs] non verbal information is presented in square brackets

underlining shows emphasis

= denotes no perceptible gap between one person talking and another

[between two speakers shows simultaneous talk

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[i] Widdicombe & Wooffitt's (1995) participants focused on personal characteristics and rarely drew on their identification with their subcultural membership when constructing meaningful identities. This was interpreted by the researchers as the participants'

resistance to being situated within a dominant cultural discourse that positioned collective identities as inferior. Our participants did not belong to an identifiable specific subculture, but had plural and more loosely organized collective identities based around Body Art, clubbing and other youth oriented activities. We surmise that in the context of our focus groups our participants were therefore less vulnerable to problematic understandings of collective identities, and so could drawn upon group membership derived identities as well as interpreting Body Art through personal discourses.