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A Qualitative Exploration of the Psychological Meaning of Body Piercing in Women.

Hunt, Justine

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INTRODUCTION

The central aim of this research was to ascertain the psychological meaning of, and motivation for body piercing in a sample of female body modifiers. It was decided to conduct research on the psychology of body piercing because although medical, anthropological and social research has been conducted into piercing practices and body modification, very little has focused on the underlying psychological meanings and motivations associated with body modification. Furthermore, the focus of this study was limited to women because it was felt that had both genders been included, possibly gender based differences would have caused the scope of the research project to become too wide. By focusing specifically on women, it was felt that a deeper understanding of the underlying psychological motivations for the piercing of the female body could be explored.

For the purposes of this research, the operational definition of body piercing is defined as that which does not echo mainstream fashion trends or promote Eurocentric, socially sanctioned ideals of beauty. The participants needed to have pierced body parts (excluding their earlobes), and the piercings or the piercing process should hold specific significance and meaning for them. Participants who had pierced body parts only for aesthetic reasons were excluded from this study. Those who were included attributed more than just a decorative function and aesthetic value to their body piercings. In other words, they deviated from mainstream piercing practices in terms of the meanings they attach to their piercings. Some of the piercings and piercing practices and processes undertaken by the participants represent a departure from the 'norm', and have been described as bordering on pathological.

The research sought to identified commonalities and differences amongst the participants and to understand their experiences and behaviour within the context of psychodynamic feminist frameworks.

Broadly defined, feminism is a movement organized around the belief that men and women are/should be socially, politically and economically equal. Contemporary feminism, which influences perceptions of female body modification, is split into two distinct strands: one school of feminism views body modification as a form of self-injury and self-mutilation while the other holds that it is a positive resistance in the face of gender norms (Pitts, 2003). This was taken into account in this study.

Given that the participants were all women, and that the relationship between body modification and social structures of power/authority are a central concern in feminist literature (Atkinson, 2002), this paradigm was chosen because it provides an appropriate and relevant framework within which to explore the underlying motives and meaning of body piercing for female body piercers. Their attitudes, meaning making processes and relationships with their bodies in relation to their piercings are used to uncover the significance of their body projects and their decisions to be pierced. The central themes which emerged through the thematic data analysis are related back to the feminist literature.

Psychoanalysis explores repressed or unconscious impulses, object relations, anxieties, and internal conflicts. For this reason, a psychodynamic framework was used to provide a context within which to explore the unconscious motivations, anxieties and defenses employed by the

participants. Freud's theories of masochism are examined in an attempt to further understand the female body piercer. These are placed within a general psychodynamic framework, and the works of Bowlby, Fonagy, Kernberg, Malan and Winnicott are used to support the findings of the research.

The research is based in the qualitative paradigm, with the aim of exploring and describing the body modifier's thoughts, fantasies, feelings and experiences around being pierced. The data gathered was analyzed using thematic content analysis to elucidate the participants' reasons for choosing to modify their bodies, and to highlight the meanings of these practices in the context of the their personal histories.

In total, six participants were interviewed, although one interview was not included for analysis as it was felt that the data gathered from this interview, while not contradicting the rest of the data gathered, was superficial in content and did not contribute to the research. The excluded participant spoke very broadly and did not really offer much personal information as to the meaning and motives behind her piercings.

The research explored the history of body modification, definitions of body modification and body projects, issues pertaining to identity, body image and self concept, expanded consciousness and altered states of being, pain and sadomasochism, the pathologizing of body modification, feminist perspectives on body modification and psychodynamic explanations for body modification.

Although much literature abounds on body modification practices, very little is of academic significance. Furthermore, few studies have been conducted into this area from a psychological perspective. In this regard, the writings of Favazza (1996), Featherstone (2003) and Vale & Juno (1989) were used to provide a context within which to place this study. Research papers by Atkinson (2002) and Dennes (2005) also proved particularly useful, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 1:

LITERATURE REVIEW

BODY MODIFICATION AND THE MODERN PRIMITIVE

History

Although traditional body piercing is practiced primarily in Asia, Africa and South America (for ritual initiations, rites of passage and sexuality), body-piercing traditions have been documented in western cultures. In ancient Rome, Caesar's bodyguards' pierced nipple rings served the dual purpose of signifying courage and virility, and more functionally, held their short capes, while genital piercings were used for the purposes of enforced chastity of the Ancient Roman slaves. In the Victorian era, society girls used nipple rings to intensify the size and shape of their nipples, and the Prince Albert (named after Queen Victoria's husband), was used by the men to secure their genitalia down one leg of their trousers to give their garments a smoother outline (Malloy, 1989). In more recent times some forms of body piercing have been used to identify the piercee as belonging to a certain sub-culture within Western society, such as being a sailor, or belonging to the gay community. There has also been an incorporation of some forms body piercing, most commonly the piercing of the earlobes in women, into western norms of aesthetics. However, due to its associations with 'primitive' cultures, such as those documented in early editions of National Geographic, or with certain lifestyles considered to by some to lack moral integrity, such as homosexuality, non-mainstream piercing may elicit negative social reaction or even governmental prohibition.

In South Africa individuals are free to engage in self-piercing or to pierce any body part of a

consenting adult. This is not so in the United Kingdom; in 1992 the British Court of Appeal incarcerated eleven men for sentences "of up to four and a half years for aiding and abetting assaults on themselves" (Randall, 2002, p. 11). As a result of this judgment, the British legal system drew up guidelines distinguishing between the aesthetic and decorative use of body piercing and its use for sexual, sadomasochistic and other purposes. In accordance with this legislation, individuals with genital and nipple piercings were in fact committing a criminal act. Randall (2002) raises questions around the enforcement of such a law and the agency of society, the government, and individuals' control over their own bodies. In 1998 this legislation was overturned. However, female genital piercing in the UK is still prohibited in accordance with the Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act (1985), which prohibits cutting, piercing or any form of female genital modification not done for medical purposes (Stirn, 2003).

Definitions

Featherstone (2003) defines the term 'body modification' as referring to a long list of practices including piercing, tattooing, cutting, binding and inserting implants with the aim of shifting the appearance and form of the human body. Western Body modification is a post modern phenomenon, in other words, "the body is no longer seen in popular and mass culture as fixed or pristine or as subordinate to the self", but rather "it is increasingly apparent that Western cultures are fascinated with manipulating the aesthetics, norms, and possibilities of the body" (Pitts, 2003, p.29). Writers attribute this change to a number of parallel social, economic, and cultural shifts which are also often identified with post-modern society. These include: "the increasing role of leisure in late modern capitalist economies; the shift of social movement

activity from class struggle into identity politics and sexuality; the erosion of traditional authority over the bodies and sexuality (such as that of the church)", amongst others (Pitts, 2003, p.29).

Physical appearance as an expression of identity can be altered in ways which society deems to be normative and routine, including shaving, cutting of hair, or application of cosmetics. The extreme alteration of identity through modification, such as branding, tattooing, and piercing, may be devalued by society. Although the breakdown of traditional authority over the body and identity in Western cultures has allowed for the body to become seen as "space of self-expression", body piercing, a form of body modification, may be interpreted as a visible, self-produced violation of socially defined beauty standards and body boundaries, and thus elicit social reaction (Stirn, 2003). Langford and Myers (cited in Stirn, 2003) refer to piercings on body parts other than the face as non-mainstream intimate piercings, however, "only erotic genital and enlarged piercings remain extreme statements as eyebrow, labret, navel, nipple and even tongue piercings are now considered no more than fashion accessories" (Wood cited in Randall, 2002, p.7).

The phrase 'modern primitives' is used to describe individuals who customize their bodies through traditional non-western methods (Favazza, 1998). "Contemporary tattooing and body piercing can be referred to as a body project which is seen to be dedicated to the construction of a coherent sense of self-identity" (Sweetman, 2003, p.71). Atkinson's (2002) interpretation of the term 'body project' refers to the use of body modification practices to communicate a wide range of personal and cultural messages. Shilling (1993) states that the term "body

project" refers to the deliberate alteration of the physical appearance, which may be superficial and transient, such as hair styles and make up, or more invasive and permanent, such as breast augmentation, tattoos and piercings. Tattooing is a permanent body modification, while piercing is more transient in that the jewellery can be removed. However, piercing is a more invasive form of body modification; it requires that the skin is punctured with a needle and that a foreign body (jewellery) is inserted either through the hole or under the skin. Blood is always present and a certain amount of cutting away of excess tissue occurs (Mercury, 2000).

Taken together, factors such as the relative permanence of such forms of body modification, the pain involved in their acquisition, and the active role played by the tattooee or piercee in their completion, also suggest that it would be misleading to label contemporary tattooing and piercing simply as fashionable products in the 'supermarket of style' (Sweetman, 2003, p.72).

Vale and Juno (1989) present the motives for piercing as ranging from functional (primarily increased sexual gratification) to poetic and metaphysical. Klesse (1999) states that the motives include spirituality, rite of passage, fun, sexual enhancement, the importance of pain, aesthetics, group affiliation and shock value. Myers (cited in Dennes, 2005) breaks down motivational categories for body modification into: sexual excitement, affiliation, shock value, trust/loyalty, aesthetic and pain experience. Furthermore, contemporary Western society provides few ritual initiation experiences for young people, who remain living in the parental home far longer than in the past due to an increase in further education norms and financial restraints. This could be seen as a contributing factor in the increase of body modification, which is used as an informal initiation experience to mark important life events or times

(Dennes, 2005).

Klesse (1999) criticizes modern primitives saying that while they claim to embrace the body modification practices and traditions of many non-western cultures in a respectful way, they are in fact operating within fixed stereotypes and fetishizing other cultures. Klesse sees modern primitive body modification as romanticizing and exoticizing the image of the 'noble savage'. Furthermore, it is argued that modern primitives do not take into account that the photographs in early editions of National Geographic (cited as a major influence in western body modification) were shot with a colonial, western eye. The image, therefore, is skewed and any reproduction is not a true interpretation. For the wider public, however, it is not this misrepresentation of non-western tradition that is objectionable, but "the prospect of a different aesthetic which goes counter to the notion of nature and consumer culture" as well as "the pain and violation of the body" (Featherstone, 2002, p.7).

Identity, Body Image and the Self Concept

Pitts (2003) identifies Foucault as having had the most impact on post-essentialist body theory, defined as a rejection of the notion that there is an "'essential,' proper, ideal body". Instead, "the body…is seen as always open to history and culture, and always negotiable and changing. Instead of one truth of the body or of ontology, there are competing truths that are productions of time, place, space, geography, and culture" (Pitts, 2003, p.28). Bodies are viewed increasingly as floating symbols of cultural identification (Featherstone, 2003), and can be used as a means for identity formation and self expression. The self-concept can be projected onto the body's surface to communicate a specific identity to the world: "bodies are

textualized, 'read' by others as expressive of a participant's psychic interior" (Grosz, 1995, p.35). Grosz (1995) sees the body as 'a kind of hinge or threshold' that balances the psychic, lived interior with a sociopolitical exterior capable of producing a new interior experience through an inscription of the body's outer surface. Featherstone says, "one has somehow taken possession of one's body, which henceforth carries a visible sign of identity" (Featherstone, 2003, p.2).

The more extreme forms of body modification, rooted in non-western traditions, are largely stigmatized within western societies (Foster & Hummel, 2000). In the case of extreme body piercing, Grosz's 'exterior inscription' is literal, and is seen to produce a new sense of identity and self-concept. Piercing functions "as an important catalyst by opening up an individual's awareness to their body. This new awareness of the body may (even for the masses) then lead to desire for further exploration – of sexuality, ritual and what might lie beyond the boundaries of the body" (Wood cited in Randall, 2002, p.7).

Turner (1999) views body modification as an attempt to fix and anchor the self. Sweetman (2003) elaborates on this idea of defining the self-concept, claiming that body modification is attractive to many because it resists the superficiality of consumer culture, is perceived as being a strong 'commitment to oneself', and is interpreted as part of a 'body project' aiding in the construction of a viable self-identity through the body.

Mercury (2000) believes that the tattoos, piercings, brandings and implants that we see on others or wear ourselves are evidence of our 'soul's' need for expression. However, those who

are lightly tattooed or pierced tend to regard theses body modifications as being primarily decorative (Sweetman, 2003). For some, then, tattooing and piercing – as previously 'classed', 'raced' and 'gendered' practices, associated strongly with specific marginal and subcultural groups – have now become so 'mainstream' as to almost be considered passé (Steele, 1996). Sweetman (2003) notes that of the people he interviewed, those with self-reported 'fashionable' piercings and tattoos also, in a contradictory manner, added that their piercings/tattoos made them feel different and original. Despite the frivolity that Sweetman indicates is associated with minimal body modifications, he does note that even for those whose piercings or tattoos were done primarily as a fashion accessory, there exists a degree of trepidation prior to the modification, as well as a sense of a process and a rite of passage. Amongst those interviewed, Sweetman found that most body modifiers, regardless of how heavily or lightly modified, attached more significance to their tattoos than to their piercings, primarily because of the permanence of tattoos. However, this did not imply that all piercings were regarded as simply superficial. Furthermore, the process of becoming pierced is far more painful than that of being tattooed, the healing process is longer, and more after care (and therefore self care) is necessary than with a tattoo. Piercings need a great degree of personal investment when it comes to aftercare to reduce the risks of infection and rejection by the body (Sweetman, 2003).

Thomas (2005) views the primary underlying motivations for body piercing as an affirmation of personal individuality, sexual gratification, a means of reclaiming the physical body following a physical or emotional trauma, and as a form of adornment. In contrast with skinhead style "contemporary body modification appears to serve less as a marker of group

identity and more as an expression of the self" (Sweetman, 2003, p.71). Rose, interviewed in Juno & Vale (1989) believes that the commonality amongst body modifiers or modern primitives, is that they have always felt like misfits in society. Turner, as cited in Pitts (2003), would agree with Rose arguing that while traditional body marks are used to 'symbolically locate and anchor an individual in the tribe or community," contemporary body marks only act to "simulate the images of non-Western cultures, and are often…attempts to address the 'time-out, alienation, and pointless leisure' characteristics of postmodern society in which social attachments are temporary and fleeting" (Pitts, 2003, p.33). In a study conducted by Carroll and Anderson (2002) the *Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory*, *The Body Investment Scale* and the *Beck Depression Inventory* were used to explore the relationship between body piercing and tattoos, self esteem and body investment, as well as anger and depressive symptoms. They found that the most significant predictors of body piercing and tattooing were anger, depression and negative feelings towards the body. Thus, later modification of the body through piercing or tattooing can be seen as a maladaptive means of expression of internal psychological pain and social isolation by the physical creation of a new identity. Such a physical rejection of societal norms of beauty, conformity, and acceptance may empower the individual, giving them a greater sense of their own agency, control, and individuality within the post-modern Western culture:

> "Sometimes people who can't express themselves in words express it in a more symbolic way, without words…Thinking is important, doing is important, casual conversation and explanation and justification ad hoc are important – but so laborious… So some people opt for a more symbolic means of expression" (Vale & Juno, 1989, p.164).

It is likely that piercings derive their meaning from both the process and the result. In a study

conducted by Stirn (2003), participants reported feeling "whole", "new", or "contained as individuals" since they had their piercings done, and that "this feeling grew stronger with every new piercing…. they (also) got their piercings at special moments in their lives to commemorate positive experiences or to mark the end and overcoming of negative ones" (Stirn, 2003, p.1214).

Expanded Consciousness and Altered States of Being

Cardinal (cited in Vale & Juno, 1989) describes body modifications as stimulating emotion. Vale and Juno (1989) elaborate on this and claim that body modification also stimulates the mind. They caution, however, that having a piercing should not be interpreted as an indication of advanced consciousness.

Gallina, a piercer interviewed in Vale & Juno (1989) describes piercing as a rite of transformation, a 'little test of endurance." She feels that for most of her clients the piercing is used to mark a 'certain time span or a certain event in their lives', and consider the act of being pierced as a suitable rite of passage. Additionally, Gallina states that the act of being pierced can alter one's mental state, making the piercing act a 'spiritual' one too. She portrays the process as a strengthening and powerful experience, particularly for women who have been abused or were in abusive situations in the past. "To bleed and then end up with something beautiful can be very empowering" (Vale & Juno, 1989, p.101).

Mercury (2000) believes that that the degree to which the body modification is significant as a transformative process is reliant upon the degree of consciousness and conscious purpose with

which the modifier embarks upon the modification. Featherstone (2003) identifies the desire to transcend the flesh and take control of the body as common to many body modifiers. Transcending the physical is both a loss and a gain of the body and is brought about through self inflicted physical pain and injury. Musafar (as cited in Vale & Juno, 1989) describes how surrendering to the experience of being pierced allows for a transcendent spiritual event. He interprets the associated altered state of consciousness as a separation from the body in which no pain is felt: "At this point I just become a head – all my consciousness, all my attention located in the very center of my head. I'm still conscious of my heart beating, but it feels like I've been hung by an incredibly long rope and swung between two stone walls… I'm feeling the power that makes my body go" (Musafar cited in Vale & Juno, 2003, p.10).

Although many body modifiers talk of experiencing an altered state of consciousness, many do not. Regarding the latter, body modification practices seem to be tapered off as the individual's experience of pain becomes too overwhelming.

Mercury (2000) feels that body modifiers are attempting to reintegrate the mind/body unity which has been split as a result of Western acceptance and promotion of Cartesian principles. She feels that the Cartesian splitting of mind and body has led many to move back to the physical body for healing in an attempt to bring back to life deadened areas of their psyche through a somatic, or body-felt, experience. The advent of cyberspace has resulted in a rootless, placeless society in which communication is done via emailing and people do not make as much physical contact as they did in the past. The result, according to Mercury, is psychic and physical numbness. Tattooing, piercing, implanting, and branding are a way to

'jumpstart' sensate functioning (Mercury, 2000).

Mercury (2000) does not believe that the placement of a piercing, or the body part chosen to be pierced, is random. She argues that it represents an unconscious need for healing represented by that particular site. Her argument is based in the bicameral brain theory that the left hemisphere of the brain is responsible for the more 'traditionally extraverted functions of conscious thought', such as language, and controls the right side of the body; whilst the right brain hemisphere is more closely aligned with feelings and emotions, and controls the left side of the body.

It has been argued that body piercing, and other forms of body modification, can be interpreted as initiation rites. Gennep (1960) divides rites of passage into three categories: rites of separation (such as funerals), transition rites (initiation, pregnancy, engagement), and rites of incorporation (marriage). Body piercing, when defined as a rite of passage, falls into the rites of transition category, in other words, the modifier experiences the process as aiding in a process of personal, psychic growth. All initiatory experiences can be seen as threshold phenomena:

> "When one engages in a threshold crossing, the gates between the levels of our conscious…swing open, if only for a moment. An initiation through body modification creates a sensate threshold crossing, testing one's endurance for pain, while leaving the initiate with a badge of the crossing. This form of initiation gives physical witness to significant life passages" (Mercury, 2000, p.26).

Pain and Sadomasochism

"Pain and permanence feature strongly in contemporary body modifiers' understandings and

experiences of such corporeal artifacts" (Sweetman, 2003, p.70). However, although pain is implicated in almost all forms of body modification, Stirn (2003) highlights that youth today do not have any culturally delineated or socially sanctioned rights of passage, and body piercing is a means of creating one's own right of passage. The pain involved is only the side-effect necessary for a successful rite of passage, which cannot be understood as one of the main motivations for body modification (Stirn, 2003, p.1213). Given this, Stirn suggests that sadomasochism cannot serve as a way to understand the motivation behind piercing. A survey, in which 134 readers of a body-art magazine participated, revealed that less than 20% of the respondents classified themselves as masochistic, sadistic, fetishistic or exhibitionists.

Sadomasochistic practices are distinguishable from modern primitivism in that the latter emphasize spiritual rather than sexual aspects: the modern primitive views the body as a medium for worship. This interpretation of body modification as a means of gaining higher consciousness or as rite of passage can be viewed as a rationalization and de-sexualization of s/m practices (Klesse, 1999). In his interview with Vale, Fakir Musafar says: "If you are seeking an altered state, the last thing in the world you want is to have it turn into sex – especially a sexual release" (Vale & Juno, 1989, p.17).

Vale & Juno (1989) believe that all the modern primitive practices form part of the continuing struggle to 'free ourselves from our complexes, to get to know our hidden instincts, to work out unaccountable aggressions and satisfy devious urges." Furthermore, they argue that as death is the standard whereby the depth of all activities must be judged, modern primitive practices underscore the realization that in order to create the 'complete' or 'integrated' ideal

self, death itself must be "stared straight in the face, unflinchingly as part of the continuing struggle… to awaken our deadened bodies to life" (Vale & Juno, 1989, p.5). Through the pain of body modification, repressed unconscious desires can be realized allowing for a fuller knowledge and understanding of pain and pleasure, of delirium and reason, and of evil and perversion, for example. Thus the practice of extreme piercing is seen to have the potential to integrate the individual. Through the puncturing of the skin, a splintered psyche can be healed.

Musafar (cited in Vale, 1989) portrays the experience of pain associated with body piercing as directly resulting in the ability to separate from the body. He qualifies this as the dissociation of thought and feeling from the physical body: "You don't feel the pain; the body feels the pain, and you observe the body recording or feeling sensation" (Vale & Juno, 1989, p.9). The needle piercing the skin is described as a momentary trauma that acts as a catalyst in unraveling the previously established body image. The extreme piercer, referred to by Jagodzinski as a 'junkie piercer', continually chases wholeness, control and a boundaried self (Jagodzinski, 2002). In other words, those body modifiers who feel a compulsion to continue to pierce themselves, do so because unconsciously they feel that they are both psychically unraveling and physically disconnected.

As with the self-mutilator, who may find their blood soothing (Favazza, 1998) some body modifiers attain a sense of release and psychic transformation through the bleeding that occurs when they are pierced. Of the five female body modifiers interviewed by Pitts (2003), two expressed highly positive experiences associated with their blood letting during the process: "Becky" (a victim of sexual abuse) describes an 'enjoyment' at the visibility of her blood,

stressing that this is not a simple masochism associated with the pain, but rather a visible representation of the dissolving of her former identification, and a physical embodiment (after the blood comes the growth of new tissue) of a new identity; "Mandy" (a victim of domestic violence) sees her abuser as having gained control over her body. Through her blood she believes that she is attaining mastery over her own body by directly provoking fear so that it can be transcended: "the body's pain and bleeding had been usurped; [Mandy] argues that by commanding these elements of the body, she took hold of them" (Pitts, 2003, p.69).

The pathology and pathologizing of body modification

Individuals who self harm find that it alleviates psychic pain and serves other restorative, redemptive, cleansing and healing functions (Farber, 1995). Inflicting injury on the body, regardless of the perceived 'benefits' that may be associated with such acts, cannot be viewed as a properly adaptive way in which to alleviate psychic discomfort. Body modification, however, constitutes a grey area: whilst being physically invasive (to varying degrees depending on the modification chosen) in that it results in pain and physical scarring, it is viewed by some as destructive and little more than a socially sanctioned form of bodily disfigurement, and by others as constructive, cathartic and aesthetic. With specific reference to the increasingly popular practices of tattooing, body piercing, decorative scarification, and branding, Juno and Vale (1989) raise the possibility that body modification is a passive variation of self-mutilation in which the individual engages another person to mutilate their body. However, Hewett (1997) argues that acts of body modification should not be pathologized and labeled, but seen as processes of reception, expression and self-determination within the context of postmodernism.

If the argument to pathologise body modification is to be considered, and piercing the body is thus viewed as self-injurious, then it is important to have a working definition of self injury/harm/mutilation. Favaza (1989) defines self-mutilation as the deliberate destruction and alteration of body tissue without suicidal intention, and recognizes that there are forms which are minor and major. Major self mutilation would refer to extreme bodily mutilation in which the body is severely disfigured, possibly even resulting in the cutting off of digit's or genitals. This severe self mutilation is usually associated with psychosis. Minor self mutilation would include self-cutting, hitting and burning. It is into the latter category that body piercing falls. Walsh & Rosen (1988) define self-mutilation as self inflicted harm and/or disfigurement to the body, and include tattooing in their definition. Sadock & Sadock (2003) include compulsive body piercing and tattooing in their definition of Repetitive Self-Mutilation, which is described as the repeated cutting or damage that a person performs to their body. For the purpose of this research, the terms self mutilation, self harm and self injury will be used interchangeably. Self harm is listed as a criterion for Borderline Personality Disorder in the DSM IV (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). It may, therefore, be useful to turn to the literature on self-mutilatory behaviour amongst individuals with a diagnosis of Borderline Personality or other serious psychological disorders for any plausibly relevant psychological motivations for body piercing.

Katherine Dunne (quoted in Pitts, 2003) believes that practices such as piercing, scarification, and branding are linked to anorexia, bulimia and what has been called "delicate self harm syndrome". Delicate Self Harm Syndrome is an addictive, repetitive, non-decorative form of skin cutting, usually on arms and legs. Orbach (in Pitts, 2003) describes body modification practices as a projection of intense hatred onto the body, and Sullivan, (in Pitts, 2003),

considers body modification as indicative of personality disorders, depression, and other psychological disorders. Favazza (1989) is of the opinion that those who partake in major and moderate self mutilation will often have a co-morbid diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder and/or other psychological disorders. Self mutilation amongst individuals with Borderline Personality Disorders is believed to be a compulsive act that is cathartic and serves to alleviate anxiety and experiences of dissociative emptiness. Impulsivity, an attempt to gain control or manipulate the environment, the presence of bad internal objects, intense self hatred and the experience of immediate relief following the behaviour, are listed as possible reasons for self mutilation (Favazza, 1996; Hewitt,1997; Kernberg, 1986; Kernberg, 1993; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Acts of self harm may also be motivated by the shocked, or maybe even horrified or disgusted, reactions of significant others (Kernberg, 1993). Favazza (1989) identifies what he believes are the most cited reasons for self harm by self mutilators as: tension release, return to reality, establishing control, security and uniqueness, influencing others' negative perceptions, sexual arousal, euphoria and titillation, anger, alienation and overwhelming urges.

Jeffreys (in Pitts, 2003), describes body modification as the most grave attacks one can make on one's body, and compares the practice to acts of self mutilation such as cutting and burning. Pitts (2003) counters this argument by stating that modern Western body piercing is in fact divided from other cultures and age old traditions. In undiscriminately pathologizing the practice of body piercing, whole cultures and traditions are also being pathologised. Body projects are differentiated from self harm in that the modifications are safe, controlled and experienced as self-enhancing. Furthermore, "reclaiming discourse articulates a project that

has a start, a middle and a finish: the need to reclaim the body is felt, the ritual is enacted and the reclamation is achieved" (Pitts, 2003, p.79). It can be argued, though, that some body modifiers do not ever find an end point, or as Pitts describes it, a 'finish'. So is it possible to separate 'healthy' body modification from 'unhealthy' body modification? Possibly it is the consciousness of the act, the desire to heal, or to enhance the body that determines this and separates modifiers from mutilators. But what of those modifiers who continue to experience all new modifications as self enhancing and feel unable to stop?

Body modifiers have been labeled both as self mutilators and praised for their 'post-essentialist' stance, which sees them remodeling their flesh as a medium for self narrative. In doing so, it is claimed that they challenge the status of Western body norms and beauty ideals. Alternatively pathologized and celebrated, the practices have provoked debates that reveal the significant role of the body in supporting and reproducing the social order. Critics of body modifying practices believe that the act of piercing the body is self mutilatory, "defiant, deviant, or shocking", and depict the modifiers as "self-hating, ill, and out of control" (Pitts, 2003, p.24)

Feminist Perspectives on Body Modification

Central in the feminist literature is the relationship between body modification and social structures of power/authority (Atkinson, 2002). Feminism has contributed much to the "political" understanding of the body (Bordo, 1993). Bray and Colebrook (1998) cited Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, Judith Butler, and Rosi Braidotti (inspired by Luce Irigaray's critique of Western metaphysics) as central in the development of feminist theory concerning

issues of the female body. These feminist theorists seek to liberate feminism from the Cartesian mind/body split, which is interpreted as repressive, negative masculine reasoning: "Formerly the body was dominantly conceptualized as a fixed, unitary, primarily physiological reality" (Bordo, 1993, p.288). Grosz (1995) distinguishes two approaches to theorizing the body. The first, which she describes as 'inscriptive', is derived from Nietzsche, Kafka, Foucault, and Deleuze. The second, which is a more prevalent theory in psychoanalysis and phenomenological psychology, is referred to as the 'lived body'. The concept of the inscriptive body is that the body is a "surface on which social law, morality, and values are inscribed", and the concept of the lived body "refers largely to the lived experience of the body, the body's internal or psychic inscription" (Grosz, 1995, p.33). Grosz further distinguishes the 'inscriptive' body as a social, public body and the 'lived body' as taking the body-schema or imaginary anatomy as its focus. She argues that though the concepts may not be compatible, together they may provide "theoretical terms necessary to problematize the major binary categories defining the body – inside/outside, participant/object, active/passive, fantasy/reality and surface/depth" (Grosz, 1995, p.33).

Grosz (1995) describes bodies as objects of power and sites of social inscription that are densely inhabited by social and psychic meaning: "The boundaries between the inside and the outside, just as much as between self and other and participant and object, must not be regarded as a limit to be transgressed so much as a boundary to be traversed…These boundaries, consequently, are more porous and less fixed and rigid than is commonly understood" (Grosz, 1995, p.131). Orlan, one of the most prolific female body project artists, publicly uses her body as a medium to express such ideas of power and internal/external

psychic and social meaning. She questions the status of the female classical body and attacks conventional standards of beauty. Her self-modifications are not viewed as replacing the classical body with the grotesque, but rather as moving beyond (Ayers, 1999): "Orlan explores the disjuncture between identity and the body, she seems to want to remake the body in order to free the body, in particular the face" (Featherstone, 2002, p.9). Clark (cited in Featherstone, 2002) suggests that Orlan is strongly influenced by her Lacanian psychoanalyst Eugenie Lemoine-Luccioni's idea that the skin is deceptive and is not a true representation of the inner self. The body is seen "as a garment, a veil or a mask, as something which should be changed and modified to become congruent with changes in the self" (Featherstone, 2002, p.10).

Women are seen to use body projects to contest culturally established constructions of the female body and to resist, negotiate or conform to ideas about femininity. This highlights the split in feminist thinking regarding body modification, as well as the feminist body modifier's dilemma of marrying that which could be interpreted as 'trashy' (or conformist) with feminist structuralist and post-structuralist thought (Nixon, 2000).

Contemporary feminism, which influences perceptions of female body modification, is split into two distinct strands: radical/post-structural feminism and post-modern feminism. Radical/Post-Structural feminists and postmodern feminists are divided on their opinion of non-mainstream body modification. Radical feminists view body modification as a form of self-injury, self-mutilation and self-harming behaviour. Postmodern feminists uphold the practice as a positive resistance in the face of gender norms (Pitts, 2003). So while some feminists see body modification as a means of rewriting the body in a personally and

politically meaningful way, other feminists believe that it is simply a physical replay of any past violation that women may have experienced (Pitts, 2003).

Radical feminists view all forms of female body modification (including non-stream modification), are as self hatred of the flesh and as an internalization of patriarchal projections onto the female body (MacKendrick cited in Pitts, 2003). Jeffreys (2000) also views all forms of body modification as self-mutilation and as a reaction by women to their gender related subservient status in society. She states that women are raised to hate their bodies, and piercing is just another onslaught on the female form.

Atkinson (2002) points out that Western ideals of femininity are associated with passive female bodies: "Masculinity is partially achieved through the corporeal display of strength, aggression, risk-taking and the ability to withstand pain and injury…and historically, such displays by women, are considered repugnant. Established feminine body projects (which ironically, are often rife with pain) highlight the docility of women's bodies" (Atkinson, 2002, p.224). Thus, certain socially sanctioned, and even encouraged forms of female body modification (such as breast augmentation, liposuction and dieting), may serve to further promote the female body as passive and encourage it's objectification. Body modification in the form of body piercing can both uphold this ideal of accepted female passivity and sexuality, and also fly in the face of such submissive female body representations. Melissa Klein (cited in Pitts, 2003) views female body modification practices, which uphold normative ideals of beauty, as problematic; however, others are seen as an assertion of agency in relation to the female body. In other words, some women embark upon non-normative body projects in

resistance to misogynistic ideologies and social structures of oppression (Atkinson, 2002). Pitts (2003) argues that some body modification practices in which extreme pain is endured are socially acceptable because they are viewed as an attempt to beautify the female form in response to patriarchal demands. However, non mainstream modifications are more likely to be viewed as socially problematic and violating of accepted beauty norms. Some women take into account how men will decode their tattoos and piercings, and will only enter into the process if these meanings will homologically complement their established feminine body projects (Atkinson, 2002).

Grosz lobbies for new representational practices outside of traditional patriarchal/ phallocentric frameworks that are seen as repressing female autonomous self-representations. Feminists are urged to use knowledge and technology to produce new images of women, not images that collude with male representations of women (Bray & Colebrook, 1998). Thus, body modification can be used as a means of renouncing patriarchal ideals of femininity and not as a form of compliance. Pitts (2003) believes that women who modify their bodies in ways which violate cultural norms promote symbolic rebellion, resistance, and self-transformation. Through body modification, women can "symbolically 'reclaim' the body from its victimization and objectification in patriarchal culture" (Pitts, 2003, p.49). Piercing is thus seen as a 'ritualized opportunity' to symbolically recover and reclaim the female body from rape, harassment or abuse. The ritualized aspect is an incorporation of non-western body modification practices: "The female body is socially controlled… Non-mainstream, permanent marking of the female body is an expression of female power" (Pitts, 2003, p.56). Pitts also points out that such "reclaiming projects, however, do not return the body to any pre-

victimized state of body or selfhood, but rather newly co-construct a set of meanings that must share authorship with other interparticipantive forces of inscription and interpretation. The 'reclaimed' body has to be understood as actually produced rather than recovered" (Pitts, 2003, p.85)

Atkinson (2002) recognizes that there is a longstanding association between body modification in the form of tattooing, and masculinity, and that it is perhaps in reaction to this that many women participate in body modification practices. An overriding finding in contemporary literature on the rising occurrence of body modification amongst women is that it is a form of resistance against misogyny and oppression of women in a phallocentric society (Atkinson, 2002). Whilst this may be one underlying psychological motive for piercing, it cannot be highlighted as the only, or even the most salient. While many women choose to "articulate their body modification practices as political protests against culturally preferred, masculine constructs of the female body… researchers have not sufficiently examined the largely hidden, private or negotiated nature of these protests" (Atkinson, 2002, p.220). It can further be agued that, in fact, women's body piercings endorse and uphold masculine ideals and expectations of the female body.

Psychodynamic explanations for body modification

From a psychoanalytic perspective, body modification can be seen to serve multiple functions, and therefore an examination of these practices from within this framework should be useful in understanding unconscious motivations. Unfortunately, there is little psychodynamic literature and research on body modification. Scant research has been done on the psychological

motivations for body modification, and the literature that does exist is extremely limited and superficial in nature, focusing primarily on emotionally disturbed and antisocial individuals. Ironically, given the psychoanalytic emphasis on the unconscious, little has been written on unconscious motivations for body modification (Dennes, 2005; Stirn, 2003). Dennes (2005) also notes that piercing became fashionable towards the end of the 20th century and expresses surprise that Freud did not address this topic, other than briefly in the index of the Standard Edition.

As there appear to be significant overlaps between self harm and body modification, literature on self harm has been consulted in order to formulate hypotheses on the motivation for body modification. Freud believed that masochistic tendencies (into which self-mutilation falls), are a redirection of anger towards the self (Panken, 1993). Kernberg (1987) explains self harm as the redirection of rage felt toward a significant object, onto the internalized representation of that object, resulting in an attack on self. Favazza (1989), exploring a different interpretation, believes that self harm is an attempt to form ego boundaries and that the blood (body jewellery) functions as a transitional object. The idea of a transitional object stems from Winnicott's theories in which the transitional object represents the breast from the primary object (Fonagy & Target, 2003). Young children use transitional objects when they are away from their primary care givers (usually the mother) as a means of self soothing and comfort. Although transitional objects constitute the first "not me" object, that is they are recognized as separate from the child, they are paradoxically experienced as a part of the individual, as an extension of the self (Winnicott, 1953). Bowlby (1988) also emphasized the infants need for a secure attachment with a primary care giver, and Winnicott (1949) describes the 'good enough

mother' as having the ability to meet the needs of her child in an adequate manner. If a secure attachment is not established, and the infant experiences their needs as unmet, this can be carried into adulthood, resulting in an inability to feel satisfied (just as the infant was never satiated), which results in a quest for vicarious satiation by means of a substitute object. In this instance, the piercing and jewellery is a symbolic compensation for the loss of the primary object which was never fully experienced as available or able to meet the infant's basic needs, leaving the person with a sense of deficiency and incompleteness. If empathic failure occurs when the individual is an infant, in other words they did not have a 'good enough' mother who was able to help them to differentiate their body from that of their mother, a distorted body image and poor body boundaries may develope. The use of transitional objects may occur at any stage of life and are compensatory efforts made when deficits in self objects exist. They function as soothers and become an extension of body boundaries (Hughes, 1990).

Physically manifested symptoms and behaviours (such as acts of self harm, eating disorders, body modification) can be seen as attempts to strengthen body boundaries and to repair deficits originating in infancy. Paradoxically, the body piercer, in an attempt to repair a damaged and flawed internal world that is not psychically contained, damages their external surface (their skin) by puncturing it with needles and inserting foreign objects into the holes that have now been created. Thus, in attempting to define body boundaries and to psychically contain affects and drives which are experienced as leaking through porous boundaries, they have in effect concretized this psychic experience by creating a physically porous exterior through which bodily fluids leak. That is, in piercing the skin they are now physically leaking (blood and body fluids etc). Ironically, through this physical leakage and puncturing of the

body container, they are able to realize a higher degree of psychic integration and containment.

Alternatively, the act of modifying the body by puncturing it with needles and inserting foreign objects into the piercings, often repetitively, could be explained as a maladaptive defense against a punitive superego. That is to say, the piercer may be wracked with guilt or feelings of anxiety over perceived wrong doings, and rather than confront these conscious and unconscious anxieties, they choose instead to punish themselves by physically damaging their own flesh. The physical damage that is inflicted on the flesh is internalized as a reparative act serving to mend a splintered and deflated sense of self.

In addition to this, the physical letting of blood in the piercing process can be seen as symbolic of the purging and excretion of hated internal objects. If the act of piercing the body is interpreted as a symbolic reenactment of perceived and/or real physical and emotional traumas, then the body modifier can be seen as performing an act that is both reparatory and psychically healing in nature. However, body modification is also a form of self violence in which the modifier becomes, once again, the recipient of a trauma, albeit a voluntarily inflicted one. In this way, while the act may relieve psychic tension and discomfort and release the piercer from past traumas and abuses, it also is a form of self-abuse and cements an association with her abuser by means of abuse repetition.

Tattooing and piercing appear to have an addictive element (Pitts,2003). Few individuals with body modifications that serve a function other than just the aesthetic have only a single piercing/tattoo. Many will admit that they would like to have, and possibly will be getting, more piercings/tattoos. In questioning why there appears to be a compulsion to modify the

flesh, it is interesting to look at other self imposed physical symptoms and behaviours in which a compulsive and repetitive element exists. In respect of this criteria, the term Hunger Disease has been used to describe the insatiable need to repeat physically dangerous behaviours. Battegay (1991) defines "Hunger disease" as describing disorders stemming from low self-esteem, characterized by the need to possess and consume in an addictive manner. Although this term is generally applied to eating disorders, substance abuse, compulsive shopping, kleptomania and compulsive sexuality, it could go some way in explaining the body modifiers continual quest for another piercing/tattoo/modification, and the inability to feel satisfaction and completeness. Always believing that the next modification will in some way bring them closer to their place of healing and internal psychic peace, would illustrate this dynamic.

Chapter Summary

Contemporary Western Body modification is a phenomenon attributed to social, economic, and cultural shifts including emphasis on leisure, a shift of social movement activity from class struggle into identity politics and sexuality and a loosening of traditional authority over the bodies and sexuality (Pitts, 2003). The breakdown of traditional authority over the body and identity in Western cultures has enabled the body to be viewed and used as a medium for self-expression. The term 'body project' refers to the deliberate alteration of the physical appearance either superficially and transiently, (e.g. hair styles and make up) or in a more invasive and permanent manner (e.g. breast augmentation, tattoos and piercings). Body projects may be frowned upon by society if they do not uphold normative Western social ideals, and are seen to violate socially defined beauty standards.

In this chapter, motives for piercing are documented, ranging from seeking heightened spirituality, rites of passage, fun, sexual enhancement and excitement, affiliation, shock value, trust/loyalty, the aesthetic effect and pain. Increasingly, bodies are viewed as symbols of cultural identification onto which the self-concept can be projected in order to communicate a specific identity to the world. The meanings attributed to body modification are many: body modification as an attempt to fix and anchor the self (Turner, 1999), to affirm personal individuality (Thomas, 2005), the need for authentic expression (Mercury, 2000), or as decorative self-enhancement (Sweetman, 2003). Contemporary body modification, some argue, functions less as a marker of group identity than as self-expression (Sweetman, 2003). Many body modifiers have always felt like misfits in society (Juno & Vale, 1989), and body piercers claim to experience a new sense of 'wholeness', and an ability to feel "contained as individuals" (Stirn, 2003, p.1214).

Although the process involved in body piercing is believed to have the capacity to bring about an altered state of being and a sense of expanded consciousness, caution should be applied when labeling the stimulation of emotion and mind that may occur with the piercing process as an indication of advanced consciousness (Vale and Juno, 1989). The degree to which the body modification is significant as a transformative process is reliant upon the degree of consciousness and conscious purpose with which the modifier embarks upon the modification (Mercury, 2000).

Pain, to some degree, is always present in any body modification procedure. As with the self-mutilator, who may find their blood soothing (Favazza, 1998), some body modifiers attain a

sense of release and psychic transformation through the bleeding that occurs when they are pierced.

A debate exists as to whether body piercing should be viewed as pathological, and simply another form of self harm, or as a creative and constructive form of adornment. Juno and Vale (1989) raise the possibility that body modification is a passive variation of self-mutilation in which the individual engages another person to mutilate their body. In contrast, some have argued that in pathologizing the practice of body piercing, whole cultures and traditions are being pathologized, and that unlike acts of self harm, the body modifications are safe, controlled and experienced as self-enhancing.

Contemporary feminism, which has commented on female body modification, is divided in its opinion of non-mainstream body modification. While some feminists see body modification as a means of rewriting the body in a personally and politically meaningful way, other feminists believe that it is simply a physical replay of past violations that that women may have experienced in a patriarchal culture (Pitts, 2003).

In the psychoanalytic literature, the act of inflicting pain and damage to the flesh by means of piercing the body could be seen as a redirection of anger towards the self (Panken, 1993); a redirection of rage felt toward a significant object onto the internalized representation of that object, resulting in an attack on self (Kernberg, 1987); or an attempt to strengthen deficient ego boundaries, with the blood letting and body jewellery functioning as transitional objects (Favazza, 1989).

CHAPTER 2:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The aim of this research is to describe and explore the lived experience and the associated feelings, thoughts, and fantasies of white female body piercers pursuing contemporary Western life-styles.

It has been argued that body piercing is a form of self-mutilation and that it is a 'behaviourally-enacted symptom rather than a primarily cognitively-mediated experience" (Malcolm, 1994, p.84). Given this, it could be anticipated that participants may encounter difficulties in fully describing their piercing experiences, providing adequate explanations, and outlining their decision making processes in relation to the acquisition of their piercings. Recollection of the event or events leading up to the piercings may be experienced as consciously unlocatable or indescribable. The researcher felt that the nature of the experience, the richness of the underlying dynamics and motivations for the act itself would not be adequately accessed through quantitative research. Qualitative research enables a fuller description of the thoughts, feelings, and fantasies that occur before, during, and after the act of being pierced, and thus appeared to be the most appropriate. However, it is inevitable that the descriptions given by the participants will be incomplete and imperfect (Van Kaam, 1969). Such imperfections within the recollection and description of the events under investigation may be due to many factors including a poor ability to clearly express oneself, forgetfulness, inability to form rapport with the interviewer or limited vocabulary. Additionally, some of the motives and fantasies related to the piercings will be unconscious and are therefore not

explicitly known, nor describable. The incompleteness or imperfections within a description may result in a failure to elucidate and explore some essential elements. However, this does not invalidate the description, which may still be analyzed for underlying themes and meanings. The limitations of relying on the account of a single research participant is overcome by drawing on data from a number of participants and exploring both commonalities and differences in their accounts:

> "By making use of a variety of participants, the possibility of finding underlying constants or themes in the many forms of expression the experience takes is greatly increased. Similarly, a participant may concentrate on one particular area and fail to describe other aspects of personal experience. This does not necessarily imply that this is all there is to the experience – it merely indicates that the person has not explicitly described other aspects. The explicit areas of concern mentioned by other participants may be implicit in this individual's descriptive expressions" (Kruger, 1988, p.152).

The issue of interpreting unconscious dynamics from participants' conscious accounts remains because the formulation of such accounts into hypothesized motivations is a subjective process as it is dependant upon interpretation by the researcher.

Participants

An initial attempt to recruit participants by means of flyers placed in six body piercing and tattoo studios in the Gauteng region, elicited no response. Three body piercers, working at the studios, were then approached in person by the researcher. One of the body piercing artists showed little interest and no further contact was made with her, however, two body piercing artists expressed interest in the research and introduced the researcher to women who they believed fulfilled the criteria for the research. Six participants, white women aged between 23

and 34, were recruited through these body piercers. However, during the analysis of the resulting interviews, it was decided to exclude one of the participants from the research. The rationale for this decision was that the excluded interview contained only superficial information relating to the participant, and while not contradicting the other data obtained, did not add any new dimensions or themes.

Collection of Data

Participants were informed of the research area and interview procedure. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the interviews, and could refuse to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable answering at any time. The participants signed consent forms allowing the interview to be taped, transcribed, analyzed, and later reproduced within the context of this research thesis. Participants were assured of their confidentiality, by informing the participants that the tapes and transcripts would not be seen or heard by any person other than the researcher and her supervisor, and would only be processed by the researcher. Additionally, the tape recordings would be destroyed after the research was completed. The participants' anonymity was assured by informing them that their names and any identifying information would not appear in the transcripts or research report.

The participants were interviewed, at a location of their choice, using a semi-structured questionnaire. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher took care to create a non-threatening environment in which the participants felt free to explore their thoughts and feelings.

The interview started with an initial period of biographical fact gathering about the participant, including their age at time of interview, current occupation, marital status, religious affiliation, age at first piercing, and total number of piercing, or other body modifications, obtained. Information obtained from this initial fact gathering process helped to locate each participant within a socio-economic and religious context, which then provided the researcher with useful information about their individual belief structures and personal histories. This was helpful when analyzing the data.

'Anna' is 29 and lives with her boyfriend. She is an attractive woman with a slim figure and presented as very confident. She worked for an event management company, but is currently unemployed due to down-sizing. She was raised in the Christian faith, but describes herself as 'spiritual' rather than religious. She was 14 when she got her first piercing, and currently has 13 piercings: eight in her ears, three in her bellybutton, and both nipples. She also has 3 tattoos. During the interview she was friendly, open and forthcoming with information and rapport was easily established, however, the interviewer's subjective interpretation of the rapport was that it was somewhat superficial.

'Kerryn' is 23. She was studying philosophy but dropped out last year. She is currently unemployed, but wants to be a writer. She does not follow any formalized religion and does consider herself to be religious, but described herself as 'spiritual'. She has 3 piercings: one in her navel, one nipple piercing, and one eyebrow piercing. She also has a very large tattoo on her back, and a smaller tattoo on her rear. She presented as anxious and insecure and seemed eager to 'perform' well in the interview. Initially she was quite apologetic to the interviewer

because she only has three piercings and was concerned that this would not be sufficient for the study and she expressed that she was anxious that the interviewer may be disappointed.

'Rebecca' is 25 and is studying for her honours in History of Art. She is not married, but has a boyfriend. Rebecca does not consider herself to be religious. Her first piercing was done when she was a baby by her mother. She currently has 14 piercings: ten in her ears, one in her eyebrow (another eyebrow piercing has closed), one in her nose, one in her navel and one in her nipple. She also has 3 tattoos. Rebecca was outspoken and forthcoming with information. Rapport was easy to establish. She presented as confident and spoke quite loudly.

'Samantha' is 23 and works in an aftercare unit and as an au pair. She is currently single and does not consider herself to be religious. Samantha's first piercing was at the age of 12. She has been pierced 7 times: 4 in her ears (2 piercings are now closed), one in her tongue and two in her navel. She does not have any tattoos. Rapport was established appropriately. Although she presented as friendly and eager to assist by speaking about herself and her experiences, the interviewer sensed that Samantha did not feel completely comfortable, and that possibly she held back a little in her responses. Although she appeared confident there was a cautiousness about her, and her non-verbals, (which were relatively closed), indicated that she possibly did not feel completely safe speaking so openly to a stranger.

'Tanya' is 34, is engaged, and works as an attorney. She described herself as being Roman Catholic. She was 14 when she got her first piercings. She currently has 13 piercings: 7 in her ears, 4 in her eyebrows, one in her tongue, and one in her nose. She also has a full back tattoo

and a smaller one at the base of her back. The interview was conducted on the balcony of a piercing studio. During the interview Tanya was quite distracted by her pet pig which was running around. She was also aware that people were watching her being interviewed but rather than feel disturbed by this, she appeared to quite enjoy the attention that she was receiving. She was very loudly spoken and right from the beginning of the interview, the interviewer felt that Tanya attempted to establish herself as being in control of the process, and as 'above', rather than on an equal standing with the interviewer: initially the interviewer and Tanya were sitting at one table, and Tanya told the interviewer that they should move to another table which she then picked; before the tape was switched on, and while the interviewer was explaining the procedure, Tanya informed the interviewer that she too had conducted interviews for research purposes and had even run a focus group. She seemed to need to establish her authority and competence. Although rapport was established, it was not deep.

Semi-structured interview formats are found to result in higher levels of self-revelation than structured questions, in particular, when topics being investigated are regarded as 'threatening' by participants (Neuendorf, K.A, 2002). Semi-structured interviews allow for the formation of a researcher-participant rapport, which facilitates the trust and co-operation needed for in-depth exploration of the areas in question. As such, after each question was put to the participant, salient aspects of their answers were pursued with relevant open-ended, follow-up questions. Such a technique allowed the participants to freely expand on their answers by exploring their feelings, thoughts, and fantasies.

Smith (cited in Neuendorf, 2002) notes that in thematic content analysis there are three ways in which study variables can be selected. These include the identification of the variables in advance based on previous theoretical or practical considerations; the derivation of variables by classifying responses already given in the descriptive categories to which most responses fit; or by determining the effects on responses of relevant experimental manipulation or differences in naturally occurring groups. However, Nueundorf (2002) also states that when there is "no clear theory to drive the research, or past studies that have examined the content of interest, research questions may guide the process of variable identification, and hence question formulation" (Nuendorf, 2002, p. 109). As such, the semi-structured questionnaire used in this study was formulated by consideration of the main research question, and by carefully reading through relevant literature with the aim of determining study variables and thematic commonalities around which interview questions could be formulated.

All participants were asked the following questions:

1. When/where did you get your first piercing and what made you decide to get a piercing?
2. Could you describe how you personally experienced the actual piercing process? (i.e. Before, during, after?)
3. What would you say are your reasons for getting multiple piercings?
4. How do you feel about it now? What do your piercings mean to you?
5. Have your piercings affected your life/relationships/sense of self in any way? And if so, how?
6. How would you describe your childhood?

Analysis of the Data

The five transcribed interviews selected for inclusion in this study were interpreted and analyzed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is the "scoring of messages for content, style, or both for the purpose of assessing the characteristics or experiences of persons, groups or historical periods." (Neuendorf, K.A, 2002, p192). In thematic content analysis, the concern is on discerning themes held within the text, rather than the content of the text itself. The steps and stages used to score the messages in the transcripts were adapted from Neuendorf (2002), but involved the researcher reading through the data repeatedly and "engaging in activities of breaking the data down (thematising and categorizing) and building it up again in novel ways (elaborating and interpreting)" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 140).

As themes should ideally arise from the data, and at the same time inform the research questions, data gathering in thematic content analysis is not a purely technical process of recording data, but rather requires the researcher to develop ideas and theories around the phenomenon being studied throughout the data gathering process. Thus, once all the data has been gathered, the researcher should already have a preliminary understanding of the meaning of the data, and the themes it involves. The first stage of data analysis, however, involves the researcher becoming more familiar with the data, by 'immersing' herself in the text of the data, by reading and re-reading the transcripts many times. The researcher should now know what kind of things can be found in the data, where, and what sorts of interpretations the data supports or does not support.

With this thorough knowledge of what the data includes, the researcher tries to identify the organizing principles that 'naturally' underlie the material (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 141). In other words, themes are induced by the researcher who infers general trends from specific examples. During this stage of analysis, the emerging themes were given preliminary labels, for example some of the emerging themes inferred by the researcher from the data included *pain, sexuality, femaleness, strength* and *body image*. The researcher then broke up the data by identifying and coding any textual data containing material pertaining to the themes under consideration. In this way, the data was worked in an analytically relevant way, to yield labeled, meaningful groups of data which could then be further analyzed:

> "When collecting material for interpretive analysis, one experiences events or the things people say in a linear, chronological order…What inducing themes and coding achieves is to break up this sequence, so that events or remarks that were far away from each other are now brought close together. This gives you a fresh view on the data and allows you to carefully compare sections of text that appear to belong together" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 144).

This allows the researcher to explore the commonalities and differences in the data that was initially grouped under a single theme. This process of exploring the content of a theme more closely is called elaboration, and may result in the researcher creating new themes or sub-themes to accommodate and accurately re-code the newly analyzed data. The researcher continued to refine the analysis of the data by recoding and elaborating until no new insights or significant new themes or sub-themes emerged.

When the major themes and sub-themes of the data were finalized, the researcher re-examined the data, eliminating redundancies or repetition. The researcher then selected data which was

illustrative of the themes, and used these to compare and contrast the differences and similarities in the different participants' opinions. Illustrative quotations were extracted and used to illustrate findings in the written report. The report is based on the research findings, particularly as they relate to the theory found in the relevant literature in Chapter One.

CHAPTER 3:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE

Eight main themes and two sub-themes were identified through the content analysis process. These themes were gleaned from the data (transcribed interviews) and were informed by the research aims. While the participants' experiences differed from one another, there were definite commonalities which allowed for the identification of underlying themes.

The following chapter explores and discusses these themes and illustrates these by mean of salient interview quotes. An attempt has been made to elucidate the experiences and perceptions of each participant in order to provide the fullest picture possible as to the meanings and motivations for their body piercing. Each theme concludes with a brief synopsis.

THEME ONE: CONCEPTS OF FEMININITY, BEAUTY AND WOMANHOOD

The first theme is concerned with how the participants interpret ideas of femininity and concepts of womanhood and how this affects their view of themselves and their perceptions of how women, and specifically pierced women, are viewed by others.

Each participant spoke to some degree of how they believe women should look, and how this image of femaleness is added to or diminished through the piercing of the flesh. Society tends to view body piercing as a visible, self-produced violation of socially defined beauty standards and body boundaries (Stirn, 2003). The notion of the ideal, beautiful female body as skinny, was referred to by most of the participants. This is not in keeping with contemporary feminist

body theory which rejects the notion of an ideal female body (Pitts, 2003). Tanya explicitly expressed her feelings of body inadequacy in relation to her 'skinny' sister: "…and now talk about my sister, my sister is skinny, she got a beautiful body and I don't think she uses it to her advantage…"

Samantha has internalised the Western construct of the 'good woman' as 'feminine', in other words, small, submissive and gentle. Western ideals of femininity are associated with passive female bodies (Atkinson, 2002). Samantha spoke about how she feared losing her femininity in the piercing process, but despite this anxiety, she opted to be pierced regardless: "And then when I got my upper ears done,…uhm, I don't know why I was a bit scared actually that it would make me look a bit butch cos I think they can, but I decided to get two…"

Atkinson (2002) notes that some women take into account the anticipated reaction that their tattoos and piercings will elicit from men. How they perceive men will decode their body modification determines what, and the degree to which, they will inscribe on or pierce their flesh. Many will only be pierced or tattooed if they believe that it will complement their established ideas of what a feminine body project should look like. Depending on individual belief structures, and the degree to which a Western concept of an ideal female body has been internalized, body piercing can be seen to either promote or diminish femininity. For some, like Melissa Klein (as cited in Pitts, 2003), female body modification practices which do not subscribe to normative ideals of female beauty are an assertion of agency, while body projects that uphold Western ideals of the perfect female form are highly problematic. In this regard, Kerryn would be construed as being more empowered and having more agency than the other

participants because she is less concerned with conventional ideas of femininity and is, in fact, impressed by women who have the strength to act out against socially accepted, phallocentrically constructed concepts of femininity.

> **"**I was looking in a book a while ago, these women, it's started from the 1920's, and I mean at that point anyone with that sort of thing, they were in circuses, it was the only place you saw a woman with any thing like that. Then you get this sort of mid 1920's (indistinct) really glamorous movie stars (indistinct) this hair style going and reclining on a couch, and they got these things protruding and it's really, I think those are lovely, I only just found them. That was brave. You think it's brave now, I mean at that point, really they were confident, I suppose you have to be, they had very definite ideas and I'm always impressed with people who have the first way to do something, because of people like that, that it gets to the point where you can convince your mum as a thirteen year old to take you for a navel piercing."

She feels, though, that she does not yet have the courage to completely act on her desire to reconstruct her body in a way that opposes socially accepted concepts of femininity, however, she expressed admiration for women who do. Bray & Colebrook (1998) recognise that not all women have the strength to construct their bodies in a way that does not collude with male representations of women, and they urge feminists to use their knowledge, as well as technology, to produce new images of women. Kerryn strongly believes that piercing and body modification can add to an aesthetically beautiful female body.

Anna experiences dissonance because her concept of femaleness falls within socially constructed Western norms, but her desire to express herself through body piercing and other forms of body modification lies outside these boundaries. She still wants to retain her femininity and sometimes struggles to merge her opposing viewpoints in a manner which is comfortable for her:

> "… I'm torn between wanting to take them out and wishing I didn't have the tattoos

> and wanting to go and get more! … especially with the tattoos, sometimes I think that they aren't very feminine, you know, like not ladylike cos I don't believe in like all that that women cant have or shouldn't have tattoos, but like the ones that I have, like they aren't your typical butterflies and fairies and dolphins all that and sometimes, like mostly I love them, uhm, but sometimes I just think do I look a bit butch you know?"

Concepts of 'prettiness' and 'beauty' held by many of the participants do not reflect social Western ideals in relation to women and piercing. Kerryn regards tattoos, piercing and implants in women as aiding in the physical expression of an aesthetically beautiful female form:

> **"**…when I found out about the implants that they do subcutaneously, I was totally just blown away by that, and I think those look absolutely stunning, but uhm I don't know, unfortunately most of what you see is like people who have had horns put under their foreheads which I find sort of a pity because there's so much more scope for it,… and I think it could be very pretty as well. What I wanted and I actually I mean I haven't looked into far enough, and it's probably not practical and I doubt it, uhm specifically cos I've got tattoos on my back now so wouldn't like to, it would sort of get too busy, but I wanted nuts, you know the, (indistinct) I just thought it was so pretty, I mean before that when I was quite a young teenager I just wanted bars, down my spine, I always wanted that, thought they were so beautiful. I don't know if you seen, it's quite a famous picture, you'll see it in most books, the woman with the rings down her back, sort of either side if her back and they're laced up, so it mimics a corset (indistinct) it's very beautiful. Oh when I saw that I just wanted that done as well you know, I thought it was so pretty like, it was just really you know not the norm."

Anna also finds beauty in female piercings: "I got my nipples done because I think it's really pretty and feminine. And I just like the way that it accentuates the nipple and like you can play that up or down depending on what you feel like."

Anna and Kerryn's views of the female aesthetic and of femininity, together with the manner in which they choose to construct, represent and secure their own sense of womanhood, may have been influenced by their 'tom-boyish' childhoods. While both decidedly wish to retain

their femaleness, they also desire to feel stronger and more masculine in their bodies. This may result in anxiety unless they are able to find a way to reconcile these concurrent and contradictory desires. Body piercing is one way in which they attempt to achieve this. Atkinson (2002) notes that an association exists between body modification, (specifically tattooing), and masculinity, which should be acknowledged as partly underlying the decision by many women to partake in body modification practices. An overriding finding in contemporary literature on the rising occurrence of body modification amongst women is that it is a form of resistance against misogyny and oppression of women in a phallocentric society (Atkinson, 2002). This could be seen to prompt certain women to seek to feel more masculine within their own bodies, or to be perceived as such. Kerryn refers to her childhood saying: "You know I want to keep up with the boys, I got an older brother who I idolise, I was this little tom-boy running around in dungarees. I mean today I'm wearing a dress but it's probably the first time in months."

Of her childhood, Anna says:

> "I come from like a big family and I have four brothers and they are like quite over-protective. We used to fight a lot as kids but like not serious fighting, uhm, and it was like I always had to be like one of the boys and I think that I kinda like, liked that you know being tough like a boy and I used to get to wear hand me downs from my brothers so I was never one of those girly girls you know uhm, I don't think that I could have been."

The participants expressed different views with regard to the aging process, women, and body modification. While some felt that growing old should not affect their ideas and opinions of femaleness and piercing, others believed that as a woman grows older she should conform to more conventional female stereotypes. Tanya said:

> "Because you got to grow old with a certain amount of dignity, and I don't want to be an old granny like that, looks ridiculous. It needs to at least be something that is tasteful, in my opinion, tasteful, and in my opinion I think I will look pretty ridiculous when I'm old and I've got piercings."

Kerryn differed greatly in her opinion, stating:

> **"**… sometimes there are things like I know I'm going to be an old lady with tattoos, I may not have the piercings then, I'm not quite sure I want to be a grandmother, but the thing is I don't see anything wrong with it and I think a lot of the time people say that it's a silly thing to do because what about when you old and wrinkly"

She elaborated further, saying:

> "… when you see a young girl, who has a piercing or a tattoo or some kind of body modifications, no one bats an eyelid but when you see a woman who's sort of in her forties then suddenly it's like, hmm, people are just very disapproving and it's just you know, I think it's particularly with women, older men who have, tattoos or piercings it's sort of more acceptable, but older women, people are not yet at ease with that, in our society, that's sort of taboo. Automatically assumptions are made about them."

Tanya feels that pierced women are constantly fighting against socially gendered constructs of femaleness, but that being pierced can be both advantageous and disadvantageous::

> "Uhm, as a woman I find that uhm, men automatically, they tend to see you as, and I don't want to say slutty, cos I don't come across as slutty but they tend to view you as you not somebody to take seriously, so you tend to then, as a woman generally, you tend to have to try and prove yourself anyway, but then as a pierced woman, it's that much more difficult, but if you strong enough you can get it done very quickly, so the moment you open your mouth they start taking you seriously, but it (the way people react) is definitely negative, definitely."

General synopsis of Theme One: Concepts of femininity, beauty and womanhood

The participants all had varied interpretations around what constitutes femininity and how body piercing can enhance their femininity. Some of the participants subscribed more to Western concepts of an ideal female body, while others were less concerned with this, and

wished to construct their body projects in a manner that reflected their internal worlds. Again, some of the participants were particularly concerned with how their body projects would be interpreted by others (particularly men), while other participants did not appear to be especially worried by how others may read their body piercings. Issues around aging and acceptability for a woman to be older and to have body art differed from participant to participant.

Participants' definitions of 'pretty' and 'beautiful' in relation to the female form did not reflect Western norms. They all found unusual, extreme or multiple body modifications in women aesthetically pleasing. However, despite this, most of the participants, either consciously or unconsciously, are influenced by images of idealised Western representations of svelte-figured models. This is evident in the participants' criticisms of themselves as overweight now, or in the past, and their idealisation of the skinny woman as perfect. The notion that a beautiful woman is a skinny woman was inferred by most of the participants, but explicitly expressed by one of the participants when she talked about, and compared herself to her 'skinny' sister. Her comments about her sister bore a distinct degree of hostility and aggression. One of the participants has been diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa in the past, but is now fully recovered. Three other participants referred to, or openly discussed, their poor relationships with their bodies, specifically with regard to issues around weight.

Despite acting against established Western constructs of femininity through their body projects, all of the participants have been influenced by these constructs, and some have clearly internalised them. This causes a certain amount of cognitive dissonance because it is

difficult for some of the participants to merge their belief structures in this area with their actions and body modification behaviour. Although, on the surface, none of the women subscribe to the idea of femininity as necessarily submissive, some of the participants openly admit that at times they feel anxious about losing their femininity in the body modification process. Of interest is how this may make them feel in relation to men. Most of the participants strive to present themselves, and be experienced by others as strong women. Their concept of 'strong' is largely associated with masculinity, however, all of the women are heterosexual and would like committed heterosexual relationships. Only one of the participants appeared to be relatively unconcerned with, or aspire to conventional ideals of femininity. However, despite this, and given her enormous admiration for women who have veered far from the norm in terms of their body projects, even she did not feel brave enough to completely act on her desire to reconstruct her body in a way that opposes the socially accepted, aesthetically beautiful female form.

Views around body modification, women and aging were divided. Some participants held the belief that the aging process should be taken into consideration by pierced women because society reacts negatively to older women with body modifications, and also because of the decrease in aesthetic appeal of piercings on an older body. Other participants disagreed because they feel that such body projects are personally relevant and that this should not be affected or influenced by age or society.

THEME TWO: STRENGTH

References to strength appeared throughout the interviews with all the participants. While

some participants saw themselves as intrinsically strong people, viewing this as a motivating factor in their choice to get multiple piercings, others felt that the process of being pierced, as well as the actual piercings, somehow served to bolster their psychic strength. They saw this strength as having been weakened due to specific events in their lives, or as a result of experiences in their formative years in which they experienced other people as over-controlling.

Tanya emphasised her belief in her intrinsic strength, repeating phrases such as "…my character is too strong" and "…I'm a very strong person…" throughout her interview. This emphasis of her strength could be a defence against her unconscious anxiety that she is weak and not good enough. For her, weakness symbolises failure, and is unacceptable.

Other participants were more open to revealing or admitting personality vulnerabilities. They saw the piercings as a means of taking control of themselves physically and emotionally, of making decisions for themselves and asserting their personal strength, of finding the strength to make themselves heard where previously they experienced themselves as voiceless. For instance, Samantha said:

> "It's kind of like when you, it's like a decision you make. Especially when I was younger … it's a decision you make for your body, and it's visible, it's there, it's, nobody can take that away from you or make it not your decision or not your act, cos nobody else can decide to pierce your body…(it's) sort of the rights you have to do this to your body, even if, you know my parents don't like body piercing, even my earlobes, they don't like it. Uhm but it's sort of claiming your right to do that. I mean my belly button, even though I don't wear it anymore it's like, it reminds me that at that time in my life I did claim the right and I think I like that. I knew that I wanted to get my tongue done, and it was just kind of the same thing, taking responsibility for my body, but also deciding that I was able to do that, uhm sort of, ja, you kind of get run down and think that you cant make any decisions and every decision you make is going

> to be wrong and you know, I think it was something I knew that I wanted and I did and I felt good and I felt like it wasn't a mistake and I was getting better and I will get better."

Rebecca also acknowledges and speaks about how, as a young girl, she felt weak and voiceless and that she has discovered her strength through piercing. She too feels this has allowed her to take control of her body. This strength is further bolstered by the fact that she pierced herself. In piercing her own flesh, she feels she accessed greater strength:

> "You know you are so limited when you at that age to express yourself…I didn't have the money to go and do these things that I wanted to do, and I think it was, I don't think they would have been as important to me then if I just had them done them at a shop with a gun, because it wasn't…, at the time it wasn't having the piercing that was important to me, it was sort of piercing myself or the experience of that."

It is difficult to tease out the affect underlying Tanya's exteme defensiveness against conceding weakness. While on the one hand she appears to harbour a large amount of unacknowledged and unvoiced anger, this may in fact not be rage towards others, but a display of her stubborn assertion of her own needs in opposition to others:

> "At the time there were just so many forces, there were so many people pulling me in different directions, my parents saying "you need to close it down you need to go and find a job", uhm my fiancé saying "listen, don't worry you'll be fine keep going, push at it", my sister saying, "don't you think it's time that you start doing something decent" and it was just a case of really, "okay I'll tell you what guys, this is what I'm going to do, and it was my statement about this is it. So no it wasn't a feeling lost or anything, my character is too strong for that, it was definitely for all my personal relationships, saying to them, listen I'll do it my way. And when I did it they all actually all did back off. My dad specifically was like okay, fine."

Her decision to pierce herself was both a means of asserting her strength and expressing resistance to certain people who she experienced as controlling of her, and of expressing herself in a manner that she labeled for herself as 'strong' and identified as assertive: "It was

definitely for all my personal relationships, saying to them, listen I'll do it my way. And when I did it they all actually all did back off. My dad specifically was like, 'okay, fine'."

Other participants also spoke of experiences in which they felt they were being made to do what other people wanted, and that their capacity to make decisions for themselves was being eroded. This they understood as partly associated with their feelings of weakness and lack of control. In reaction to this, and as a means of reasserting their strength, they chose to be pierced. This bolstered their concept of themselves as strong and assertive individuals. Like Tanya, Samantha also felt that she was being pulled in directions by people, making her feel powerless. Her piercings helped her to gain strength and a sense of assertiveness: "I think it was also a time when I was, ja when I was sort of going along a direction that a lot of people wanted me to go along, and not really knowing if that's what I wanted and it was some way for me to bring myself sort of back to me, and sort of bring myself back to the fact that I could make decisions for myself."

Rebecca also expressed that she chose to be pierced as a way of rebuffing the demands and perceived expectations of others. In her case, she felt that the familial pressures to perform, react or behave in certain ways was bound up in the financial control her father wielded over her. Thus, being pierced not only allowed her to assert herself against the emotional expectations of others, but also to demonstrate to herself and others her independence. She felt extremely financially oppressed by her father, and paying for her own piercing was an important step in gaining her strength and independence from him:

"I didn't have any money at the time to have them pierced and I wanted to do them

> properly; uhm and I had to save up cos I was travelling and working, I had to save up for about three months and it was the first time in my life that I actually had to, you know work for something myself, something that I really wanted, I think I keep them cos it reminds me of that determination of knowing exactly what I want and not being able to get it and coming up with a plan and then getting it all by myself."

Kerryn also found it important that she paid for her own tattoo. She too found that this empowered her more than it would have had she allowed her father to pay for the tattoo which he had initially given to her as a present: "It was years later that I did the next section and that was when I was, when I got a job, I paid for them myself."

Concepts around strength and gender are found in all the interviews with all the participants stressing the need for strength of character. Some participants focused on femaleness and feminine strength while others associated strength with masculinity. Kerryn and Anna, in particular, associated 'strength' with 'masculinity', therefore seeking to assert masculine aspects of themselves in an attempt to feel stronger. Kerryn felt that she needed to minimise feminine traits and accentuate masculine ones in order to be seen to be a strong woman. In no way did she consciously want to be masculine, and there was certainly no evidence of any gender confusion. It appears that her notion of the concept of strength is highly gender based. She states: "I want to keep up with the boys, I got an older brother who I idolise…"

Like Kerryn, Anna does not have any desire to look masculine or to lose her sense of femininity, however, she too deems strength to be a male domain: "I always had to be like one of the boys and I think that I kinda, like, liked that you know being tough like a boy…"

The need to minimise feminine traits and accentuate masculine ones in order to be seen to be experienced as a strong woman does not indicate a desire to actually be a man. Rather, these women want to be perceived as being strong like men, and body piercing is one means by which they feel able to demonstrate and achieve that. Two participants described how they had been tom-boys when they were children. Psychodynamic theory asserts that when women assign significantly higher degrees of power and intrinsic value to masculinity, it indicates that it is likely they would have been exposed to attitudes or situations as a child in which boys were favoured above girls, or in which male adults were experienced as far more powerful than female adults. "When positive attention is given to this child, it involves only superficial, external attributes like her appearance or non-threatening, infantile ones like her innocence and cuteness. When negative attention is given to her brothers, their punitive inadequacies are equated with femininity." (McWilliams, 1994, p. 308). The participants' desires to retain an external representation of femaleness coupled with their definition of, and attempts to assert a 'masculine strength', indicates that they felt rejected based on their gender, but at the same time, are aware of the power that femininity can hold over men (McWilliams, 1994).

Certain anatomical areas were regarded by some of the participants as needing particular emotional and psychological strength to pierce because of the potential interpretations of others, or the participants' experience of their own bodies. Kerryn and Samantha both like facial piercings, but were cautious of getting them because they did not feel that they had the strength of character or physical features to wear facial piercings. Kerryn commented: "We saw this lady walking along, she had a number of facial piercings, which I always think is very brave for a lady, having one over here (septum) … can look so amazing but it takes, you have

to be quite brave to do that…"

Tanya specified that she was not brave enough for genital piercings, and Anna also stated that she was not brave enough to get genital piercings. None of the participants fully articulated what they believe braveness is in relation to piercing, nor did they specify how the qualities involved in being brave may differ for different types of piercings. In other words, the braveness needed for facial piercings may be more around the anticipated reaction from others, whereas the braveness required for genital piercings may be focused around the pain involved in the process, the possible complications after the piercing (such as scar formation and loss of sensitivity), and the ability to be 'brave' enough to explore ones sexuality in a manner that is not openly condoned or understood by society.

Some participants use the piercings as a constant physical reminder of their inner strength. It would appear that in these cases the piercing was used both to encourage and derive internal strength; to represent this strength, and as a constant and material reminder to the individual of their ability to be strong. Samantha, as an adolescent, was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa and she says her piercings were instrumental in overcoming this disorder. She explains how she still finds strength from their constant presence:

> "I mean my belly button, even though I don't wear it anymore it's like, it reminds me that at that time in my life I did claim the right and I think I like that….it (tongue ring) kind of reminds me of how far I have come since I got it and how far, you know how strong, I am in a way, uhm I don't like not having it in, it doesn't feel right. Ja I think what it reminds me of is how far I've come and how strong I've been and it's kind of because I had it done in that transition period, it kind of marks from where I started to get better to where I am now and it sounds so funny but it's been with me through all of that, and not that I say it's given me power or that, but it somehow is the reason that I've gotten through things, ja it's just a reminder of where I've been and where I

mustn't go back to."

Rebecca's piercings were symbolic of her ability to locate her inner strength. They still serve to remind her of her strength, and allow her to believe in herself when she is feeling weak: "It reminds me of that determination of knowing exactly what I want and not being able to get it and coming up with a plan and then getting it all by myself."

When asked if she would consider removing her piercings she explained that they are a commitment to herself and to her inner strength. Body modification can be understood as being a strong 'commitment to oneself' in which the body modifier attempts to anchor the self, and to construct a viable self-identity through their body (Sweetman, 2003; Turner, 1999). Rebecca explains how she perceives her piercings as essential in her commitment to herself:

> " I would feel almost like, not betraying myself, something less than betraying myself, but, ja giving in or, not even as strong, it just wouldn't feel, it would feel bad. It would, I know it's not the same thing but it's sort of when somebody gets married and they have a wedding ring and they never take it off and then you tell them you have to take it off, and people say they feel naked or uhm, ja like they betraying their partner or something I think maybe it would feel like that."

All the participants described how their first significant piercings were acquired during times of difficulty in their lives, when things felt out of their control and they were feeling extremely weak. Many women have piercings done at specific moments in their lives to honor and recall negative life experiences which they have managed (or are attempting) to overcome. The piercings elicit a sense of strength and a feeling of being "whole", "new", and "contained as individuals", and these feelings often grow stronger each time a new piercing is acquired (Stirn, 2003). As mentioned, Samantha was pierced during her battle with Anorexia; Rebecca pierced herself during her adolescence when she realised that her family system was collapsing and she felt voiceless and weak; Anna's most significant piercings were done after ending an unhealthy relationship and reasserting her control over herself; Tanya's piercings were in reaction to a work related incident in which she went from being a highly paid attorney to

nearly losing her job; and Kerryn's most meaningful piercing was in reaction to a cancer scare in which she felt that her own body was revolting against her.

Samantha acknowledges the above when she says: "I mean, I think now, sort of what stands out is they have all been done, sort of when I'm in quite a low place…"

Rebecca also acknowledges that her piercings are representative of low times in her life:"I think I know with my eyebrows uhm, I had them pierced because it was at a stage when I was deciding what to do with my life, sort of after leaving school, you know. What to do, and I made quite a few bad decisions."

Kerryn and Anna both admit that they still feel weak and ineffectual at present. Both feel that their lack of employment and occupational accomplishment largely defines them as weak. Kerryn says:

> "I'm not doing anything at the moment, I was studying last year, but I've dropped out, I hate it when people ask me what I'm doing because I fell like, it's so embarrassing, I want to be a writer but I'm writing at the moment, but I mean it's the extent that I've got a couple of published products on-line like the kind of thing that you don't actually even want to tell people, you know, so that's what I'm working towards."

Given this, it would appear that the inner strength to which they refer in the interviews is largely illusory or precarious, and when external pressures (such as job loss etc.) are exerted on the participants, they crumble because, in fact, they do not possess the internal resources to maintain a positive sense of self. It is not possible to ascertain how much strength is really derived from the piercings, but the women believe that they are drawing stability and a sense of containment from of their piercings, and it is this belief, rather than the piercing itself,

which allows them to feel a degree of internal strength. This 'strength', however, as mentioned, is very fragile and not wholly integrated as is demonstrated by the feelings of weakness that arise when faced with adversity.

General synopsis of Theme Two: Strength

While most participants acknowledged that part of the reason for their body piercings was rooted in a sense of weakness at a particular moment in their lives, one of the participants was extremely defended against admitting any possible weaknesses, which she appears to interpret as weakness of character. For those who reported feelings of internal weakness, the piercings were experienced as facilitating internal strength, and aided in strengthening their self concepts. Furthermore, the piercings and the process of being pierced was viewed as a means by which they were able to express a measure of control over their bodies and their internal world. It was also viewed by some as a means of making themselves heard by those people who they felt were controlling or overpowering. In this regard, many felt that their capacity to make decisions for themselves had been undermined from an early age, and this made them feel weak and lacking in control. This resulted in piercing as a means of rebuffing the demands and perceived expectations of others, and in regaining a sense of control and strength.

For two of the participants in particular, paying for the piercings themselves was extremely important as it represented a further step in self-empowerment and shaking off the financial control that they felt their parents (and in particular their fathers) exerted over them.

Many expressed that they use their piercings as a constant, physical reminder of their inner

strength. In other words, the piercings are used to encourage and derive internal strength, to represent that strength, and as a constant and material reminder of their ability to be strong. All the participants remembered their first significant piercings as being acquired during a time of difficulty in their lives. One was pierced during her battle with Anorexia, one pierced herself during her adolescence when she realised that her family system was collapsing and she felt voiceless and weak, one had her most significant piercings done after ending an unhealthy relationship and reasserting her control over herself, one's piercings were in reaction to a work related incident in which she went from being a highly paid attorney to nearly losing her job, and one participant's most meaningful piercing was in reaction to a cancer scare in which she felt that her own body was revolting against her. All reacted strongly when asked if they would consider removing their piercings. Most felt that it would represent a betrayal to self, an admission of internal weakness and would elicit their anger and resentment.

THEME THREE: ISSUES AROUND CONFORMING AND FEELING DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS

Most participants believe that their first piercing was performed more as an act of rebellion and non-conformity rather than a meaningful or personally symbolic act. Most individuals who are 'lightly' pierced have a tendency to regard their body modifications as primarily decorative (Sweetman, 2003). The participants interviewed in this study found that their piercings gained meaning for them over time. When they retrospectively examined the events and emotions that they were experiencing at the time of the piercings, their significance and importance became apparent. Tanya says:

"Initially my facial, the facial piercings were initially because I was making a statement

> about me as an attorney. I was going through a particularly very bad time uhm, career wise, uhm and I think it was probably just a "okay I'll listen guys but fuck you! And uhm, from there it just turned into okay, I like this, I like the reaction, I like the feel, I like what it looks like, fine, lets do it again."

Samantha says of her first body piercing: "I suppose it was a kind of rebellion thing."

Rebecca concurs that her first piercings expressed rebellion: "It was a bit of a rebellious streak, I went to a very private posh girls school and we weren't allowed to have anything else but one stud in each ear, that's why outside of school I was a bit of a rebel, or at least I thought I was…"

Anna also describes how being pierced was initially motivated by her need to be rebellious and to act against what she felt was expected of her from authoritarian influences. She says: "And even though I say we were rebels, uhm, we were actually really just good kids who were a bit you know off the rails, but not in a nasty way I don't think."

Tanya believes that she was rebelling, or acting out against demands that she felt were imposed on her by other people in her life. Being pierced was a way of showing others that she would not conform to their opinions or orders, and the act was accompanied by a significant amount of hostility. Rebellion and a need for assertiveness were strong motivating factors. It can be hypothesised that the participants' are defending against hidden feelings which, in part, are aggressive in nature, and consist of inhibited resentment, anger, rebellion and hostility. It is, however, difficult to tease out the extent and intensity of anger which may have underpinned this rebellion and assertiveness, but it is interesting to note that anger has been found to be one of the most significant predictors of body piercing and tattooing (Carroll &

Anderson, 2002). Samantha also felt that she was unhappy being compliant with the demands of others in her life, and needed to express herself and act out against what was expected of her: "I think it was also a time when I was, ja when I was sort of going along a direction that a lot of people wanted me to go along, and not really knowing if that's what I wanted and it was some way for me to bring myself sort of back to me."

All the participants expressed that they feel different from other people. Rose, interviewed in Juno & Vale (1989) noted that most body modifiers feel like misfits in society. The participants were not always able to articulate the way in which they experience this difference from others, but they felt that there had always been something that separated them from most people and prevented them from completely being or feeling accepted socially. Rebecca says: "I didn't have a lot of friends, uhm, and the friends I did have I didn't really feel understood me or knew what I was about…"

She talks about finally finding friends after she was pierced, and comments:

> "When I look back, all my friends had something about them, something that they were, we just felt more comfortable, I suppose we, ja and then I think you almost exclude yourself from society. In a way and you do so willingly because I never fitted in and I fit in with this little circle of people, it feels right and I don't see why I should conform in the way I look when I don't fit in the way I feel."

Kerryn also felt different all her life, but is conscious of being perceived more as an outsider since being pierced and tattooed:

> "I noticed the other day … I was walking around and it's like people stopped and they have a good look, and my mum also told me once, we went on holiday and we flew, and she said "I love going out with you, because you must see how people look", and that's stuff you don't realise and people are discreet as well to a certain point, but she

> says it's just your way, but uhm I don't know, (indistinct) generally people that are going to have such a pre-cast definition of you, generally I 'm probably not going to get on that well with them anyway"

Rebecca also feels that her piercings have exacerbated her feelings of 'differentness' and that people do read them as significant and representative of this trait. However, unlike Kerryn, she feels she has the ability to connect with others should she so choose. Somehow, while embracing qualities and emotional experiences that separate her from those she perceives as 'average' or 'normal', she also holds on to, and is able to access a sense of a collective emotional experience which allows her to feel that others are emotionally available and accessible on certain levels:

> "I feel somehow very different from other people, but at the same time, even though I look different and all that, I think that we are all basically the same, we just show things or experience things in different ways. Like we are all the same inside and I just choose to show how I am feeling like this, and maybe you do it in some other way you know."

Some participants pierced themselves to express and anchor their innate sense of 'differentness' and individuality, while others purposely strove to create and establish themselves as unique and different through their piercings. Tanya strongly desires to stand out from other people. In fact it appears as if she gains a sense of validation through her difference and thus strives consciously to promote or emphasize her 'differentness' from others. All her piercings have been done in her face and, as such, are highly visible, part of her motivation in being pierced is that others will see the piercing. Piercings are a way of projecting the self-concept onto the body's surface, and of communicating a specific identity to the world (Grosz, 1995). Kerryn's view on needing to externalise her self concept through purposefully visible piercings is the opposite of Tanya's. Kerryn does not wish to make a public spectacle of her

piercings and tattoos. In this regard she says: “You don’t do it for other people to look at.”

Tanya disagrees:

> “In everyday life, how do you, make your statement? Like if you’re walking down the road, you as a person you make your statement by your make-up or your hair or the way that you dress, but inevitably it’s not enough to have people look at you twice, unless they see something they like, but when you got a piercing it generally tends to make people look twice but then what the perception is that they pick up, that’s their problem. I’ve achieved the first step, they looking at me and are going: She’s not the same as everybody else. And that’s all that I need to achieve.”

It is almost as though Tanya feels that without making herself special by having something (the piercings) that defines her, she “is not enough” and will either not be noticed or will not be remembered. Later in the interview she denies this: “So ja, I think it’s not about I didn’t feel special, I think it’s about I am different, don’t assume that I’m the same…”

Kerryn also expresses a feeling of ‘not being enough’. She is more open to acknowledging her feelings of inadequacy, which stem from experiencing herself as different and somehow defective because she is not the same as other people. She talks about a picture she has seen in which a woman has implants up her spine, and describes this image as ‘beautiful’ and expresses that she wishes to have similar ‘nuts’ inserted in her back. Her desire to ‘bolt’ herself together could be interpreted as representing her unconscious anxiety that she may fall apart, and as a physical attempt to prevent psychic fragmentation. This may partly explain her desire to replicate the image of the woman:

> **“**What I wanted and I actually I mean I haven’t looked into far enough, and it’s probably not practical and I doubt it, uhm, specifically cos I’ve got tattoos on my back now, so wouldn’t like to, it would sort of get too busy, but I wanted nuts, you know the, (indistinct) I just thought it was so pretty, I mean before that when I was quite a

> young teenager I just wanted bars, down my spine, I always wanted that, thought they were so beautiful, I don't know if you seen, it's quite a famous picture, you'll see it in most books, the woman with the rings down her back, sort of either side if her back and they're laced up, so it mimics a corset (indistinct) it's very beautiful."

Samantha also feels that her piercings were not done for any public display but rather as a private means to deal with certain issues in her life at that time. In other words, although she admits to being pierced as a means of expressing rebellion and non-conformity, she also feels that a large part of choosing where to be pierced was not motivated by any need to stand out as different from the average, as is so clearly the case with Tanya. With reference to her belly ring, Samantha says: "I was quite large at the time so it wasn't something a lot of people knew about, but it was something that I knew about."

Not only was Samantha's choice not overtly non-conformist and thus conspicuous, but there was even an element of secrecy in the piercing site. While Tanya appears to need external reinforcement from others that she is different, which promotes her sense of self, others like Samantha achieve this same sense of uniqueness from piercings which only they know about. Rebecca also found some sense of herself and her individuality through 'secret' piercings:

> "All of my ears were done as a teenager, I started to pierce them myself, I think I was around twelve or thirteen at the time, just in my earlobes, uhm, I'd sort of pierce it and take it out and I knew my mum wouldn't like it, so I'd have it for a few days and take it out and go another week and pierce it again."

Rebecca also feels that she is pierced less out of a need to publicly articulate her feelings of being different and her need not to conform, and more because she needs to feel an internal sense of self. Her sense of self differs from how she perceives others experience themselves, but she does not explicitly feel a desire to make others aware of these perceived discrepancies

by overtly exhibiting her piercings. When asked if she would consider taking her piercings out she became quite emotional and responded:

> "Uhm I think it would depend on the context of why I'm taking it out, and if I was taking it out to conform, I think I would just be angry that I had to do that and I would feel almost like, not betraying myself, something less than betraying myself, but, ja giving in or, not even as strong, it just wouldn't feel, it would feel bad. It would, I know it's not the same thing but it's sort of when somebody gets married and they have a wedding ring and they never take it off and then you tell them you have to take it off, and people say they feel naked or uhm, ja like they betraying their partner or something I think maybe it would feel like that… it's because you work so hard to realise who you are and what you want and what's important to you, and I don't mean in any big grand way, but just even the small things and then to give up on that because, it makes fitting in easier, or you following the rules…I think you then betraying yourself."

Kerryn also expressed that for her piercing is a form of commitment to herself. She too emphasised the element of secrecy in piercings as a means of accessing a stable core sense of self, rather than as a way to convey to others her experience of being different:

> **"**You don't do it for other people to look at, it's not about, as a fashion accessory or to look sexy or attractive or daring or anything, because even if it does look like that for a short while, it's only going to be a short while and then you're going to be sixty, and then die of (indistinct) and I think anyone who has something done, they know that it's not really something that you can take lightly when you know it's going to be needled through your own flesh, you think about it quite seriously, …you do it for you, and it's, it can't matter too much what it looks like to the outside."

Anna admits that part of the reason she likes being pierced is that it is a physical representation of her uniqueness and that others can see this. However, she also acknowledges that on some level she does identify and associate with others, and that this too is something that she embraces: "They (nipple rings) remind me that I am different but also the same." Samantha aligns her identity more strongly with accepted, socially constructed norms, and although she feels different from that which she perceives as 'normal', she does not believe that others' superficial experience of her reveals to them her 'differentness'. This results in

reactions of shock and surprise: “I think people are sometimes quite shocked that I have a tongue ring uhm, I suppose I don’t look like somebody who would.”

Thus her perception of how others experience her is as a young woman who is adequately socially integrated and ‘normal’, but who has a few oddities, such as a tongue ring. This is vastly different from Tanya who does not seem able or willing to consider that people may not experience her as as extreme and unique as she might like them to. Kerryn, on the other hand, has always felt a rift between herself and other people. She expresses that she is not happy with feeling different and has on a number of occasions tried to bridge this gap and bring herself closer to what she considers to be ‘normal’, but that after many attempts she is left feeling even more isolated and different. Members of her family have also noticed this uniqueness in her, and appear to have unconsciously labelled it as ‘unacceptable’ and in some way ‘defective’. So while Tanya strives towards this, Kerryn has fought against it. She says:

> **“**Uhm, and my mum said to me when I go to university the people I meet, I mean I used to dye my hair like techni- colours … she said “please just look normal, and wear normal clothes and go and meet some normal people”. I said “okay”, and I tried this for the first two months and I was miserable and then the one day we had to do an assignment … and it had to be in a group and I was like “how am I ever going to get together with a group of people?”, and I was walking out and this girl came up to me and said, “look I’m sorry, but you seem like the only person that I actually want to approach and could we do it together?”, and she just turned out to be this very strange girl, not strange but completely mad like my mother said I should try and avoid, and I went that afternoon and I got my eyebrow pierced and I went to my mum and I said “see it doesn’t matter what I wear, or what colour my hair is, I still meet the same sort of people so I’m just going to get my eyebrow pierced cos it actually doesn’t make a difference”.”

Conversely, Tanya constantly and emphatically verbalises her uniqueness: “I’m not conventional, I don’t want to be put into a box, I don’t want to be…I am not the same as

everybody else, I will not be, I will not conform …I don't want to be put into that box, I will not be and I think it's part of who I am, my character is too strong for it…"

This, coupled with her extreme desire to disavow any form of mainstream social assimilation, could indicate underlying fears that she isn't really outstanding and unique and that if she does not constantly remind others, (and herself) of this, she might just disappear.

Some of the participants expressed that there was a part of themselves that would like to conform and fit in with social norms and acceptabilities, while others wanted very much to stand out and be individuals and be different in all respects. Kerryn, who appears to feel the most socially uncomfortable with those who she perceives as 'normal' people, expressed the strongest desire to partake in activities and experiences of 'normality' which would make her feel part of society. When asked how she would ultimately expand personal boundaries, she responded: "Uhm, I don't know. It's quite possibly being married with three kids or maybe being a published writer or I don't know something that I haven't even come up."

All participants acknowledged that body piercing is becoming more mainstream and socially accepted, but had different reactions to this. Tanya expressed a disdain for the integration of body piercing into society, stating that "It's bad, whatever the case is, now what people are doing." Although she appeared to feel that it diminished her own body modification, she would not entertain any thoughts that if others were pierced this might cause her to feel less special and unique.

In respect to the mainstreaming of body modification, Samantha commented: “Ja cos I think even a tongue ring now, is not bad, sort of out there, it’s quite accepted.”

Issues regarding acceptability of their body piercing in their occupational environments was raised by almost all the participants. Some feel accepted and liked by work colleagues and employers, and others feel a sense of antagonism between themselves and their employers, which they believe is fuelled by their body modifications. Tanya expressed a lot of anger towards the Law Society and the legal profession in general, which she feels unfairly judges her because of her piercings. When asked about her angry feelings, she denied them. She said that she feels that her piercings are limiting her career, however. When asked if she would consider removing them, she said:

> “No, it’s part of who I am, it’s part of my identity and if they don’t like it! I only took out, my eyebrow piercing once, and that was for a very, very big court case and I had to, it was the instruction of the advocate, who said to me ‘you will not come to court unless they’re out!’. Uhm, I’ve gone as far as the law society before and all I did was put a plaster on, so I don’t, absolutely don’t consider taking it out.”

Samantha’s experience of occupational acceptance is very different: “Uhm I think at work some people think it’s a bit odd, but it doesn’t change how they are to me… I wear it all the time even at work my boss has just gotten used to it”

There are significant occupational and personality differences between Samantha and Tanya, which may also account for the different reactions they receive at work. With regard to work, Rebecca notes:

> “Uhm I don’t think with all my facial piercings I could you know walk into a business and apply for a job, because you know people don’t look at me normally…you can see

people looking and wondering why I have all these piercings and you know they think it might be ugly or whatever."

General synopsis of Theme Three: Issues around conforming and feeling different from others

All the participants acknowledge that part of deciding to acquire their first (or first few) piercings was more an act of rebellion and non-conformity than a desire for a meaningful or personally symbolic experience. Over time, the piercings have gained meaning, and the participants have been more fully able to identify the underlying motives for being pierced. This has led the piercings to acquire a far more symbolic meaning than was originally attached to them.

All the participants said that they experience themselves as different from others. For some this is positive and they wish to highlight the differences by means of their body modification. For others this is experienced as negative and uncomfortable, and they would like to be able to better integrate with society and to enjoy more, and more fulfilling relationships with other people. Most of the participants feel that their social circles are not representative of 'normal', 'average' people.

While some of the participants were motivated to draw attention to themselves and their differences by having highly visible piercings, others chose rather to be pierced in places, or to dress in ways that hide their piercing. One participant in particular expressed her need to make herself immediately distinguishable from other people with her highly visible piercings. The extent to which she placed emphasis on the importance to her of others seeing her piercings

suggests that she believes that she is 'not enough' without having something extra or different. One of the other participants also expressed a feeling of not being enough, but she acknowledges this as a feeling of inadequacy, and as a sense of herself as different from other people. Her differentness is subjectively felt to be representative of a deficiency. She does not seek to publicly display her piercings, like the other participants. She says that her piercings were not done for any public display, but rather as a private means to deal with certain issues in her life at that time.

Most of the participants did not feel that their piercings negatively impacted on their occupational standing or interactions with colleagues and clients, although they did admit that it placed a restriction on the types of jobs they could do. One of the participants believes that her piercings cause significant negative interaction in her work environment. This participant appeared to be generally antagonistic in her attitude to her colleagues and her profession.

THEME FOUR: BODY IMAGE

4.1) PHYSICAL DISCONTENT

Tanya, Samantha, Kerryn and Anna all reported dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of their bodies. Negative feelings towards the body has been found to be a key predictor of body piercing and tattooing (Carroll & Anderson, 2002). All four participants described disturbances in their perceptions of their physical selves, and feel that they have been, or currently are over-weight. With reference to psychoanalytic developmental theory, distorted body image and poor body boundaries may develop if empathic failure occurred when the individual was an infant. The infant's experience of having her needs unfulfilled could lead to

body image distortions because the infant encountered difficulties in differentiating her body from her mother's. This can be carried into adulthood resulting in an inability to feel generally satisfied with herself. As an adult, the individual may seek vicarious satiation by means of a substitute object (Winnicott, 1949). The body piercing jewellery may be such a substitute object, acting as symbolic compensation for the loss of the primary object, as well delineating personal body boundaries. Although the participants may have distorted body images and poor body boundaries, their extreme concern with their physicality could also be explained as a product of low self-esteem, indicating less severe psychological disturbance.

Of the participants, Tanya is the only one who is currently overweight. She feels restricted by her body, which she describes as 'big', juxtaposing it with descriptions of her perfect 'skinny' sister. She uses piercing as a way to emancipate herself from her physical frame: "I am bound by weight…I cannot express myself in my clothing, so I'm fine with the piercing, that's quite cool. There's uhm, unfortunately with weight comes as I say boundaries, so it would be clothing but it isn't"

Tanya appears quite distressed and embarrassed by her large frame. When she talked about her body she made a number of comments which demonstrated her discomfort, embarrassment and attempts to make light of something that is clearly painful to her: "You know, what if I was, how's this for an admission, it probably isn't something I would tell anybody, if I was skinny, which I'm not, I'm a big girl, and I'm not comfortable with it, it's just the way it is. Now don't you tell anybody that!"

While she strives to present herself as confident and unconcerned with the opinions of others, she is far more insecure than she would choose to admit. It is also interesting that, in light of issues raised in the previous theme, she feels that she 'is not enough', that there is not enough of her to make an impact, and yet at the same time she feels that there is too much of her, and she believes that if she were physically thinner she would be more visible to others.

Samantha was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa but says she is now healthy. Body piercing, scarification, and branding have been linked to anorexia and bulimia (Pitts, 2003). Orbach, (in Pitts, 2003) describes body modification practices as a projection of intense hatred onto the body. Samantha believes that part of her motivation to have her belly pierced was that this was an area of her body that caused her great unhappiness: "I don't know why I had my belly button pierced but, I think I just decided that, that that's the place. Maybe it's a place I felt bad about and I wanted to love it as well." In "loving it" she is, of course, also attacking it by having it pierced.

She feels, however, that the piercing of her tongue was significant in her healing process:

> "Uhm my tongue I got when I had been, uhm, I had a really tough time, I was diagnosed with Anorexia…and it was sort of the time when I was getting better and was feeling awful but having to pretend to everybody that everything was fine, and I think, I didn't think about it long uhm, but I knew that I wanted to get my tongue done, and it was just kind of the same thing, taking responsibility for my body, but also deciding that I was able to do that, uhm sort of, ja, you kind of get run down and think that you can't make any decisions and every decision you make is going to be wrong and you know, I think it was something I knew that I wanted and I did and I felt good and I felt like it wasn't a mistake and I was getting better and I will get better. It was sort of an empowering step I suppose in my recovery but ja, and then, my tongue is my favourite part now, uhm sorry my favourite piercing uhm, and then soon after I got my tongue I stopped wearing my belly button ring, so, I don't know why, I just didn't, it didn't feel right anymore……it (tongue ring) kind of marks from where I started to get

> better to where I am now and it sound so funny but it's been with me through all of that and not that I say it's given me power or that, but it somehow is the reason that I've gotten through things, ja it's just a reminder of where I've been and where I mustn't go back to."

Anna admits that in the past she too has been too thin, and is in fact currently very slim. Despite this, at times she feels that her tattoos cause her to look big and fat. She describes it thus:

> "But sometimes I do suddenly get like anxious… especially with the tattoos… they aren't your typical butterflies and fairies and dolphins… sometimes I just think do I look a bit butch you know? And like I know that I'm not fat, like I know I have a good body and there have been times that I've been like way too skinny….

Kerryn also describes moments of unhappiness with her weight. This began in childhood:

> **"**As a little girl in primary school I was quite overweight, I look at photos now, and I actually wasn't really, I was that sort of awkward weight, and uhm… I was quite unhappy with that, I mean even recently, last year I went on medication, and I picked up like twenty kilograms in three months, and I was horrified, I had nothing to wear, my mum had to go out and buy me clothes cos I couldn't, I literally couldn't get my jeans on to like past my knee, it was horrible…

Kerryn's discomfort with her body is not just related to perceptions of being overweight. As a young adult she was diagnosed with a benign breast tumour. This experience prompted a very strong reaction, accompanied by a sense of dissociation from herself and her physical body. This led to her acquiring a nipple ring in an attempt to regain some form of control over her physical self. Piercing has been recognised as a way to physically enact a reclamation of one's body (Pitts, 2003). Kerryn describes her experience as such:

> "I felt like a stranger in my own body. I just felt like that, you know… I just sort of felt like my body had virtually turned against me and I was quite uncomfortable and unhappy about it…it (the nipple piercing) was just symbolic for me, I don't know, it was sort of reclaiming my own skin, and you know I felt much happier after that…The operation, it was very horrible, a feeling as though your own body is doing you harm

> and you know all these anonymous strangers poking and prodding at you and cutting bit's out and sending them away for analysis, it was really, it wasn't, it was almost like (indistinct) it was like common property"

4.2) INTEGRATION OF THE PIERCING INTO THE SELF

Although the use of transitional objects is primarily the domain of children, their use can extend into adulthood. Transitional objects are "not me" objects, that is they are recognized to be separate from the self, but have the potential to be experienced as a part of the individual, as an extension of the self (Winnicott, 1953). All the participants feel that their piercings have become an integral part of their being, and it is possible that for some of them their body piercings serve as transitional objects, however, this would not hold true for all. Even with those participants for whom the piercing does not function as a transitional object, it would be overly simplistic to label the piercings as merely products of fashion. The relative permanence of body piercing, the pain experienced during their acquisition, and the belief structure of the piercer need to be taken into account in assessing their significance to the individual (Sweetman, 2003). The degree of importance and significance of the piercings varied from participant to participant, however all had a strong reaction when asked if they would consider removing the them. For most, removing the piercings because someone requested this would symbolise a betrayal to themselves and would be experienced as a metaphorical amputation. The physical piercing was felt to have integrated not only with their flesh but with their psyches too. Samantha comments that : "None of the actual experiences of having it pierced are important to me, it's always the afterwards of having it in your body."

Piercings are felt to derive their meaning from both the process and the result (Stirn, 2003). Tanya believes that the piercings are "part of who I am, it's part of my identity…" However, she did say that she would consider removing them when she grew old as she felt that they would not look 'cool', demonstrating once again that, although she denies it, she is more influenced by the opinions of others than are some of the other participants.

For some participants, the piercings are a constant, concrete symbol of past experiences. Tanya says: "I've had this one (eyebrow) now for years. It's just a constant, it just stays there…It's like a good friend… I think that was a reminder: remember when that went badly, just keep that in mind, so it's also probably part of the aversion to taking it out.". Samantha also experiences her piercings as a reminder of her past and feels that they form a part of her. She too is reluctant to remove those that are particularly meaningful to her now:

> "I think the ones in my ears, I like them and I don't want them to close you know but they're not meaningful to me, it's my belly button which is sort of maybe a reminder, well not a reminder, but it's a… what do you call that when, I don't know, like when you find things from the past about people, it's like a thing from my past. Uhm and it sort of a pre-cursor to everything that happened afterwards and my tongue is sort of more of the present."

Rebecca says: "Uhm I think keeping your piercings is more important than having them done because they're so, you know you can just take it out and nobody will ever know you done it, keeping them in, that's where the importance is, that you continue to wear them in your body even though you don't have to."

Anna adds to this concept of the piercing as an external representation and reminder of her internal landscape saying: "They remind me of stuff in my past, like of where I was at certain times in my life. Like, I dunno, maybe this sounds corny or wacko but kinda like a diary that I am keeping you know, like on my body."

Kerryn talks about how her piercings connect her mind and her body and provide her with a sense of integration:

> "You know, this (the nipple ring) is part of me, and I don't feel separate from it…It's just to feel, I don't like feeling separate from my physical side, I mean I have a tendency to live very much in my head and then and I don't think that, that's a very good thing either, the best is to be as integrated as possible and for me it's just, it's a symbolic act that I could do, that, to feel integrated again, not in control of my body but very connected to it again."

On removing the jewellery from the piercings, Samantha said that although her piercings connect her with her body, she does not believe that she needs the jewellery inside the piercing in order to feel at one with her body, or to be reminded of the experiences underlying her decision to be pierced: "It's not something that I wear any more, but is still open, it's still there, ja.". Her piercing is still open and she is always aware of it, even though there is no jewellery filling the hole. In many ways this mirrors her relationship with anorexia (which was symbolised by the belly ring barbell): it is no longer present, or immediately problematic, but she is always conscious of the psychologically wound that it created:

> "Uhm, and it's just like having, you can feel it, and it's you know, it's always there you know, even now, when I don't have my belly button ring in, I know that the piercing's still there, so I don't know… it's just something tangible, to have… it really feels a part of me, I mean you get used to it you know, I would feel suddenly odd if it were gone."

Rebecca reacted very strongly when asked if she would consider removing her piercings:

> "It would depend on the context of why I'm taking it out, and if I was taking it out to conform, I think I would just be angry that I had to do that and I would feel almost like, not betraying myself, something less than betraying myself, but, ja giving in or, not even as strong, it just wouldn't feel, it would feel bad. It would, I know it's not the same thing but it's sort of when somebody gets married and they have a wedding ring and they never take it off and then you tell them you have to take it off, and people say they feel naked or uhm, ja like they betraying their partner or something I think maybe it would feel like that."

This is an expression of her self reliance and self assertion, as well as a desire for stability and containment in her life. Possibly she has not experienced others as being as available or

reliable as she would have liked. In committing to wearing the body jewellery (as a married woman wears a wedding ring to symbolise her commitment to the relationship), she is attempting to provide for herself that which others were not able to provide, to secure her independence and to bolster her sense of self.

General synopsis of Theme Four: Body image

Four of the five participants reported feelings of dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of their bodies. They also reported dissatisfaction with their body weight and some admitted that in the past they had either been over-, or under-weight. One reported that, in retrospect, and on inspection of photographs, she realised that her belief that she was over-weight was in fact not correct. One of the participants had been diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa, but is currently symptom free. She cites her piercings as aiding her in her recovery process.

One of the participants was diagnosed with a breast tumour that was later found to be benign. However, her breast cancer scare caused her to experience further feelings of alienation and discomfort within her own body. She too used piercing as a means to rediscover a sense of acceptance and agency over her body.

All the participants experience the piercings as integral to their sense of self and identity. When asked if they would remove the piercings if requested to do so, all had very strong reactions, stating that doing so would feel like a betrayal to themselves and would make them feel extremely angry. The piercings have come to be external, concrete symbols of experiences that they have had. They help the participants to locate their sense of self, and

serve as a reminder of their strengths and weaknesses. As one participant expressed, they remind her of where she was in her past and where she must never let herself return to.

THEME FIVE: SEXUALITY

Another primary motives for piercing is believed to be increased sexual enhancement and gratification (Klesse, 1999; Myers cited in Dennes, 2005; Vale & Juno, 1989). However, only two of the respondents felt that their piercings were influenced by a need to express their sexuality or believed that they had benefited sexually from their piercings. Fakir Musafar is a body modifier with extensive modifications who is perceived by many as having acquired ground breaking piercings. Musafar states that sex and sexual release is the last thing on his mind when being pierced; however, he does acknowledge that there is an element of sexual heightening or transformation following the procedure (Vale & Juno, 1989). Rebecca describes how she feels that her piercings enabled her to make a transition from being a child to becoming a sexual being: "It sort of marks, it marks a transition from being, I don't feel like I went through puberty, feel like I went from being a little girl to being a woman and I just thought breast and boobs are just, you know, the sort of epitome of womanhood in a way and uhm, ja, I wanted to mark 'this is my womanhood'."

She describes how prior to her piercings, which were done while she was in a committed relationship with her boyfriend, she was not able to "connect" with her own sexuality and did not feel any attachment to the relationships in her life:

> "Uhm, I think probably my nipple piercing uhm, I had that done about two years ago, it was you know I never really felt sexy and I never, I always had boyfriends who, they were kind of just there and I thought I had to have a boyfriend and I never really felt that they wanted me or needed me or, I was just sort of, I was just convenient, uhm and then three years ago I met my boyfriend Adam and everything just felt right, and you know we really so good together and he just changed everything in my life and it took a while and one day I just realised that I did feel sexy, at least with Adam and I did enjoy being me, and being so free with him, uhm, ja you know it's very exciting when I think about it now, that I mark that, that sort of feeling with the nipple piercing, but it's very special to me, it's always something I share with Adam cos he knows what it

means to me."

Anna also expresses her desire to acquire piercings which she considers to be more sexual within the context of a committed relationship:

> **"**I think that a genital piercing is quite hectic and it can send out the wrong message to a guy, and I say that cos of what my guy friends say, just that, like it's the kind of piercing I would like to get together with someone who I am serious about you know. I'm not saying to both get together but like I think it's a nice thing to get, to share, when you in a serious relationship that you know is going to last, although who knows what lasts, but that you feel like you're making a commitment to each other and also that, uhm, you're prepared to go through that pain because you know that sexually it will bring you closer together."

She also feels that some of her piercings have brought her and her boyfriend into a closer and more intimate relationship: "And like the tongue and the nipple piercing like I said before can be quite erotic and like I think that, uhm, that's quite exciting sexually, and so that's been a good thing uhm, for our relationship you know. And that they are ours that I share them with him. It makes it more special you know."

She readily admits that her piercings contribute greatly to her sense of sexuality and she enjoys that they have an exhibitionistic quality to them which can be exaggerated or minimised: "I mostly like the way they make me feel like more sexy and confident and ja confident. You know like if you want them to be noticed and you go like to a club or something and you have a slinky top on you can just kinda make out that there is something else going on there, like something more. And people are like 'hey?' I think it's quite erotic"

Unlike Rebecca and Anna, Kerryn very firmly veers away from the possibility of a sexual

meaning being attributed to her piercings. She is definite in her stance that they were acquired for herself and for her own psychic healing, and in no way associates them with sex or her own sexuality:

> "… you don't do it for other people to look at, it's not about, as a fashion accessory or to look sexy or attractive or daring or anything, because even if it does look like that for a short while, it's only going to be a short while and then you're going to be sixty, and then die…it's not really something that you can take lightly when you know it's going to be needled through your own flesh, you think about it quite seriously, and it's, you do it for you, and it's, it can't matter too much what it looks like to the outside."

General synopsis of Theme Five: Sexuality

Although sexuality was listed in the literature as one of the key motivations for body piercing, only two of the respondents linked any aspects of sexuality to their piercing. The one participant felt that her body piercings, specifically her nipple piercings, had aided her, in her mind, to a transition from being a child to becoming a woman, and had allowed her to access her sexuality.

The other participant expressed that her piercings allowed her a closer sexual and intimate bond with her boyfriend. For her, they contribute to her sense of sexuality and she enjoys that they have an exhibitionistic quality to them which can be exaggerated or minimised.

THEME SIX: PAIN

Body modification is seen by some as a passive variation of self-mutilation in which someone else (the piercer) mutilates the body (Juno & Vale, 1989). While some view body piercing as symbolic of self-hatred and pathology (Pitts, 2003), it is interesting that accepted, established women's body projects, such as liposuction and breast augmentation, which feed off Western

concepts of femininity and promote docility and passivity, are more intrusive and physically painful than body piercing (Atkinson, 2002). The participants had varying responses to, and experiences of the pain involved in their body piercings. Tanya describes how she enjoys the pain aspect of the piercings and tattoos:

> "It's an absolute adrenalin rush…I don't do it for the rush, but it's an absolute by-product, it's an advantage… three hours of intense pain (referring to the tattoo) uhm, and it just the endorphins going, it's a rush, it's really, really very cool, very cool, it's a good feeling… there are other ways of getting the rush, but I don't jump out of aeroplanes and you know, that doesn't do it for me, I don't like motor bikes and I think probably a lot of the other ways of doing it, is probably a whole lot of drugs. I don't do drugs so for me it's a good feeling."

Kerryn also acknowledges that the pain involved in the process is a rush: "After I'm (indistinct)… I think the endorphins released are sort of this massive uhm, I'm very happy very talkative afterwards, when I went to go fetch my boyfriend…talking a mile a minute, oh guess what, (indistinct). I felt like a kid in a candy store, very excited."

Tanya describes feelings of disappointment when the piercing and tattoo process ends saying: "Shit it's over, damn, okay let's do it again, Ja… I'm looking at it in the mirror and there's blood coming out and there's blood all over my face and I'm thinking, okay where can I do next?".

Some participants may be using the self inflicted pain of body piercing as a maladaptive defence against a punitive superego. In other words, unconsciously they may be experiencing feelings of guilt over certain real or perceived wrong doings. Instead of confronting these conscious and unconscious anxieties, they are punishing themselves by damaging their own

flesh. Furthermore, it could be hypothesised that the blood and bodily pain are visual and physical representations and evidence, for the participants, of their internal psychic pain which they struggle to vocalise and from which they may be cut off. Kerryn and Tanya both appear to struggle to express their emotions in a meaningful and appropriate manner. Tanya in particular seems to react extremely defensively and even aggressively. She denies many feelings and seems to project her emotions onto others. She experienced the blood letting as both exciting and calming. The pain and blood letting may be experienced as soothing because it enables them a sense of release and psychic transformation (Favazza, 1998). If the participants do experience the pain as soothing, this would go some way to explaining why they describe feeling elated, as well as their desire to repeat the piercing procedures.

The physical letting of blood could be interpreted as a symbolic act of purging and excreting hated internal objects. Some individuals hold a primitive equation between the inside of the body and affect, therefore, the elimination of physical material (in this case blood), is a means by which they are able to express their feelings (Malan, 1999).

Pitts (2003) interviewed five body modifiers and found that two experienced their blood letting during the piercing processes as positive and enjoyable. This, she feels, is not simply masochistic, but signifies for the body modifier a visible representation of their dissolving former identifications, represented by the letting of blood and the growth of new tissue. When asked how the blood all over her face made her feel, Tanya responded: “Nothing. Just it’s bleeding… standing with this thing in.” This inability or refusal to think about or reflect on her experience indicates that she uses primitive defence mechanisms to protect herself against

anxiety which may surface should her hidden feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness and anger (amongst others) be brought into consciousness.

Rebecca started piercing herself with safety pins as a young adolescent. She describes how she would pierce herself and allow the hole to hold jewellery for only a few days before removing it and then re-piercing. Given the indicated time frame, it is not possible that the piercing would have healed before she repeatedly inflicted another wound to the area: "I started to pierce them myself, I think I was around twelve or thirteen at the time…I'd sort of pierce it and take it out." Although she says that she started piercing herself because she did not have money to have a piercing done in a shop, she also admits that she enjoyed the process of piercing herself: "I don't think they would have been as important to me then if I just had them done at a shop with a gun, because it wasn't … it wasn't having the piercing that was important to me, it was sort of piercing myself.". By piercing herself, she is no longer a passive recipient of pain and injury to the flesh, but can now be seen as actively inducing pain by puncturing her own flesh. Jeffreys (in Pitts, 2003), describes body modification as the most grave attacks one can make on one's body, and compares the practice to acts of self mutilation such as cutting and burning. Freud understood masochistic tendencies as a redirection of anger towards the self (Panken, 1993). This redirection of anger can be interpreted as rage felt is toward a significant object displaced onto the internalized representation of that object, resulting in an attack on self (Kernberg, 1987).

Some body modifiers do experience a sense of release and psychic transformation when they are pierced (Favazza, 1998). Rebecca, like some of the other participants, describes an

accompanying state of dissociation, saying: "Uhm you can kind of just switch off and just be." Kerryn also describes a state of dissociation from herself but unlike Tanya and Rebecca, she is very much aware of this experience and believes that it brings her closer to her physical self. Piercing can act as a catalyst to heightened body awareness (Wood cited in Randall, 2002). In the actual moment of being pierced Kerryn is aware of a 'transcendence' of the physical, but after the process, she finds that she feels more anchored and present:

> **"**It's about being to able to transcend the physical pain because it is there, it's sort of, it seems like a bit of a paradox, because on the one hand it's about being able to move past every natural response your body has, and every physical sort of default, that you have, but at the same time it's, I don't think it's about a rejection of your body, I think it's about a very deep acceptance, uhm you know it's all very well and good to you, in your head, I don't think that, that's the ideal, for me it's not, uhm for me it's not, you know, I find that when I'm like that, I end up with lots of coffee table type bruises, cos I walk into things, I can get totally upset about it, and what not and I prefer to be sort of, I don't even know what the word is, but I like to feel very grounded and I'm not always."

Samantha describes her disappointment that her experience of being pierced did not live up to her anticipation of accompanying pain:

> "They weren't sore and I think there was an anti-climax… so ja the actual experience of the piercing is just like quick, so sort of inconsequential in a way, it's sort of the after, afterwards when you have the piercing that most sort of, that's what I like… I think actually having a part of your self, your body, you, pierced. Not the act of having it pierced is what I like, uhm I don't, ja none of the actual experiences of having it pierced are important to me, it's always the afterwards of having it in your body."

In fact, Samantha demonstrated an aversion to pain when she commented that she does remove the piercings if they start to give her pain, and that she voluntarily opted to have an anaesthetic when having her tongue pierced. Anna also had an anaesthetic for one of her piercings, but unlike Samantha, she found that this detracted from the meaning she attached to the process and the piercing. For her, the pain involved in the process is a barrier that needs to be overcome and a challenge that acts as a right of passage. She does not believe in anaesthetics

for piercings as she feels that it numbs the physical sensation, which lessens the psychic and emotional impact. Surrendering to the experience of being pierced is thought to enable a transcendent spiritual experience (Vale & Juno, 1989). By using an anaesthetic, the body piercer avoids 'surrendering' to the process. Anna refers to her experience:

> "Well like I said with the fist one it was a bit of a shock because there was so much blood. But, uhm, like it was also kinda cool because I felt like, wow, I actually managed to do that you know. Like that was pretty cool (indistinct). And then when I had it redone the guy asked if I wanted an anaesthetic and I thought ok well I may as well especially after the first one was such a fuck up you know. But like I think that I regret that for the nipples I didn't get an anaesthetic, cos like, I think it's important to feel the you know, uhm, the whole thing. Cos it's not just like about the being pierced thing, it's also like going through it and showing to yourself that yes I can do this and even though it hurts I made it through. Like proving something to yourself. Like crossing a line. Like that you had to endure something to get that in the end and when I had my belly done with the anaesthetic it was like so what. It was just like numb and dead and I could feel a bit of pressure (indistinct) uhm, but like with the nipples, and also cos I had them done together it was like damn, damn sore and it's a kinda a cool feeling."

Kerryn also does not believe in using anaesthetic for piercing with the exception of certain piercings:

> "I don't understand why people use anaesthetic. There are situations where anaesthetic is necessary…what I've heard, I mean with men, the intimate piercings…it's just necessary, because that's so extreme that they wouldn't actually be able to sit still, but I mean I think if you can, it's better to sort of live through the whole experience, it's part of (indistinct)…it's just really trying to you know, sort of not burst into tears, uhm it's trying to be brave and get through it as gracefully as possible."

Although pain is a big factor in Anna's piercing experiences, she says:

> "I'm not into the pain aspects of piercing like some people are, but I do think that like getting pierced or tattooed or whatever, it's a big thing. Uhm. It changes you. It changes the way you look and how you feel about yourself uhm (indistinct) and it's not like a haircut you know that you can decide oh well I don't like that cos even if with piercings if you take them out, there's still a scar like a mark that's on you forever. So, uhm, I think that it's good that it hurts because it means you have to really think about if this is something that you want and are you prepared to go though this pain and it

> also kinda makes it more real you know. Someone is sticking a needle through your skin through your flesh depending on where you having it done it hurts more or goes deeper you know. And if you just use anaesthetic like what's the point?"

Kerryn concurs with Anna on this matter: "It's not really something that you can take lightly when you know it's going to be needled through your own flesh…".

Kerryn talks a lot about the need to be brave, to overcome the suffering of the experience:

> **"**Anyone who tells you that piercings doesn't hurt or tattoos doesn't hurt, is lying, it does hurt, I mean it always has been very important not to moan or complain or pass-out or cry, I suppose you cant help it if you pass-out but it's … part of it, it's just really trying to you know, sort of not burst into tears, uhm it's trying to be brave and get through it as gracefully as possible"

For her this is an achievement and a way of validating herself in her own eyes. She would like to try a suspension but does not feel that she is able yet, although she adds that it is something that would be really meaningful to her. It would symbolise another passage or threshold crossing.

General synopsis of Theme Six: Pain

The participants did not convey any shared meanings concerning the experience of the pain involved in the piercing process. Some reported that they felt an accompanying sense of elation which they described as a 'rush'. Most felt a sense of numbness and dissociation during the process: an ability to simply "switch off and just be". This was experienced by most as a pleasant distancing from the physical; however, one of the participants who expressed in the interview that she generally has difficulties 'being present', felt that the pain feelings allowed

her to become more ‘present’ in her body.

Most of the participants believe that body piercing should be performed without the use of anaesthetic because the experience of pain is an important aspect of the piercing. The pain, they feel, makes the experience more real and the significance of the piercing more meaningful.

Humans are driven towards tension reduction and away from pain (Fonagy & Target, 2003). What is of note here, is that some may attempt to protect themselves from psychic pain through physical pain, i.e. they use pain as a defence. Defense Mechanisms can be psychologically healthy or maladaptive, but tension reduction is always the goal. The triangle of defence, anxiety and hidden feelings, in conjunction with the link with the past can be used to provide a psychodynamic explanation for symptomatic phenomena (Malan, 1999). The participants’ body piercings may be interpreted as observable symptoms borne out of defences whose function it is to keep painful and conflicting feelings out of consciousness. The psychoanalytic definition and interpretation of masochism does not necessarily connote a love of pain and suffering, but rather that the individual endures the pain and suffering in a conscious or unconscious attempt to reach a more endurable psychic state (McWilliams, 1994).

THEME SEVEN: ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

None of the participants placed much emphasis on the occurrence or importance of attempting to find deeper spirituality or reach an altered state of consciousness through the piercing

process. As discussed in Theme Six (Pain), Tanya, Rebecca and Kerryn all talked about experiencing a state of detachment during the piercing process, which could be interpreted as entering into a different state of consciousness. Rebecca describes this as a time in which she is able to "just switch off and just be", Tanya describes a numbness in which she says she feels nothing and just stands looking at the blood coming out of her face. Kerryn also reports experiences that could be interpreted as a state of dissociation, but it differs from Tanya's and Rebecca's experiences in that she believes that it allows her to be more in touch, rather than cut off, from herself.

Only Kerryn has considered more extreme piercing procedures which she feels would allow her greater access to her internal world, thus allowing her to enter an altered state of consciousness. The suspensions to which she refers in her interview require a number of small meat hooks being inserted down the back of the arms, legs and back. The hooks are then threaded and the person is elevated off the ground and is literally suspended in the air. The process is extremely painful, although those who have participated in suspensions report a surprising lack of pain and a sense of elation, release and extreme dissociation. This, many believe, is a highly spiritually charged process which allows one access to an altered state of consciousness. Kerryn talks about her thoughts and reasons for wanting to do a suspension:

> "I'd like to do a suspension, but I'm not ready for it yet, I just don't think I could actually have it, but it's something I know I desperately want to do**.** I see it as a completely spiritual thing… For me it's about doing something that is very hard and very difficult and very painful and being able to, I mean, what I've seen and what I've heard from the people who do it, it's really, it's always a spiritual experience, I've never seen anyone who's done it for a stunt or you know for, nobody actually, it's always, I think it's a different thing for each person I think it's a catalyst, some sort of catalyst, …I think it's something for every person it's this profound spiritual experience, but I don't think it's necessarily the same spiritual experience, uhm I mean

> if you look at it, it's not really a new practice, it's really, it's the oldest in any sort of organised civilisation, they use it, I mean putting the body under that amount of stress. It allows you to go to a place but I also think it's very dangerous, if you not ready for it, then it's just very traumatic and I think it can damage you, but I think it's different for each person, but it's … sort of growth, you feel like you going to the next step in your personal growth."

She feels that she lives in her head and describes how she will often discover bruises on her legs from walking into objects because she is so unaware of her environment. She describes this as not being 'resident' in her body and she is unhappy with this state of being. Piercing is one way that she tries to reclaim her consciousness, however, she feels that doing a suspension would help her greatly in this respect: "It's about being to able to transcend the physical pain …I don't think it's about a rejection of your body, I think it's about a very deep acceptance."

General synopsis of Theme Seven: Altered states of consciousness

As addressed in the previous theme, most of the participants entered a state of dissociation during and slightly after the actual piercing process. However, attaining a state of heightened spirituality, or an altered state of consciousness was not emphasised by the participants as important or relevant in their piercings. Only one has considered this aspect of piercing, and for her, she feels she would need to embark on a more intense process of piercing called 'suspension' in which the entire body is threaded with hooks and suspended from the ceiling with ropes attached to the hooks. The participant who was considering this did not feel she was yet ready for that experience.

THEME EIGHT: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

8.1) PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Because psychodynamic explanations for self-mutilation appeal to early childhood experiences and conflicts, it is important to try to understand how the participants' familial relationships, (specifically their experience of, and interaction with their parents in their formative years) may have may have shaped their personalities and thus been a motivating force in their choice of body projects. Psychodynamic theory stresses early parental misattunement and emotional unavailability as contributing to anxieties and maladaptive defences later in life. Uncovering the occurrence of developmental rifts in the formative years can be instrumental in understanding the unconscious motivations for acts of self harm (Fonagy & Target, 2003). Specifically, either real or imagined experiences of loss and abandonment are thought to trigger a desire to direct aggression towards the self. This is believed to occur because either consciously or unconsciously, the individual believes the abandonment and loss of the loved object (i.e. the parent) to be as a direct result of their actions. The self harm, in this case, body piercing, is thus a self punishment for having caused the abandonment (Walsh & Rosen, 1988).

In the interviews, all the participants describe their childhoods as 'normal' and their relationships with their parents as 'good'. Rebecca is the only participant who talks about marital conflict between her parents: "I think my parents, you know, my parents have never got along, they were fighting since I can remember and I think it was at that time that I began to realise that it's, it wasn't alright and that there was something wrong."

Despite a denial of conflictual parent/child relationships, closer examination of the interview material indirectly reveals ambivalence. It is well known that a conflictual or insecure attachment with the primary care giver can cause significant psychic disturbances in later life. The participants' defensiveness against acknowledging ambivalent parental relationships possibly indicates that this is associated with some unconscious conflict. In relationships in which there is ambivalence, the object is both hated and loved. The defences operating are repression or splitting and denial in which conflict is avoided through keeping the two incompatible feelings entirely separate (Malan, 1999).

When asked about her relationship with her parents, Tanya described it as 'great', adding "…my mum and dad… They very, very cool". Her description of her childhood as non-conflictual, and her parents as open minded and flexible in their attitude and disciplinary measures towards the children is contradicted at another point:

> "We grew up very strict uhmm, but we lucky because our parents allow us, they've always allowed us to express ourselves, we can do, there were rules - you can only go and sleep at your friends house when you are 14 years old, which off course was terrible because everybody was sleeping at everybody's houses. We weren't told you will go and do a degree, we decided that was what we would do and it was great."

Overprotective parenting can interfere with autonomous development (Fonagy & Target, 2003) and could offer some explanation as to Tanya's struggle with, and need to assert herself, (sometimes contextually inappropriately) as an adult.

Although she initially denies any conflict or ambivalence in her relationship with her parents, later in the interview Tanya does reveal that in fact the relationship between her and her father

was not always ideal: “My dad and I had a bit of a rough patch.” She also indicates that when she first acquired a piercing, part of the satisfaction for her was that her father, in particular, reacted strongly and she felt that she was reclaiming control and sending a message to him that she is now making her own choices for herself. Samantha recalls that she and her siblings and mother were close growing up. No mention is made of her relationship with her father. She also then adds that although she feels that she was close to her mother, it was “nothing special”. Rebecca describes her relationship with her mother as close and one in which they share many common interests: “Uhm, my mum is lovely, uhm we get on, we have lots and lots of, you know we both love art and I remember going to art exhibitions with her when I was younger and really sort of feeling special with her.” Given the favourable light in which she describes the bond between herself and her mother, it is of interest to note that it was from her mother that she hid her self inflicted piercings. She openly identifies the problematic relationship she still experiences with her father: “And my dad I don’t get on with… I always felt very small and very insignificant with him, and almost a bit of an embarrassment because I always seem to be doing something that was wrong, even when I had no idea what that was.”

Anna also feels that she is a disappointment to her parents; “They don’t really get why I do this and I think that I am a bit of a disappointment for them”. Like Samantha, she does not specifically mention her relationship with her father, but she does express a desire to have a closer attachment to her mother: “It would be nice to be like one of those girls who goes shopping with her mom and has lunch and like shares secrets and things uhm, but you know I think they did the best they could and that’s all you can really ask (indistinct) your parents. But sometimes I do feel a bit sad that we aren’t closer you know. It would be nice.”

Kerryn also describes her relationship with her parents as good:

> **"**I think I'm very lucky, cos of my parents… I think it's a huge advantage anyone who grows up knowing that they are loved, a lot of people don't have that, it's terrible, I only realised quite recently how many people grow up and that don't necessarily have that to take for granted and it's like, and if there's anything it's the thing I'm luckiest to have had, it's that. You know, it's sort of gives you a lot of confidence to…you know… how you go out into life, it's nice."

Despite this, she does suggest a conflictual earlier relationship with her father. His reaction to her getting a tattoo as an adolescent is tinged with aggression and destructive retaliatory behaviour: "They're completely against tattoos, they used to tell me that if I came home with a tattoo they would 'angle grind it off my body', those were my father's words."

Despite this initially explosive relationship with her father, he in fact bought her her first tattoo:

> "In the end, my father actually, he phoned me the one day, they (her wing tattoos) were a gift from him. I had a drug problem as a young teenager uhm, and my father (indistinct) I relapsed a couple times after that but that was with the (indistinct) He said really I don't understand what you see in them, but I understand that it's important to you and he said I've got a present for you and he took me go get that and he said that I need something to lift me up at that point."

Parental reaction to the participant's piercings and tattoos varied from complete acceptance without understanding (as in Kerryn's case), to disgust, shock and refusal to acknowledge the body modification at all. Anna describes how, despite her tattoos and piercings being far from inconspicuous, her parents never acknowledge them. She does not comment on how this might make her feel invisible to her parents:

> "Like uhm, my folks just pretty much ignore them. It's kinda weird like the first tattoo

> I got they hated and were shocked and all that but after that they just kinda pretend that they don't exist and every time I have gotten a new piercing or tattoo they just don't say anything, it's like nothing has happened or changed and it's not like you can't miss them you know."

Kerryn describes her mother's immediate reaction as shocked, but goes on to say: "First she was actually quite upset with me, it was quite shocking to her, but she saw I was so happy, she said okay, you (indistinct)and it was alright".

Many of the participants see themselves as the 'bad girl' in the family and believe that this is how they are experienced by others. Rebecca feels that her sister blames her for making her parents stressed and anxious, and an underlying unvoiced accusation may be that Rebecca is, to some extent, blamed for the tumultuous interaction between her parents: "I put mum and dad through worrying about me and stressing about me". Kerryn says: "… I was just giving my mother grey hairs", and Anna uses very similar language when she says: "I was like a real rebel at school … I think I gave my parents grey hair. I was always getting into trouble."

8.2) OTHER SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS

Psychodynamic theory proposes that internal object relations are etched in neural networks from early childhood development and tend to repeat themselves in adult relationships (Pompili, Mancinelli & Tatarelli, 2002). For this reason, the interviewer questioned the participants to ascertain if there were any transferential feelings towards others in current relationships which may have derived from feelings about the parents (Malan, 1999), and which could be seen to impact on the participants underlying motivations for being pierced.

Furthermore, the participants' social interactions and ability to form and maintain longer term intimate relationships was felt to be significant in light of identifying possible attachment styles and defence mechanisms.

Four of the five participants are currently in committed relationships which they describe as satisfying. None of the significant partners have any apparent issues with the participants' body modifications. However, Rebecca, Kerryn and Anna all acknowledge that in the past they have been involved with partners who did not accept their body modifications and who undermined their confidence by belittling them in some or other way. Of all the participants, Kerryn appears to struggle the most to socially integrate and to feel comfortable in relation to others. She has recently started corresponding with people on the internet, which has allowed her access to a network of people she defines as 'normal':

> "I recently discovered the internet which was great fun, with the internet I've got three people that I actually speak to, at first it took a while, it's quite daunting when you go in, and I sort of found three people that I sort of speak to and I mean, one is an elderly sheep farmer from Idaho, who's deeply religious, and we get on very, very well, uhm and I've told him about my tattoos and piercings. I showed him a picture and he said you know really, usually he doesn't approve of this sort of thing but he thinks I'm a nice girl and you know, and it's actually, it's been nice to sort of interact with people."

General synopsis of Theme Eight: Interpersonal relationships

All the participants recount their childhoods as normal, and their relationships with their parents as good. However, on closer examination, it becomes apparent that most had/have conflictual relationships with their parents, which was accompanied by feelings of ambivalence towards them. Many of the participants perceive themselves as the 'bad girl' in their family. Two of the participants feel that they are big disappointments to their parents: that

they have not lived up to their expectations. The participants reported parental reaction to their piercings as varying from acceptance to disapproval, shock and disgust.

Four of the five participants are currently in committed relationships which they describe as satisfying, however, many of the participants either alluded to or directly stated that they had been in destructive relationships in the past. This would be significant both in terms of self-punishing tendencies in which they place themselves in situations or relationships that are destructive and thus affirm their unconscious beliefs of themselves as worthless and undeserving, as well as with reference to transferential relationships in which the current interpersonal relationships are seen to echo past parental relationships. As discussed, many of the participants had ambivalent interpersonal parental relationships.

Furthermore, although some of the participants associate strength with masculinity, and wish to assert masculine traits so as to affirm themselves as strong women, they also see men as more powerful and able than women. Paradoxically, becoming involved with a dominant man is both self-affirming and devaluing. Their gender based self representation as weak, is strengthened, and unconscious feelings of helplessness, inadequacy and ineffectualness are affirmed. However, at the same time, by 'possessing' a strong and dominant man, they may experience themselves as possessing his power and strength too. In this way they have achieved masculine strength but can never really feel empowered.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Using Malan's (1999) Triangle of Conflict in conjunction with the psychodynamic theories of

Fonagy & Target (2003); Kernberg (1986, 1987,1993); McWilliams (1994) and Winnicott (1949, 1953), the findings as discussed above under the main themes are now formulated in an attempt to provide a more complete understanding of the underlying meanings of, and motivations for the participants' piercings.

Piercing can be understood as a defense mechanism used by the participants' in an attempt to avoid their internal conflicting and painful feelings. All the participants have varying levels of low self esteem, evident either directly or indirectly in the data. They use body piercing as one means to cope in an environment which they appear to experience as threatening, unsafe and uncontaining. This can be seen as a transferential reaction elicited from their past, and specifically shaped by experiences in their formative years. The main hidden feelings that the participants are defending against can be seen to be ambivalence (i.e. the feelings of love and hate for the same object at the same time), anger, shame, inferiority, inadequacy, jealousy, envy, fear, weakness and worthlessness.

The participants protect themselves through idealization, splitting, displacement, denial, dissociation, acting out and exhibitionism. (A more complete analysis of these follows shortly). Many of the defenses are primitive, thus indicating that the developmental rift that occurred in their childhoods and shaped them psychologically took place at an Oedipal or pre-Oedipal level. In other words, at this very early stage, psychic safeness and optimal satiation was possibly not experienced by the participants and they may have experienced their primary caregiver as unable or unwilling to meet their needs. With the exception of Rebecca, the participants are generally defended against this possibility, and attempt to portray their familial

relationships as ‘normal’ and ‘good’, however, their feelings of ambivalence towards primary caregivers would have originated in an early insecure attachment thus implicating at least some degree of empathic failure.

Their piercings may be seen as a form of bodily acting out. The participants, as a result of their personal histories and past experiences do not anticipate respectful attention to their feelings and therefore do not verbalize them. The attempted message being conveyed to the viewer is, “Pay attention! I’m in pain!” Acting out is counterphobic, in other words, the unconscious fear is actually approached through the defense (McWilliams., 1994). This is evident in a number of the participants’ underlying feelings suggested by the interview material.

From the thematic analysis and discussion of the data, it is clear that many of the participants act out in counterphobic ways. Many have a low self esteem and poor body image. They feel ashamed of their bodies and struggle, or have struggled with issues related to weight. By piercing their bodies they are actually drawing attention to their bodies. The body piercing makes them stand out from others and they receive more attention than had they not been pierced. This makes them the centre of attention when they subjectively experience themselves as inferior to others. By showing off their bodies they are converting their passive sense of physical inferiority into active feelings of physical power. This is both counterphobic and counterdepressive (McWilliams, 1994). This applies to Samantha, Anna and Tanya but less so to Rebecca, and not at all to Kerryn who tries hard not to have any of her body modifications visible to the public gaze.

Another counterphobic behaviour could be seen to be the constant striving to be brave, which is then realized either through repetitive piercing, or by piercing parts of the body that the participants fear piercing (e.g. facial and genital, or simply being pierced even though they fear they will 'look butch' and not gain the approval of the male gaze). Linked to concepts of being brave, are ideas around strength. For Kerryn and Anna in particular, women are seen as weak, and men as strong. This would have stemmed from early childhood experiences of gender related roles, behaviour and parental attitudes around gender. This idealization of male strength leads them to feel powerless in their womanhood and to envy men. Piercing thus narrows the gap between strong masculinity and the participants' devalued femininity. The un-pierced female body is somehow 'not enough'.

Piercing as a dissociative mechanism acts to reduce the amount of affect felt by the participants. However, this is paradoxical because the piercing is also used to release and feel emotions from which the participants have become cut off through their defenses. Splitting occurs when two conflicting and anxiety provoking feelings are held simultaneously and implies that idealization is present. Tanya was very antagonistic towards figures of authority, especially in the work environment. This could be seen as a form of denying the underlying negative feelings and not acknowledging to whom these feelings are really directed. These feelings, derived from early parental relations, are projected onto others, whose subsequent behaviour is interpreted to confirm the correctness of the attributions. An example of this is Tanya's stubborn refusal to remove her facial piercings and her accompanying belief that her professional colleagues (specifically the male ones), and the Law Society are 'bad'. Tanya, in particular, comes across as confident and controlling. However, in light of the analysis and

discussion as put forward in this study, it could be hypothesized that in fact she feels the opposite. She feels weak, fearful, insignificant, powerless and defective.

While it has become evident that body piercing is at least partly used by the participants as a defense mechanism, it is still not clear from the data analysis if this behaviour is necessarily pathological (as with self-harm) or a constructive way of mitigating unconscious anxieties and strengthening a low self esteem. Ultimately, the social and occupational functioning of each individual participant needs to be examined. Based solely on occupational achievement, Tanya appears highly functional. She has a university degree and is a practicing attorney while the others have only partially completed degrees or none at all. However, Tanya is unable or unwilling to acknowledge any feelings which may cause her anxiety. She is highly defended and uses splitting to deal with ambivalence. She cannot see that there are weak or angry parts of herself, and she projects these outwards on to others. Her use of body piercing seems to be the most maladaptive. Kerryn and Samantha have both used their body piercing as an aide in overcoming diagnoses (a tumour, and a diagnosis of Anorexia Nervosa respectively). While it could be argued that there are more 'appropriate' means by which to deal with such traumas, these two participants' use of body piercing was subjectively experienced as positive and helpful in re-establishing their sense of themselves and 'reclaiming' their bodies. While Kerryn appears to struggle the most socially, this does not seem to have been initiated by her body piercings, but is an aspect that she has described as having struggled with all her life. While their body piercing does place restrictions on their occupational and social relationships and functioning, as is readily admitted by most of the participants, it is not possible to assess if they would function better, or be more content with themselves if they had not been pierced.

Analysis of the data clearly revealed that piercing holds different significance and depth of meaning for each participant. Based on some of the participants' views around aging and piercing, as well as their motivation for being pierced, it would seem that for some the experience of being pierced and of having a piercing is possibly only transitory and representative of how they experience themselves, and themselves in relation to their environment now, while for others (Kerryn in particular stands out), it is a step on a journey to really try to find a deeper and more acceptable understanding of her inner world. What is clear though, is that piercing behaviour is complex and no single set of meanings or motives can be generally inferred outside of close examination of the individual and her specific personal history and circumstances.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

During, and upon completion of this research report, two specific weaknesses of the research became apparent to the researcher. The first concerned the research sample, and the second with regard to the actual interview process. Although not purposely constructed so, the population group consisted of only white participants who came from a middle class socio-economic background. Had the participants been drawn from a wider demographic group, they would possibly have demonstrated a wider spectrum of meaning and motives.

With regards to the interview schedule, it is felt that a more in-depth description and understanding of the participants could have been gleaned had there been further questioning around parental relationships and their developmental impact. Only after the interviews had been conducted and the data analyzed, did the ambivalence within these relationships become clearly apparent to the researcher. Psychodynamic theory emphasises early childhood relationships with primary caregiver as pertinent in terms of later behaviour, decisions and attitudes in adulthood. As such, richer information in this regard would have been useful in formulating hypotheses regarding the impact of developmental experiences and primary relationships on the participants' decisions to modify their bodies through piercing. Furthermore, a lack of detailed information in this regard makes the attribution of unconscious meanings and processes more speculative and less evidence-based. A number of interviews with the same participants may have allowed deeper probing of relevant areas that were only approached superficially in the single interview.

Future research should seek to address the limitations of this research as detailed above. Specifically, the research sample should be more representative of South Africa's population demographics. This would be of interest as it would uncover shifting generational and racial perceptions around body image and agency. The male body piercer may have significantly different responses, motives and ways of constructing and attaching meaning to the piercings and the process of being pierced. Therefore, a gender based comparison would be of significance and interest.

The administration of psychometric instruments assessing personality traits (such as the MCMI) could also be used in conjunction with interviews to uncover any commonalities in personality characteristics or the presence of personality disorders. In light of the debate around the pathologization of body piercing, this would be particularly salient.

APPENDIX:

INTERVIEW- KERRYN

Interviewer: **Please could you answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. In your description, comment on as many aspects of the experience as you wish. This is so that I can get the fullest picture possible.**

Interviewer: your name?

Interviewee: Kerryn

And how old are you?

I'm 23.

And what do you do?

I'm not doing anything at the moment, I was studying last year, but I've dropped out,

I hate it when people ask me what I'm doing because I fell like, it's so embarrassing, I want to be a writer but I'm writing at the moment, but I mean it's the extent that I've got a couple of published products on-line like the kind of thing that you don't actually even want to tell people, you know, so that's what I'm working towards.

What were you studying?

Philosophy, it's lots of work that, really.

And religion, do you follow anything?

No I don't, it's not that I don't believe in sort of the heaven and force, I just don't subscribe to any particular religion.

So how many piercings do you have?

Uhm, I only have three piercings okay, and (indistinct)

Where are the two piercings?

I have a navel ring, I haven't even changed the jewellery yet, I've had it since I was thirteen, I wanted it and I wanted it and I insisted and eventually my mother and my brother, took me, it was very un-cool you know, my mum sat with me in the tattoo parlour and I was (indistinct) I haven't been able to take it out, no one ever sees it now, and then I have this one that I had done, probably when I was seventeen or eighteen and uhm, just in varsity and then I have a nipple ring that I've just had re-done, I had it done and I had it for about a year and it started migrating so I had to take it out and I recently had it done again.

(Indistinct) when you say migrating?

It often happens, they just sort of start growing out your body, it doesn't actually reject, there's nothing terrible going on, it starts moving out, it actually starts growing out, and when it got to the point where I could actually see the silver beneath the skin I thought oh god, all I need to do is catch it while I'm busy showering or something, and it was too terrifying.

And I see you've got this huge tattoo…

That I did over a couple of years, I did it in three sections, that also I wanted from when I was about five years old, and it took me along time to actually get it, but I think it's finished now, I've got no more space left.

Have you got any other tattoos?

I have another tiny tattoo. It's one of those Chinese characters above my bum, I also got that when I was seventeen.

And anything else that you plan on getting?

I'd like to do a suspension, but I'm not ready for it yet, I just don't think I could actually have it, but it's something I know I desperately want to do.

When did you get your first piercing? What made you decide to get it?

It was just a navel piercing, I just really wanted one, uhm, I actually wanted a tattoo and I wanted to pierce, I was just giving my mother grey hairs I think, and eventually she had to , she took me.

And your eyebrow ring?

Uhm, that was actually, when I went to university the first, time I studied psychology originally, which I realised after a year or something, it was absolutely lovely but I'm not cut out for it, uhm and my mum said to me when I go to university the people I meet, I mean I used

to dye my hair like techni- colours … she said please just look normal, and wear normal clothes and go and meet some normal people. I said okay , and I tried this for the first two months and I was miserable and then the one day we had to an assignment in sports psychology and most of the people who take psychology I don't really relate to, and it had to be group and I was like how am I ever going to get together with a group of people, and I was walking out and this girl came up to me and said, look I'm sorry but, you seem like the only person that I actually want to approach and could we do it together, and she just turned out to be this very strange girl, not strange but completely mad. Like my mother did say I should try and avoid, and i went that afternoon and I got my eyebrow pierced and I went to my mum and I said see it doesn't matter what I wear, or what colour my hair is, I still meet the same sort of people so I'm just going to get my eyebrow pierced cos it actually doesn't make a difference.

So in some way you're different, even if you dress the same?

I think everybody is different, every single person is so different its. So I don't think it actually matters that much, what you look like, what you wearing or anything because, it's you know quite superficial stuff

Could you tell me about your nipple ring?

okay uhm I had a benign tumour removed from my breast, but after that I was quite I don't know I just, (indistinct) quite a hard thing, specifically being a woman, but its, you know your breast are part, I just sort of felt like my body had virtually turned against me and I was quite uncomfortable and unhappy about it,(indistinct) it was just symbolic for me, I don't know, it was sort of reclaiming my own skin, and you know I felt much happier after that, after I took it

out I left it for a couple of years. When I had to go back to the doctor, I was worried, that was when I went and had it re-done and it just, I felt like a stranger in my own body. I just felt like that, you know. The operation, it was very horrible, a feeling as though your own body is doing you harm and you know all these anonymous strangers poking and prodding at you and cutting bit's out and sending them away for analysis , it was really, it wasn't, it was almost like (indistinct) it was like common property, and I just felt, I mean I'm terribly sentimental, I keep shoe boxes full of things, I like to have my little rituals and it's just something that's symbolic for me, and then I don't know. I sort of find meaning in it, I don't know if that's the right word.

So what does it mean to you now?

It's just that, you know, this is part of me, and I don't feel separate from it, I think even though, I don't know, it's quite hard to say cos I have so many things, so many reasons, on the one hand it's just a case of, this is going to sound completely ridiculous but, uhm that whole event uhm, you have studied philosophy as well? You know about that whole master and servant thing, that the master is the one that's willing to risk his life, you trying to .., or try to put yourself in danger and make yourself do something valid(Indistinct) and it sort of, I'm not very articulate, I'm sorry.

So you saying for you it was forcing yourself to do something that made you try and get in control of your physical situation.

It's just to feel, I don't like feeling separate from my physical side, I mean I have a tendency to live very much in my head and then and I don't think that, that's a very good thing either,

the best is to be as integrated as possible and for me it's just it's a symbolic act that I could do, that, to feel integrated again, not in control of my body but very connected to it again, uhm, and then anyone who tells you that piercings doesn't hurt or tattoos doesn't hurt, is lying, it does hurt, I mean it always has been very important not to moan or complain or pass-out or cry, I suppose you cant help it if you pass-out but its… I 've always, it's been important to be brave about it because it's something you willingly (indistinct)

So that pain is part of the experience?

Very much so, I don't understand why people use anaesthetic. There are situations where anaesthetic is necessary…what I've heard, I mean with men, the intimate piercings…it's just necessary, because that so extreme that they wouldn't actually be able to sit still, but I mean I think if you can, it's better to sort of live through the whole experience, it's part of (indistinct).

You live through the experience. What is that like?

Uhm, I don't know I mean, part of it, it's just really trying to you know, sort of not burst into tears, uhm it's trying to be brave and get through it as gracefully as possible, after I'm (indistinct) I think the endorphins released are sort of this massive uhm, I'm very happy very talkative afterwards, when I went to go fetch my boyfriend from (indistinct)…. Talking a mile a minute, oh guess what, (indistinct). I felt like a kid in a candy store, very excited and very (indistinct) but that uhm, ja it's important to me that I was sort of brave, maybe sounds silly but I don't have that many piercings but people cold do very extreme things and I got a huge amount of admiration for that. Tthat's why I would like to the suspension.

What is it about the suspension that attracts you to it?

I mean look, I see it as a completely spiritual thing, I can't cut it down because my concept of sort of spirituality is a very broad one, (indistinct)…. Mythology that just incorporates , wherever it's just, I think it's very much to be able, it's not always uhm, I'm not necessarily impressed with someone who does something that's difficult or scary if it wasn't hard for them, you cant go according to the facts cos it's different for each person, I know it would be hard for me, I don't think it would be easy and right now I don't actually, I'm not sure I could do it, uhm, I know I want to and I will but its, I think I got to, there are things that I don't have in place yet. For me it's about doing something that is very hard and very difficult and very painful and being able to, I mean, what I've seen and what I've heard from the people who do it it's really, it's always a spiritual experience, I've never seen anyone who's done it for a stunt or you know for, nobody actually, it's always, I think it's a different thing for each person I think it's a catalyst, some of the catalyst, some sort of (indistinct) I think it's something for every person it's this profound spiritual experience, but I don't think it's necessarily the same spiritual experience, uhm I mean if you look at it, it's not really a new practice it's really, it's the oldest in any sort of organised civilisation, they use it, I mean putting the body under that amount of stress it's allows you to go to a place but I also think it's very dangerous, if you not ready for it, then it's just very traumatic and I think it can damage you, but I think it's different for each person, but it's …, sort of growth, you feel like you going to the next step in your personal growth.

And for you where is that next step? Where is it that you coming from?

It's think that it's just left overs, you I know I want to keep up with the boys, I got an older brother who I idolise, I was this little tom-boy running around in dungarees, uhm it's I don't know, I mean like with my tattoo, I mean, the little.. the very first part I did, the outline, small outlines, they were a gift from my parents. They're completely against tattoos , they used to tell me that if I came home with a tattoo they would angle grind it off my body, those were my father's words, and in the end, my father actually, he phoned me the one day, they were a gift from him. I had a drug problem as a young teenager uhm, and my father (indistinct) I relapsed a couple times after that but that was with the (indistinct) He said really I don't understand what you see in them, but I understand that it's important to you and he said I've got a present for you and he took me go get that and he said that I need something to lift me up at that point and I mean it was years later that I did the next section and that was when I was , when I got a job I paid for them myself. It was the next point , I was waiting forever before I finished them and I knew that I couldn't , I mean I just wasn't, it just didn't feel like I could, it wasn't the right time, then I was in a relationship that wasn't very healthy and I didn't, it probably sounds completely delusional but for months before I went to go finish that, I had extreme tension in my shoulders and you know, to myself, I could feel they were there, and it was after I left that relationship and started on the next thing, you know, got out of that, just the one day I phoned the woman who's done it from the beginning and I said, It's Kerryn, I'm sorry the girl with the wings, you have to finish them today, and she's lovely because I think she understands where I was coming from, and she said okay fine and she arranged to see me and we started. So it's just with everything that I've done, I don't know if that's what you were asking cos that's sort of highly personalised so…

With the suspension…I'm very wary of anything that comes (indistinct) because theirs so many people out there saying they've got the answers and everything, and I even stopped taking that stuff in, cos I'm very wary of anyone who claims the odds for an entire generation or agenda or anything because I think it's impossible uhm, but I think I got a long way to go, it's uhm, I don't think that the suspension would be sort of, the ultimate, I suppose the penultimate, you know.

What is the ultimate?

Uhm, I don't know. It's quite possibly being married with three kids or maybe being a published writer or I don't know something that I haven't even come up, I have no idea. I think the ultimate for anyone is just to reach their potential, its, I got a very (indistinct) view on that, I just want to sort of live the best life I can.

Could you tell me more about your family life and your relationship with your parents. It sounds like they have bee very instrumental in your life.

Very much so I'd say. I think I'm very lucky, cos of my parents, they very conservative, uhm. Conservative but not narrow minded, uhm they, I mean they got married the day after my mothers sixteenth birthday, they'll be married for nearly forty years, they really are sort of very, they both Christian uhm, but they understand that I don't uhm, go with any organised religions I feel (indistinct) but I think it would be much nicer if you put the whole bunch together or something, but I really, I like that about them, that they are able to try to understand something that they don't necessarily agree with. They very sort of, they have a lot of empathy which is nice. They don't need to go through something or be in a culture or

anything to be able to understand that it has value for someone else, so I'm very lucky, they are, I think it's a huge advantage anyone who grows up knowing that they are loved, a lot of people don't have that, it's terrible, I only realised quite recently how many people grow up and that don't necessarily have that to take for granted and it's like, and if there's anything it's the thing I'm luckiest to have had, it's that. You know, it's sort of gives you a lot of confidence to…you know… how you go out into life, it's nice.

And, your piercings in terms of identity, what do they mean to you?

Uhm, I don't know I mean, I had to think about that for a moment cos the identity thing is quite difficult, I've been thinking about that recently uhm, my boyfriend and I were speaking about it, do you have that core, that feeling, that there's a part of you that regardless how you change through your love, is that still the same? And that no one even sees. It's uhm, I don't know. I suppose they're very much a part of my identity because they are very personal to me, but at the same time, my tattoo isn't usually visible, I mean today I'm wearing a dress but it's probably the first time in months, I generally wear long sleeved shirts, I actually don't really like … it's a, I don't know, it's just uhm, I think it was bit more of a problem when I was younger going out at night and (indistinct) a lot people assume that if you got something that's so visible that automatically they can touch, and I've got a very big problem with that, I don't mind if somebody asks to see or something, even that gets a bit much after a couple of years you know, uhm , so most of the time I just cover up, but um , the funny thing is you know, not the funny things, I didn't, it doesn't matter to me, a lot of people don't know , people know that I have tattoos and piercings, people I've known a long, long time um, but they just not really something I show, and funny enough somebody said to me the other day, when did you get an

eyebrow ring, probably a few years before I met you, and I said that's so strange they probably, they actually never realised , so I don't know.

Some people don't even see it?

Some people don't , but I mean the funny thing is, I mean I was so excited when I got it, the first one and there (nipple), I couldn't show anyone, so I showed my mum and we were grocery shopping, and I went to go and meet her uhm, and I said to her I'm sorry but I have to show you, I took her to the bathroom and I flipped up my top, at first she was actually quite upset with me, it was quite shocking to her, but she saw I was so happy, she said okay, you (indistinct) it was alright but I mean, cos you do want to share it with someone else, but it's you know, I mean it's not really something you show. My belly ring, it's really, I'm not quite into wearing sort of tank tops and bare midriffs,(indistinct) but it's really feels apart of me, I mean you get used to it you know, I would feel suddenly odd if it were gone.

So you haven't taken it out?

No. Nothing, (indistinct) I see that a lot of people have sort of very decorative things now but I don't know, that's never really appealed to me.

And does anyone treat you differently or have your piercings affects your relationship?

Uhm, sometimes, I actually noticed it now since, most of the time I actually dress quite conservatively and like, I sort of had a weakness with white frilly tops, so but uhm, I do notice it, I thinks it's also, but I mean, I mean I'm originally from Pretoria, it's more conservative than Joburg, I noticed the other day cos I went there looking for something uhm, and I had to

go to Menlyn, the shopping centre and I was walking around and it's like people stopped and they have a good look, and my mum also told me once, we went on holiday and we flew, and she said I love going out with you, because you must see how people look, and that's stuff you don't realise and people are discreet as well to a certain point, but she's says it's just your way, but uhm I don't know, (indistinct) generally people that are going to have such a pre-cast definition of you, generally I 'm probably not going to get on that well with them anyway, you know it's funny, I mean I recently discovered the internet which was great fun, with the internet I've got three people that I actually speak to , at first it took a while, it's quite daunting when you go in, and I sort of found three people that I sort of speak to and I mean , one is an elderly sheep farmer from Idaho, who's deeply religious, and we get on very , very well, uhm and I've told hI'm about my tattoos and piercings, I showed hI'm a picture and he said you know really, usually he doesn't approve of this sort of thing but he thinks I'm a nice girl and you know, and it's actually, it's been nice to sort of interact with people and at first they don't really see this, and I don't know, I think it's people who are so offended or whatever, they generally, it's not just this, it's everything else as well, it's reflected in all of their dealings with people. So.

It seems there were times in your life where you were not comfortable in your body.

Ja, like I said I have a tendency to be sort of, to intellectualise everything to the point where it's a problem, it's something I'm conscious of and sort of working on, but I means as a, sort of a little girl in primary school I was quite overweight, I look at photos now, and I actually wasn't really, I was that sort of awkward weight, and uhm… I was quite unhappy with that, I mean even recently, last year I went on medication, and I picked up like twenty kilograms in

three months, and I was horrified, I had nothing to wear, my mum had to go out and buy me clothes cos I couldn't, I literally couldn't get my jeans on to like past my knee, it was horrible but uhm, its, that's, I think sort of as I get older and it's not just with piercings, it's through out my life I'm learning to sort of stay more, be more resident and uhm , I don't know, I don't think, you know with things like piercings and tattoos I suppose it's an aesthetic as well, and I don't find it ugly uhm , and sometimes there are things like I know I'm going to be an old lady with tattoos, I may not have the piercings then, I'm not quite sure I want to be a grandmother, but the thing is I don't see anything wrong with it and I think a lot of the time people say that it's a silly thing to do because what about when you old and wrinkly? But the I think that's the misconception is looking at the place where people do it from, cos you don't do it for other people to look at, it's not about, as a fashion accessory or to look sexy or attractive or daring or anything, because even if it does look like that for a short while, it's only going to be a short while and then you're going to be sixty, and then die of (indistinct) and I think anyone who has something done, they know that it's not really something that you can take lightly when you know it's going to be needled through your own flesh, you think about it quite seriously, and its, you do it for you, and its, it cant matter too much what it looks like to the outside.

You used the word resident, (indistinct) do you find that the piercing and the tattoos can bring you back to yourself?

Yes I do, even though like I said at the same time it's about being to able to transcend the physical pain because it is there, it's sort of , it seems like a bit of a paradox, because on the one hand it's about being able to move past every natural response your body has, and every

physical sort of default, that you have, but at the same time its, I don't think it's about a rejection of your body, I think it's about a very deep acceptance, uhm you know it's all very well and good to you, in your head, I don't think that, that's the ideal, for me it's not, uhm for me it's not, you know, I find that when I'm like that, I end up with lots of coffee table type bruises, cos I walk into things, I can get totally upset about it, and what not and I prefer to be sort of , I don't even know what the word is, but I like to feel very grounded and I'm not always. Just because I know you looking at this particularly from a woman's point of view, somebody said to me the other day, we saw this lady walking along she had a number of facial piercings, which I always think is very brave for a lady, for anyone, Eddy and I were talking about that the other day about having one over here (septum) and its, it can look so amazing but it takes, you have to be quite brave to do that, uhm we were saying it's funny, when you see a young girl, who has a piercing or a tattoo or some kind of body modifications, no one bats an eyelid but when you see a woman who's sort of in her forties than suddenly it's like hmm, people are just very disapproving and it's just you know, I think it's particularly with women, older men who have Tattoos or piercings it's sort of more acceptable but, older women , people are not yet at ease with that, in our society, that's sort of taboo. Automatically assumptions are made about them. I was looking in a book a while ago, these women, it's started from the 1920's and I mean at that point anyone with that sort of thing, they were in circuses, it was the only place you saw a woman with any thing like that. Then you get this sort of mid 1920's (indistinct) really glamorous movie stars (indistinct) this hair style going and reclining on a couch, and they got these thing protruding and it's really, I think those are lovely, I only just found them, that was brave. You think it's brave now, I mean at that point, really they werey confident, I suppose you have to be, they had very definite ideas and I'm

always impressed with people who have the first way to do something, because of people like that, that's it gets to the point where you can convince your mum as a thirteen year old to take you for a navel piercing.

Do you consider anything on your face, doing …?

Uhm, I would , it's one thing, there's always an element of vanity, like I broke my nose (indistinct) but uhm, I really considered having a septum piercing , uhm and then broke my nose and I thought oh God no, I'm not drawing any attention to my skew nose, which is very bad, so I suppose it is about you know (indistinct), it locks nice but uhm I think with a facial piercing I wouldn't get a nose ring for example , that I don't like, I don't know, uhm when I found out about the implants that they do subcutaneously, I was totally just blown away by that, and I think those look absolutely stunning, but uhm I don't know, unfortunately most of what you see is like people who have had horns put under their foreheads which I find sort of a pity because there's so much more scope for it,… and I think it could be very pretty as well.

What would you have done if you had implants?

What I wanted and I actually I mean I haven't looked into far enough, and it's probably not practical and I doubt it, uhm specifically cos I've got tattoos on my back now so wouldn't like to, it would sort of get too busy, but I wanted nuts, you know the, (indistinct) I just thought it was so pretty, I mean before that when I was quite a young teenager I just wanted bars, down my spine, I always wanted that, thought they were so beautiful, I don't know if you seen, it's quite a famous picture, you'll see it in most books, the woman with the rings down her back,

sort of either side if her back and they're laced up, so it mimics a corset (indistinct) it's very beautiful, oh when I saw that I just wanted that done as well you know, I thought it was so pretty like, it was just really you know not the norm. It was sort of my first exposure to these things, and it wasn't a case of tattoos, and piercings were for unmentionable in dark places in the New York subway.

Does your boyfriend have anything done?

No, not at all and has no desire.

And what does he think about them?

I think, I had my eyebrow ring since I met hI'm and we met six years ago, and we only recently become involved and uhm, he knows how important my tattoos are to me and he went through the whole thing with me, leading up to the nipple ring, and he was the one who insisted and took me to the doctor and made appointments for me for so long (indistinct).

Well. I don't think that I have anything else to ask, unless there is anything you wanted to add to help me understand your piercing better?

INTERVIEW- ANNA

Interviewer: Please could you answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. In your description, comment on as many aspects of the experience as you wish. This is so that I can get the fullest picture possible. What is your name?

Intervieweee: Anna

How old are you Anna?

28

What is your occupation?

Uhm, I'm not really full time emplyed right now. But it's in event management.

And you marital status. Are you married?

No, I'm living with my boyfriend though.

And your religion?

No. I don't really follow anything.

How old were you when you first got a body piercing

Uhm, I was, uhm, 14.

And where have you been pierced?

Uhm. I've got three in my right ear, five, ja five in me left, I've had my belly done three times, both nipples, ja and also my tongue. Ja, That's all.

Ok, uhm and do you have any other forms of body modification? Like maybe tattoos?

Ja. I've got a tattoo on my lower back, on my upper calf and kinda in my, uhm, groin area. Ja.

Any children?

No.

When/where did you get your first piercing and what made you decide to get a piercing?

Well. Let me think now. I was fourteen and, uhm, obviously we not talking ear here cos I had those done as a kid right. But I was fourteen and me and this mate see, we decided to cut school and, we were kinda rebels I guess but it was cos I was just such an angry kid you know and school was like seriously not for me you know, like it's not that I'm stupid but I just couldn't see the point really and now that I look back on those days I wonder if I would have done stuff differently cos like I think that I really could have been a top student you know, but anyway, this mate and me we cut school and we smoked a bit of weed and then it was like what should we do now? You know? So we went into Hillbrow cos in those days that was like still quite a cool spot to hang out at you know thee was the Three Sisters and all those places, and we were like lets do something really cool and really wild. And like we were just kids and even though I say we were rebels we were actually really just good kids who were a bit you know

off the rails, but not in a nasty way I don't think. So we went to this jewellery shop and we decided to get our navels pierced and like in those days it was quite unheard of and people didn't really know anything about the proper way of doing it and all that. So we asked this shop assistant to pierce our belly buttons and she was like quite stunned, I think she was a bit shocked you know because she had only ever pierced ears. But like anyway she finally said ok she would try but you know we didn't realize you have to do it with a needle so she just used the piercing gun and like it was awful, it just wouldn't go through, not that I'm fat or that but like it just got stuck and I was like oh shit what now, do I leave it or do I force it through, so like she took it out and she was freaking because there was so much blood and I was like ok, we gotta just do this cos otherwise it's gonna look horrible. And like finally we convinced her to try again and this time it went right through but because it was so close to the edge of the belly button because it was done with like the gun you know, it didn't ever really heal properly and so I had to take it out and then the next time I had it done I went to a proper place and the guy was like what were you thinking? And that time he did it with a needle.

And how was the actual piercing experience for you?

Well like I said with the fist one it was a bit of a shock because there was so much blood. But like it was also kinda cool because I felt like wow I actually managed to do that you know. Like that was pretty cool (indistinct). And then when I had it redone the guy asked if I wanted an anesthetic and I thought ok well I may as well especially after the first one was such a fuck up you know. But like I think that I regretted that because for the nipples I didn't get an anesthetic cos like I think it's important to feel the you know the whole thing. Cos it's not just

like about the being pierced thing, it's also like going through it and showing to yourself that yes I can do this and even though it hurts I made it through. Like proving something to yourself. Like crossing a line. Like that you had to endure something to get that in the end and when I had my belly done with the anesthetic it was like so what. It was just like numb and dead and I could feel a bit of pressure (indistinct) uhm, but like with the nipples, and also cos I had them done together it was like damn sore and it s a kinda a cool feeling. Like afterwards you're aware of your piercings, like it's a hot stinging feeling and you konw you've done something different that other people cant or wont or whatever don't do. And it's also kinda something that you're not supposed to do that makes it kinda cool. Like I like the reaction that I get from other people not that they can see my tit's you know but the way I dress and look and, not that I want to scare people off but it's like listen I'm not the same as you and you should take me a little bit seriously. You know?

So it seems like the pain was uhm quite a big part of the experience for you?
No. I mean I'm not into the pain aspects of piercing like some people are, but I do think that like getting pierced or tattooed or whatever, it's a big thing. It changes you. It changes the way you look and how you feel about yourself uhm (indistinct) and it's not like a haircut you know that you can decide oh well I don't like that cos even if with piercings if you take them out, there's still a scar like a mark that's on you forever. So I think that it's good that it hurts because it means you have to really think about if this is something that you want and are you prepared to go though this pain and it also kinda makes it more real you know. Someone is sticking a needle through your skin through your flesh depending on where you having it done it hurts more or goes deeper you know. And if you just use anesthetic like what's the point?

What made you get your nipples pierced?

Uhm. I think, I, uhm. You know I didn't really think so much about it. Like I wanted to get something else done and I wasn't sure what and I'm not, or I wasn't, cos I am thinking about it now but like it's still a bit scary cos what if it doesn't heal properly you know, to get a clit piercing. But I think I just haven't been ready yet. Or maybe brave enough, and also cos I wasn't in like a committed relationship at the time and I think that a genital piercing is quite hectic and it can send out the wrong message to a guy and I say that cos of what my guy friends say just that like it's the kind of piercing I would like to get together with someone who I am serious about you know I'm not saying to both get together but like I think it's a nice thing to get, to share, when you in a serious relationship that you know is going to last, although who knows what lasts, but that you feel like you're making a commitment to each other and also that you're prepared to go through that pain because you know that sexually it will bring you closer together. But, so like uhm (indistinct) I got my nipples done because I think it's really pretty. And feminine. And I just like the way that it accentuates the nipple and like you can play that up or down depending on what you feel like.

What do you mean by that?

You know like if you want them to be noticed and you go like to a club or something and you have a slinky top on you can just kinda make out that there is something else going on there, like something more. I think it's quite erotic. Or if I just want to keep them to myself I can wear stuff that doesn't show them and then it's just for me and I know that they are there. And like I really like them. They're not what everyone else has. Like the tongue ring a lot of

girls…and guys have you now. Like it's more common, not that that bothers me cos like I don't care.

And you had your tongue ring after your nipples?

Ja. I had just split up with this guy. We had been seeing each other (indistinct)…and it was like had been a really good relationship for like a really long time and…I don't really want to talk about it…

That's fine.

It's not that I cant you know it's just that it's in my past and like I've moved on from there. You know. Sorry.

That's really fine. How do you feel about your piercings now? Do they have a meaning for you or is it more about the way they look?

I think that it's both really. Like (indistinct)…but also they remind me of stuff in my past, like of where I was at certain times in my life. Like, I dunno, maybe this sounds corny or wacko but kinda like a diary that I am keeping you know, like on my body. They remind me of what has happened in my life and how I was feeling at that time, and it's not so much about the piercing or the tattoo or where I got them but just that they are there always. They remind me that I am different but also the same.

Do you mean different from other people or different from how you were?

I guess both, but also the same you know. That I feel somehow very different from other people

but at the same time even though I look different and all that I think that we are all basically the same, we just show things or experience things in different ways. Like we are all the same inside and I just chose to show how I am feeling like this and maybe you do it in some other way you know. But there are a lot of people out there who don't see that, who just think that this is weird and all that and they will never understand it and I think I kinda feel sorry for them because they will just be stuck in a little box and they think that that's the whole thing that that's all there is you know.

How do they make you feel about yourself?

I mostly like the way they make me feel like more sexy and confident and ja confident. But sometimes I do suddenly get like anxious and I think oh my god Anna you are really a bit fucked up and like a bit of a failure, especially now when I don't have a job, but that's only temporary and then it's like I'm torn between wanting to take them out and wishing I didn't have the tattoos and wanting to go and get more! So it's really weird I suppose. Maybe I'm weird I dunno (indistinct). And then like ,uhm, especially with the tattoos, sometimes I think that they aren't very feminine, you know, like not ladylike cos I don't believe in like all that that women cant have or shouldn't have tattoos, but like the ones that I have, like they aren't your typical butterflies and fairies and all that and sometimes, like mostly I love them, but sometimes I just think do I look a bit butch you know? And like I know that I'm not fat, like I know I have a good body and there have been times that I've been like way too skinny but mostly I love them and they make me feel good about me and confident. Although I think sometimes I do worry what they will look like when I am an old lady, if I ever am an old lady and then I just think you know, uhm, they are part of me, I got them because I was feeling

something at that time and I don't want to ever have to regret anything that I've done even if it is a mistake.

Have your piercings affected your relationships in any way?

I guess, yes and no. Like uhm, my folks just pretty much ignore them. It's kinda weird like the first tattoo I got they hated and were shocked and all that but after that they just kinda pretend that they don't exist and every time I have gotten a now piercing or tattoo they just don't say anything, it's like nothing has happened or changed and it's not like you can miss them you know. So no I don't think that it has really changed that. With boyfriends. Well my ex hated them and he used to make me feel really bad about them like that they were ugly and not feminine. Those were the ones that I got before we met and you couldn't really see them so much and the after we split up I got my tongue done and then when I met my boyfriend who I'm with now I had the nipples and these two other tattoos and he loves them like he doesn't really have much, just a small tattoo on the base of his back but like he says that they are part of me and that he loves me and if they make me happy that cool and also that he understands that they were that like they had a meaning or there was a reason that I did them. And like the tongue and the nipple piercing like I said before can be quite erotic and like I think that that's quite exciting sexually and so that been a good thing uhm, for our relationship you know. And that they are ours that I share them with him. It makes it more special you know.

And in your family? Growing up, what was that like for you?

Well, I think it was pretty normal Like I say I was like a real revel at school and then I just kinda grew outa that thank god. I think I gave my parents grey hair I was always getting you

to something. But ja. I come from like a big family and I have four brothers and they are like quite over protective. We used to fight a lot as kids but like not serious fighting and it was like I always had to be like one of the boys and I think that I kinda like liked that you know being tough like a boy and I used to get to wear hand me downs from my brothers so I was never one of those girly girls you know uhm, I don't think that I could have been. So like ja my parents are pretty conservative you know average, they don't really get why I do this and I think that I am a bit of a disappointment for them although they are quite proud that I did finish school even tough I was going through such a rebellious stage and then that I have done quite well like in my job although right now, cos like the company that I worked for wasn't doing so well so I'm not employed full time anymore but they just kinda use me for events as they come u and so I'm looking for a full time job uhm but like it's hard, but I think my parents were or they are I dunno I think they are kinda disappointed with how I've turned out. And that's hard you know. I dunnno. But like growing up was ok. I think we were like a pretty average family you know. I think that I wish I could be a bit closer to my folks, like I sometimes feel that they just cant get me. Like they never did. It would be nice to be like one of those girls who goes shopping with her mom and has lunch and like shares secrets and things uhm, but you know I think they did the best they could and that's all you can really ask (indistinct) your parents. But sometimes I do feel a bit sad that we aren't closer you know. It would be nice.

Is there anything else you would like to add that could help me to understand better what being pierced and getting pierced means to you?

No. I dunno. I mean I think that it's hard to say anyway cos it's not like it really like a what you would say conscious thing you know what it really means but I do think that for some

people it's just about they way it looks but for me there's definitely more but I guess I haven't really figured it all out myself you know so maybe you could tell me when you do! I'm just kidding. But seriously…anyway. No I think that's all.

Thank you so much for your time and for talking with me.

INTERVIEW- TANYA

Interviewer*:* Please could you answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. In your description, comment on as many aspects of the experience as you wish. This is so that I can get the fullest picture possible

Interviewer: How are you?

Interviewee: 35 in March, so I'm 34 at the moment.

And what is your occupation?

I am and attorney. That will just top up your research.

And your marital status?

I am engaged.

And religion?

Uhm, Roman Catholic.

And age at which you were first pierced? And what was that?

It was at the age of uhm, are we talking ears as well? Ears would probably be when I was 14.

And other piercings?

Uhm, well since then I've done my eyebrow, I've done my tongue; I've done the eyebrows four times. I've done four in the ears, no seven in the ears, tongue once, nose once. That's all.

And anything you want to get?

I want to do a whole lot.

What do you want to do?

I don't know I'm relying on Candice for that, but I'm not brave enough for like genital and all of that, so I'm like trying to see where. You cant do eyebrow and nose and tongue, it's just too much in your face and I've still gotta do a profession, so it doesn't work too much in the face.

How do people react to you?

Very badly, very badly, specifically my professional context, uhm as a woman I find that uhm, men automatically, they tend to see you as, and I don't want to say slutty, cos I don't come across as slutty but they tend to view you as you not somebody to take seriously, so you tend to then, as a woman generally, you tend to have to try and prove yourself anyway, but then as a pierced woman, it's that much more difficult, but if you strong enough you can get it done very quickly, so the moment you open your mouth they start taking you seriously , but it is definitely negative, definitely.

But you wouldn't consider taking them out?

No, it's part of who I am, it's part of my identity and if they don't like it! I only took out my

eyebrow piercings once, and that was for a very, very big court case and I had to, it was the instruction of the advocate, who said to me you will not come to court unless they're out. uhm I've gone as far as the law society before and all I did was put a plaster on, so I don't, absolutely don't consider taking it out. I will when I get older, cos I don't think it will look too cool but, otherwise.

Why do they not look so cool when you're older?

Because you got to grow old with a certain amount of dignity, and I don't want to an old granny like that, looks ridiculous. It needs to at least be something that is tasteful, in my opinion, tasteful, and in my opinion I think I will look pretty ridiculous when I'm old and I've got piercings. The tattoos a different story, but that's for me as well.

And have you got tattoos as well?

Ja

What tattoo? Where have you got tattoos?

I've got one at the base of my back and then I've got one that's across my whole back. It's a full back tattoo.

What is the difference to you in the meaning of getting the tattoo and the meaning in the piercings?

Tattoos are something that I'm doing, look they both for me, but the tattoos I consider to be something that's me, private, because I've got nothing that you can see. I don't consider them

to be something that I do for anybody else, uhm but my piercing, this is my identity, this is, you can look at me and you can see look, you not going to come across something that is just the norm, you looking at somebody who's different. And as I said, the tattoos, it's private, so for me it's a public and a private persona.

And the persona, what is that? What is that to you? What does it say to people?

I'm not conventional, I don't want to be put into a box, I don't want to be…. Yes I'm an attorney and I'm a female attorney and now female attorneys are like that. I am not the same as everybody else, I will not be, I will not conform to the Law Society, Law Society is incredibly strict, I mean they've got all these rules and regulations, about how you need to conduct yourself, how you need to be with your clients, how you need to be in court, and in court it's like little roads and you know uhm, I don't want to be put into that box, I will not be and I think it's part of who I am, my character is too strong for it, so you find that in everyday life, how do you, make your statement? Like if you walking down the road, you as a person you make your statement by your make-up or your hair or the way that you dress, but inevitably it's not enough to have people look at you twice, unless they see something they like, but when you got a piercing it generally tends to make people look twice but then what the perception is that they pick up, that's their problem. I've achieved the first step, they looking at me and are going: She's not the same as everybody else. And that's all that I need to achieve. If it's an achievement, it's also not something I go out to achieve, it's a statement I'm making for myself but it has an effect and that fine.

And when they look at you twice, what does that mean to you?

I don't notice them looking, but I know they do because anybody would, because when I see… I suppose if I ever saw Candice walking down the road I'd look twice, but that look twice for her means something for her, as an outsider I look at her twice and I go hmmm, okay not for me. But it's bad, whatever the case is, now what people are doing. You'll find the younger people are going hmmm, okay that looks cool or you'll find the older people going (indistinct) that looks terrible. I don't care what they think, and the looking twice is not, I don't notice that, it's just the reactions when you're face to face that's when you see it.

And in your personal relationships, has it changed anything with like parents or friends or fiance?

No.

And your fiancé?

Not at all. He's uhm, he's got a nipple pierce. He's also, I don't know, I don't think it changed anything. I did it for very personal reasons and his reaction was well that's cool; if that's what makes happy.

When and where did you get your first piercing and what made you decide to get it?

Initially my facial, the facial piercings were initially because I was making a statement about me as an attorney. I was going through a particularly very bad time uhm, career wise, uhm and I think it was probably just a "okay I'll listen guys but Fuck You". And uhm from there it just turned into okay, I like this, I like the reaction, I like the feel, I like what it looks like, fine, lets do it again.

Would you mind telling me a little more, about what you were going through career wise?

Yes.

Sounds like you were going through a difficult time?

It was very, very traumatic, I went, I was at a huge attorneys firm at the time, I was quite, I suppose I was too young, I was recently qualified, uhm picked up a very, very lucrative contract uhm, had a lot of money, there was just I think too much money for the age that I was and uhm the guy that I picked the contract up for, his companies were liquidated so I lost the work, and I had not made any contingency plans so I went from this huge office with a whole lot of money into a tiny office and oh my God how am I going to pay the rent? And uhm, it was a reaction to that, but that's where it started.

So at that time would you say you kind of felt lost, not grounded?

I was no, not lost, as a person I'm a very strong person, I would rather categorise it as uhm, at the time there were just so many forces, there were so many people pulling me in different directions, my parents saying you need to close it down you need to go and find a job, uhm my fiancé saying listen, don't worry you'll be fine keep going, push at it, my sister saying, don't you think it's time that you start doing something decent and it was just a case of really, okay I'll tell you what guys, this is what I'm going to do, and it was my statement about this is it. So no it wasn't a feeling lost or anything, my character is too strong for that, it was definitely for all my personal relationships, saying to them, listen I'll do it my way. And when I did it they all actually all did back off. My dad specifically was like okay, fine.

(Indistinct)

No it isn't that's what I am, it's absolutely hip in the way I talk.

Could you describe how you experienced the actual piercing process.

It's an absolute adrenalin rush, I heard Candice say some people do it for the rush. I don't do it for the rush, but it's an absolute by-product, it's an advantage.

Tell me like about that if you can?

Well when you getting ready I'll come here to Candice and say fine, we gonna do a piercing today and she goes oh, she's very relaxed, very laid back and she talks, and you just find yourself getting very tense and uhm, the last time I got this one, the top one, was uhm I took it out for the court case and uhm it closed up, it was too new, so I had to have it done again, and it was just before I had the tattoo done so it was a case of fine okay, so I'm going to now have first the piercing then the tattoo and I was nervous for the tattoo because it's a long period, three hours of intense pain uhm, and it just the endorphins going, it's a rush, it's really, really very cool, very cool, it's a good feeling, and ja Candice is right, there are other ways of getting the rush, but I don't jump out of aeroplanes and you know, that doesn't do it for me, I don't like motor bikes and I think probably a lot of the other ways of doing it, is probably a whole lot of drugs. I don't do drugs so for me it's a good feeling.

And afterwards?

Shit it's over, damn, okay let's do it again, JA

It's kind of addictive?

It's absolutely addictive, I promise you it is addictive, the piercing and the tattooing, it's addictive, I think or, not for every body, because I know some people get it and that's it, it's over, but for me,, I'm looking at it in the mirror and there's blood coming out and there's blood all over my face and I'm thinking, okay where can I do next?

And when you see the blood all over your face… what that like for you?

Nothing. Just it's bleeding… standing with this thing in. But it's definitely the anticipating and the pain, and I say, okay, tell me when you're going to do it, you're actually sitting there and you're like okay, okay, okay, okay, it's gonna come, it's gonna come, and when it happens you like, it's over.

And before you get a piercing have you thought about it. Is it something, is it something you think about for a long time?

No, the only one that was considered was this one because it fell out and I knew I had to have it re-done, but otherwise I get here and I've said to her okay what's next? Then she says okay, go and do research, I haven't done my research, go and do research and see what you want, so now that's the next step, I need to go see what I want, but now the problem, now that this is done and the tongue is done, I'm not prepared to do here or here or face, so what next?

There are a lot of them that are on your face.

They are, but again in the profession that I have I think that I also have a boundary as to what is acceptable to my clients. This is still acceptable, uhm but I think anything else is, I wouldn't be able to make a living so it's not because I have an aversion to, it's because I have a boundary by my career. So I don't think it's a considerer thing it's not something I consider it's just something that okay, cool, lets do it, but I'm gonna do this one, so that's why haven't done another one cos I don't know which one I'm going to do

And when you were growing up, like what kind of growing up did you have as a childhood?

Great, my mum and dad, my dads Italian, my mums Afrikaans so we grew up very strict uhmm, but we lucky because our parents allow us, they've always allowed us to express ourselves, we can do, there were rules. You can only go and sleep at your friends house when you are 14 years old, which off course was terrible because everybody was sleeping at everybody's houses. We weren't told you will go and do a degree, we decided that was what we would do and it was great. My parents are great. They very, very cool.

Your relationship with them now?

Good, very good, my dad and I had a bit of a rough patch but that's because hI'm and I are very similar in character, so we tend to clash, and then my sister, she's younger and she's little bit of a los kop, we very, very close as a family, lucky in that, so with the personal relationships, if I had to look for a reason why I pierce, I don't think it would be there, probably cos I discovered and thought hmm this is cool, so ja

Just now when Candice was saying she always felt a bit different, you seemed to agree with her. Do you feel like that as well, that you're not quite the same as the norm, or you don't want to be exactly the same as them?

I don't want to say I'm different, I don't wan't to be the same. You know what if I was, how's this for an admission, it probably isn't something I would tell anybody, if I was skinny, which I'm not, I'm a big girl, and I'm not comfortable with it, it's just the way it is. If I was skinny, I would, my dress would show that as well, but because I have, I am bound by weight, I have certain ways I can do it, I cannot express myself in my clothing, so I'm fine with the piercing, that's quite cool. There's uhm, unfortunately with weight comes as I say boundaries, so it would be clothing but it isn't. Now don't you tell anybody that!

What would you do with your clothing?

I don't know I would probably uhm, I think that with clothing you can express yourself, you can, there's a lot of expressing that you can do, uhm you can make statements with the way that you dress, you can show people what you want to feel in that particular day, purely by the way you dress and now talk about my sister, my sister is skinny, she got a beautiful body and I don't think she uses it to her advantage, I don't think that she expresses herself enough through her clothing, so people tend to over look her, because of the fact that she doesn't express herself, and I wouldn't do that, I would express myself, today I'm feeling in a particularly bad mood so I will dress in black and I will make it that it's a statement black, but it all about statement isn't it? I would be analysing it. I'm different don't put me in a box; I'm not the same as everybody else.

Do you feel like you ever were at some point in your life, just put in a box and felt like you weren't special?

Do you know what I think it's got more to do with uhm, the fact that everybody is the same, we all have our jobs. We go to work; we go do our thing and then you're expected, you go to school, you're expected to go to university, after university you're expected to get a good job, you're expected to get married, expected to have children, I don't have children, I'm nearly 35, uhm my pet, I mean it's an unusual pet uhm, it's not about the fact that it's an unusual pet, but would I have a pig if it wasn't so different? So ja i think it's not about I didn't feel special, I think it's about I am different, don't assume that I'm the same. I think I had to analyse it.

What is your most important piercing - that means the most to you?

Probably the first eyebrow one, because that was at the time all the shit that I had with the business, ja, because I've had this one now for years. It's just a constant, it just stays there.

A constant?

It's like good friend.

Is it a reminder?

I think so, I think that was a reminder, remember when, that went badly, just keep that in mind, so it's also probably part of the aversion to taking it out.

Is there anything else that you wold like to tell me that you think could help me to understand?

What are you trying to understand? Are you trying to understand women and piercings?

This is about women. But I am wanting to understand individuals. What this means for you.

I think, I just think I must be honest, depending on who you interview you could find that you get uhm, people that are going to tell you about piercings and they going to try and put a whole lot of meaning to it, and people that get tattoos they going try and put a whole lot of meaning to it, but you'll find that 99% of the time, if you enquire a little bit you'll find that oh , my friend's also got a navel piercing, oh and my friend's also got an eyebrow and no. I actually saw a movie, a lot of people were influenced at the time by big brother, remember they all got pierced and I think it was just piercing, Margaret got the tongue and Brad got the eyebrow and you'll find a lot of people had their piercings at that time, because, "oh they actually look cool". So by delving deeper into the reasons why they did it, they'll give you a whole lot of happy reasons, but I don't know if the motivations are always that pure. I also think that tattooing is something that people should do with meaning; it has to have a meaning to it, if you're doing it just because everybody else has got it, what's the point? Really what's the point? It's something that's permanent. Mike's daughter just got one and she's had something put here and it's because all the friends have got one and really I take exception to that!, I really do, I don't think (inaudible).

Do you feel that that cheapens what you do?

No, it doesn't cheapen what I've done, it cheapens what they do, because why, it couldn't be over here, because nobody would see it, you know, why do it? Because it's for you, it has to be, I just think it's a process of when you sit down and have your piercing, have your tattoo,

it's such a personal thing, you haven't got a crowd watching you do it, it's such a personal experience and has to, and if you don't attach a meaning to it, why do it? Then you going to have it and in a years time, you going to take your piercing out, and it doesn't actually matter that you ever had it. My sister did that, she went with me when I had my first one and I think two months later it fell out because the little ball fell out, and she never had it done again, because it didn't mean anything to her, so you if don't have a reason, as I say if you talking to people and you finding out and they give all the "ja, you know it actually means blaa blaa blaa". I don't know, I don't know if there's actually a way of climbing into their head and finding out if it actually it is like that, That's for 99% of the people. But take, Candice, there is reason for that, there is really, really a reason, where as 90% of the other people it isn't, it's fashion, and that's just stupid, it's ridiculous. So ja and I don't say the bigger the better or the wilder the better, I'm saying where is it? Why did you put it there? What is your reason? And feel inside of you, have it something that comes out from inside, then it's cool. So that's why I have no problem the way she looks because that comes from something that she believe in her core, so I think it's great, and the people that have a problem with it, I have a problem with them.

Thank you so much.

It's a great pleasure.

INTERVIEW- SAMANTHA

Interviewer*:* Please could you answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. In your description, comment on as many aspects of the experience as you wish. This is so that I can get the fullest picture possible.

Interviewer- your name?

Interviewee- Samantha

How old are you?

I'm 23

Occupation?

I work in an aftercare unit and as an au pair.

And you not married?

No. I'm single.

And what is your religion?

I don't have one, I'm not religious.

How old were you when you got your first piercing?

My first piercings were in my earlobes and I was 12, uhm and my older sister took me, for my birthday to get them done

And the number of piercing that you have at the moment or that you've had and where were you pierced?

All together I've had… I've had four in my ear but two closed, two in my other ear, one in my tongue and two in my belly button.

And do you have any other kind of body modification, tattoos?

No.

When and where did you get your first piercing and what made you decide to get it?

Uhm, my piercing aside from my earlobes would be my belly button and I was fifteen and my family had gone to England and I had a friend there and we had gone to Camdon and I suppose it was a kind of rebellion thing , it was like a spur of the moment , but I had been thinking about it for a while, I was thinking either my nose or my belly button, and so we went and I just decided to get it done. And I loved it for ages, I was quite large at the time so it wasn't something a lot of people knew about, but it was something that I knew about, uhm ja and it's not something that I wear any more but is still open, it's still there, ja.

What made you decide to get the belly and not the nose?

Uhm, I think it's cos I like nose rings and I don't like my nose and I wouldn't, It didn't feel right having it in my nose. I think it was, it didn't feel like it was me because I don't like my nose so wouldn't have it done there.

Could you describe how you experienced the actual experience, the actual piercing process, in other words, the process leading up to it, during and than after.

I think none of the piercing except for the two in my upper ear , uhm gave me any problems and they weren't sore and I think there was an anti climax, cos you get all worked up and you think about it and you know where you want it and find somebody you comfortable with , and then it's sort of over in two seconds, and it's alright, it's kind of, ja it doesn't fulfil all your expectations, but then you have the piercing and that is just great and is what you really want, and to feel really happy with it, so ja the actual experience of the piercing is just like quick , so sort of inconsequential in a way, it's sort of the after, afterwards when you have the piercing that most sort of, that's what I like.

When you say that's what you like (indistinct)

I think actually having a part of your self, your body, you, pierced. Not the act of having it pierced is what I like, uhm I don't, ja none of the actual experiences of having it pierced are important to me, it's always the afterwards of having it in your body.

What is your experience afterwards?

It's kind of like when you, it's like a decision you make. Especially when I was younger when I had the ones in my ears and my belly button, it's a decision you make for your body, and it's visible, it's there, its, nobody can take that away from you or make it not your decision or not your act, cos nobody else can decide to pierce your body. Uhm and it's just like having, and you can feel it and it's you know, it's always there you know, even now, when I don't have my belly button ring in, I know that the piercing's still there, so I don't know… it's just something

tangible, to have.

Sounds like it reminds you, if it's there or not there, it reminds you, or you think of it. Makes you aware of that body part.

No it's not aware of the body part it's aware of, sort of the rights you have to do this to your body, even if, you know my parents don't like body piercing, even my earlobes, they don't like it. Uhm but it's sort of claiming your right to do that. I mean my belly button, even though I dont wear it anymore it's like, it reminds me that at that time in my life I did claim the right and I think I like that.

So somehow it gave you access to your body.

Ja, and it always a bit secretive, I suppose it's something that I don't bring attention to or anything like that, but it's ja, it's something that I have, it's mine.

What would you say are your reasons for getting more than one piercing?

I don't know.

Are there different reasons for the different piercing?

Ja, I think there are reasons for the different piercing, I got my …, after my earlobes, I got two more done in my earlobes and I hated it, I couldn't stand them, I only had them for a couple of weeks, they just didn't feel right, uhm and then my belly button I think was just rebellion. I think it was, I mean I knew I could have had something else pierced I don't know why I had my

belly button pierced but, I think I just decided that, that that's the place. Maybe it's a place I felt bad about and I wanted to love it as well. Uhm my tongue I got when I had been ,uhm I had a really tough time, I was diagnosed with anorexia (inaudible), and it was sort of the time when I was getting better and was feeling awful but having to pretend to everybody that everything was fine, and I think, I didn't think about it long uhm, but I knew that I wanted to get my tongue done, and it was just kind of the same thing, taking responsibility for my body, but also deciding that I was able to do that, uhm sort of, ja, you kind of get run down and think that you cant make any decisions and every decision you make is going to be wrong and you know, I think it was something I knew that I wanted and I did and I felt good and I felt like it wasn't a mistake and I was getting better and I will get better. It was sort of an empowering step I suppose in my recovery but ja, and then, my tongue is my favourite part now, uhm sorry my favourite piercing uhm, and then soon after I got my tongue I stopped wearing my belly button ring, so, I don't know why, I just didn't, it didn't feel right anymore. And then when I got my upper ears done, I got them done with the needle at the same time and they really hurt. I knew I wanted to get two uhm, I don't know why I was a bit scared actually that it would make me look a bit butch cos I think they can but I decided to get two, and it was also sort of, I knew that I wanted them, I knew which ear I wanted them in, I knew how many I wanted and I think it was also a time when I was, ja when I was sort of going along a direction that a lot of people wanted me to go along, and not really knowing if that's what I wanted and it was some way for me to bring myself sort of back to me, and sort of bring myself back to the fact that I could make decisions for myself.

What does the tongue ring mean to you now?

I quite like it, I mean I wear it all the time even at work my boss has just gotten used to it so, like, I only take it out if it gives me sort of pain or something, uhm I think people are sometimes quite shocked that I have a tongue ring uhm, I suppose I don't look like somebody who would uhm, but I feel, it kind of reminds me of how far I have come since I got it and how far, you know how strong, I am in a way, uhm I don't like not having it in, it doesn't feel right. Ja I think what it reminds me of is how far I've come and how strong I've been and it's kind of because I had it done in that transition period, it kind of marks from where I started to get better to where I am now and it sound so funny but it's been with me through all of that and not that I say it's given me power or that, but it somehow is the reason that I've gotten through things, ja it's just a reminder of where I've been and where I mustn't go back to.

Sounds like a friend.

Ja, it's not really a friend, it doesn't you know, I don't derive power or energy or, it doesn't make me a different person, uhm it's just a marker of who I am.

What was your experience with the actual piercing, and the pain of being pierced?

Uhm, my earlobes were done with a gun and they kind of stung but nothing badly. My belly button, it didn't hurt at all, uhm I've never had an infection either. Uhm I think the most difficult thing was at school, my skirt would rub against it, cos that's where the waistband came, but it was nothing at all. Uhm, like I sad my ears, my upper ears when I had them first done with a needle, hurt really badly, it was excruciatingly sore, uhm and then for ages when I slept or something it, as soon as you put any pressure on it, uhm they would be very sore and they'd bleed, but now they're fine. I'm allergic to nickel so if I put a lot of earrings up here I

get an allergy, but that's something else. And then my tongue was, I had an anaesthetic mouth wash, and it was, I could even say, it wasn't even as sore as biting your tongue when you're eating uhm, and I healed very quickly, within a week I could do everything, uhm and it didn't affect my speech, so ja the pain was really not bad.

Would you say that your piercing have affected your life or your relationships or yourself in any way?

Uhm, I don't think, it hasn't directly changed my relationships, nobody sort of looked at me and ran off or you know looked at me strangely or anything. Ja cos I think even a tongue ring now, is not bad, sort of out there, it's quite accepted. Uhm I think at work some people think it's a bit odd, but it doesn't change how they are to me, I think it changes my relationships because it changes who I am, or changed who I am, uhm I think they give me a sense of being independent, being an independent (indistinct) and having that independence and owning that independence for myself, and that's obviously going to change your relationships and how people interact with you. Uhm, ja I think, but I don't think anybody changed, my parents are not happy about it but they kind of make a joke of it, they don't really mind, the rest of my family doesn't really mind at all so, ja not really.

Anything else you can maybe add to this or tell me to help me understand about your piercing, why you had them done?

I mean, I think now, sort of what stands out is they have all been done, sort of when I'm in quite a low place and when I'm there they give me a push, and the only one that sort of remains salient is my tongue. I think the ones in my ears, I like them and I don't want them to

close you know but they're not meaningful to me, it's my belly button which is sort of maybe a reminder, well not a reminder, but it's a… what do you call that when, I don't know, like when you find things from the past about people, it's like a thing from my past. Uhm and it sort of a pre-cursor to everything that happened afterwards and my tongue is sort of more of the present. I think that's why I don't wear my belly button ring any more it doesn't feel right and I think that, I've always known exactly what I wanted to get pierced or exactly what I wanted to get done, and it's just, it feels right I think, I've had my tongue piercing for about four years now, and it still feels right everyday, and you know sometimes if the ball comes out, and I have to take it out for a while, I actually don't feel, I kind of feel like I don't have make-up on or something like that, it's the same feeling like you've gone out half dressed. You've gone out not fully prepared for the world, uhm, it kind of just, ja it's in a way, it's like me keeping my chin up. So ja that's…. that's what it mean,s and my belly button is no longer that piercing, it just feels, it feels wrong to have it in, uhm if I was to get, I don't think I'd get more piercing uhm, I think I'd go for a tattoo next, uhm but I don't know maybe I will next, you never know.

How would you describe your past and your growing up and your relationships with your different family members, do you think this influenced you in any way to get pierced?

Uhm, I have a big family, I have two sisters and a brother, uhm and we always, I was always very close with my brothers and sisters and I was ja you know, and I was close with my mum as normal but nothing special I suppose, uhm I don't know, I don't think it affected my, why I got pierced, and my parents aren't, I said they don't like piercing uhm, but it was never, it was I suppose I didn't tell them before I got them I just kind of went home with them, uhm but I never thought that they would throw me out the house or be terribly , terribly upset or any

thing like that. None of my sisters or my brother have piercing… oh my sister has her belly button, ja I don't think they really affected me, I think it was ja (indistinct).

Is there anything else you want to add before we finish, that you haven't said?

INTERVIEW – REBECCA

Interviewer*:* Please could you answer the following questions in as much detail as possible. In your description, comment on as many aspects of the experience as you wish. This is so that I can get the fullest picture possible

Interviewer – if you could just tell me your name?

Interviewee- uhm Rebecca

And how old are you uhm Rebecca?

I'm 25.

What is it that you do?

Well currently I'm actually studying for my honours in uhm history of art.

And are you married?

No.

Do you have a boyfriend?

Yes.

And religion?

No, I'm not religious.

When did you first get your very first piercing?

My first one was actually when I was baby, my mum got it for me, I'm not sure how old, just in my ears, uhm ja so that was my first one.

How many piercings have you had?

Uhm, quite a lot, I've had lets see, I've got three in each earlobe and uhm, in my upper ears and one here in the triangle of my upper ear. I've had two in my eyebrow but one's closed, I've got one in my nose, my left nostril, one in my lip, uhm one in my belly button, my nipple, my left nipple.

And are you planning on getting more piercings?

I'm thinking of maybe getting my other nipple done, but it's not pressing, I don't have to get it done for awhile, you know I don't want it done right now.

And do you have any other body art, body modifications?

I have three tattoos, I have a small strawberry on my lower back, uhm and then I have a flower on my right calf and the stem goes round, it sort of goes round the flower, and I've got an angel on my right shoulder.

What would you say is more meaningful to you, your tattoos or your piercings?

Uhm, I think … because tattoos are so much more permanent uhm , they are more meaningful, they have to be , you know the strawberry i kind of just got and then it became meaningful to me, and I think that's why I got the others, uhm I think keeping your piercings is more important than having them done because they're so, you know you can just take it out and nobody will ever know you done it, keeping them in, that's where the importance is, that you continue to wear them in your body even though you don't have to.

When and where did you get your first piercing and what made you decide to get this other than that very first one you described which you got as a baby?

All of my ears were done as a teenager, I started to pierce them myself, I think I was around twelve or thirteen at the time, just in my earlobes uhm, I'd sort of pierce it and take it out and I knew my mum wouldn't like it, so I'd have it for few days and take it out and go another week and pierce it again uhm and then when I was about fifteen, I think I was about fifteen I'd had the three in each ear and for a while, it was a bit of a rebellious streak, I went through a very private posh girls school and we weren't allowed to have anything else but one stud in each ear , that why outside of school I was a bit of a rebel and at least I thought I was and it was definitely sort of a, sort of saying they cant control everything in my life and than I can follow the rules and only have one stud but I'm not necessarily doing what the want anyway.

When you say you pierced your ears, what did you pierce your ears with?

Uhm it would be like a pen or a safety needle, or something like that ja.

And when you decided to do that, what was happening to you at that time?

I think my parents, you know, my parents have never got along, they were fighting since I can remember and I think it was at that time that I began to realise that its, it wasn't alright and that there was something wrong, uhm and then I changed schools to go to high school and it was a difficult time for me I think, and I didn't have a lot of friends uhm, and the friends I did have I didn't really feel understood me or knew what I was about and it was a very confusing time I think and I didn't, you know you so limited when you at that age to express yourself, uhm even piercings you know, you not suppose to unless you sixteen and have parental signature and whatever and tattoos were out of the question. Money wise I didn't have the money to go and do these things that I wanted to do, and I think it was, I don't think they would have been as important to me then if I just had them done at a shop with a gun, because it wasn't …, at the time it wasn't having the piercing that was important to me, it was sort of piercing myself or the experience of that, uhm you can kind of just switch off and just be, uhm and that's, I think that's what I was craving or needing at the time and then having the first , it was quite striking piercings at the time, uhm that changed who I was and that gave me a lot of self confidence.

And what would you say is your most important piercing to you? (Indistinct).

Uhm, I think probably my nipple piercing uhm, I had that done about two years ago, it was you know I never really felt sexy and I never, I always had boyfriends who, they were kind of just there and I thought I had to have a boyfriend and I never really felt that they wanted me or needed me or, I was just sort of, I was just convenient, uhm and then three years ago I met my boyfriend Adam and everything just felt right, and you know we really so good together and he just changed everything in my life and it took a while and one day I just realised that I did feel

sexy, at least with Adam and I did enjoy being me, and being so free with hI'm ,uhm ja you know it's very exciting when I think about it now, that I mark that, that sort of feeling with the nipple piercing , but it's very special to me, it's always something I share with Adam cos he knows what it means to me, and it's sort of marks, it marks a transition from being, I don't feel like I went through puberty, feel like I went from being a little girl to being a woman and I just thought , breast and boobs are just you know the sort of epitome of womanhood in a way and uhm, ja I wanted to mark this is my womanhood.

How would you say that, that's affected your life, your relationships with other people, and the sense of who you are?

I think, I think it's affected my life very much, uhm I don't think with all my facial piercings I could you know walk into a business and apply for a job, because you know people don't look at me normally uhm, not that they look at me abnormally but you can see people looking and wondering why I have all these piercings and you know they think it might be ugly or whatever, uhm you know its, it's sort of a knock-on effect, you get one too many and then all of a sudden you have to sort of re-evaluate who you are as well and your friends sort of, it goes along with a whole lot of different things in life, you might not get sort of more and more piercings if you're socialising with people who don't get piercings or don't think it's right to get piercings or tattoos or you know the more you get the more you sort of wasn't to hang out with people who are the same, you know when I look back all my friends had something about them, something that they were, we just felt more comfortable, I suppose we, ja and then I think you almost exclude yourself from society. In a way and you do say willingly because I never fitted in and I fit in with this little circle of people, it feels right and I don't see why I

should conform in the way I look when I don't fit in the way I feel so ja it's definitely changed who I am. And then obviously in relationships I mean I've already said about my nipple with Adam, I mean that's a very special thing for me, and I know Adam accepts me and my piercings and my tattoos and quirks and my insanities and that's big for me, so ja, it definitely affects who I am.

What does it mean to you to take the nipple ring out, do you ever take it out?.

I don't, I never thought about that. It's just not something that I would do, uhm I think it would depend on the context of why I'm taking it out, and if I was taking it out to conform, I think I would just be angry that I had to do that and I would feel almost like, not betraying myself, something less than betraying myself, but, ja giving in or, not even as strong, it just wouldn't feel, it would feel bad. It would, I know it's not the same thing but it's sort of when somebody gets married and they have a wedding ring and they never take it off and then you tell them you have to take it off, and people say they feel naked or uhm, ja like they betraying their partner or something I think maybe it would feel like that.

Who is it that you feel you'll betray?

I suppose me, ja. Ja definitely, it's because you work so hard to realise who you are and what you want and what's important to you and I don't mean in any big grand way but just even the small things and than to give up on that because, it makes fitting in easier, or you following the rules, I think unless you like that, I think you then betraying yourself.

You say you always felt different from other people and if you look back, growing up what

was that like? What kind of a childhood did you have…with your family what was that like?

Uhm, my mum is lovely, uhm we get on, we have lots and lots of, you know we both love art and I remember going to art exhibitions with her when I was younger and really sort of feeling special with her. And my dad I don't get on with, he's a businessman and he's very logical in his thoughts and there's the right way to do things and there's the wrong way to do things, and he's you know he's very black and white, he's very you know, he doesn't understand the grey areas, he doesn't understand mixed feelings, he doesn't get the ambivalence or you know, I sometimes don't even think he get basic emotions like loneliness, he just sort of goes along and plods along, and he doesn't ever just look at something and say he doesn't get it, he'll have to have an opinion and then his opinion is right, you know it very, I always felt very small and very insignificant with him, and almost a bit of an embarrassment because I always seem to be doing something that was wrong , even when I had no idea what that was. And my sister, we were close, she's five years younger than me, we were very close at one stage, then I moved away, than she moved away and we not very close anymore, uhm we still get on and we phone each other every now and again but there's no sort of very special connection with us anymore, she's a lot like my dad already, not as much but you know I think she doesn't see why I'm living my life the way I do, why I put mum and dad through worrying about me and stressing about me, when you know I'm travelling or whatever, you know she doesn't really get me, she doesn't, she loves me and I know she does.

Is there anything else that you feel you need to tell me to help me understand about your piercings, what they mean to you.

I think I know with my eyebrows uhm, I had them pierced because it was at a stage when I was

deciding what to do with my life, sort of after leaving school, you know. What to do, and I made quite a few bad decisions and than I decided to go travel again. It was during my travelling uhm, that I decided to get them done and I didn't have any money at the time to have them pierced and I wanted to do them properly; uhm and I had to save up cos I was travelling and working, I had to save up for about three months and it was the first time in my life that I actually had to, you know work for something myself, something that I really wanted, I think I keep them cos it reminds me of that determination of knowing exactly what I want and not being able to get it and coming up with a plan and then getting it all by myself. I know a lot of people must think that's silly because it's such a small thing, I had to work to get my eyebrows pierced, but to me that was the first time that it wasn't my dads money or money I got for my birthday or something. It was really hard work to get that money and still survive. And think that for me it's…, I really had, you know I waned two, so it was quite a mission, uhm ja, I always think people must think I'm insane cos I really, it's such a nice feeling to have, to know that I did that, and I mean now I've been working for so long, but it's sort of you pay for your car, you pay for your house , you think how can I still put so much emphasis on these that, but I do , so ja I think they also really special.

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