Appendix: The Method

Though this book largely presents the empirical research findings and discussion around tattooed feminine bodies, I also wanted to include the methods that were undertaken, for those interested parties. On top of that, I had mentioned early on in the book how I as the researcher was important for this feminist-informed research. I wanted to make these processes visible, and by sharing this method detail, I hope to provide something that is of use for other researchers, regardless of academic level. Here, I outline the approach taken for the research, how it was conducted and the analytic framework that underpinned the analysis.

Research Approach

To answer my research questions, I drew upon a feminist-informed qualitative methodology, which allowed me to reflect on my position as a researcher (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008), constructions of otherness (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004) and the sharing of voices (Parr, 2015). In addition, this approach allowed me to challenge current knowledge claims held by those in privileged positions, which includes my own position. It was my position of being both insider (being tattooed) and outsider (the academic researcher coming in to talk about other women's experiences) that I spent most time with throughout the research. Similar to what was discussed within the analytic chapters, we as researchers also hold multiple positions, rather than singular ones, and as a qualitative researcher, it is beneficial to be explicit about what these positions are. For example, for myself, I focused on my class background, my whiteness, my relative youth, my level of education, my gender expression and the number of tattoos that I visibly had on display during the interview process.

For consistency, I felt that my more visible tattoos – the ones on my arms – should be on display for all of the interviews. To me, this seemed important, as having all of my tattoos hidden may have an effect on the responses exchanged within the interviews. I was aware that having my tattoos exposed would also have an effect, though given the topic area, and my relationships with the participants, I felt this would help them be more comfortable with how they responded. In some of the interviews, my own tattoos were directly referred to or pointed at, especially when the dialogue revolved around shared experiences, such as needing to cover up tattoos on our arms whilst at work. This approach has been criticised in respect to a potential exploitation of

relationships and the information that might be shared during the interview process (Banister et al., 2011; Kvale, 2007). However, this is somewhat of a contested issue, with Oakley (1981) commenting how interviews involve a process of 'give and take', whereby information is also shared by the researcher, forming part of the co-production of knowledge in the context of the interview. It would be illogical for me to think I could have removed myself from the interview process, and therefore the way that the data were analysed, especially given my close relationship with the topic area.

There were also some problematic methodological issues to contend with early on in the research, as I wrangled with the debate around the use of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis in feminist work (Ramazanoglu, 1993). For example, with considering the power of the speaker, Foucault et al. (1991) focus more on the production of the discourse and lose the account of the speaker. To address this, I had to pay close attention to my own positions (of which there were multiple, some outlined above) in order to process the kinds of discussions that I had with the participants. In addition, I must add that I had a relationship of some kind with all of the participants – they were family friends, colleagues and school friends. I avidly support the point that those known to us are just as valid to work with in qualitative research (Oakley, 1981), as it is those relationships that allow for more free-flowing and honest conversation.

The Participants

I used purposive sampling for my research (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008), specifically identifying British tattooed women as the main focus for this approach. From that position, I intended to find women from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities and employment statuses in order to explore the various subjective positionings. Participants were mostly recruited via word of mouth – I knew the women personally, and they knew that this research area was of interest to me. For some of the women, we already had personal conversations relating to tattoos, and once they knew about this project, they were keen to take part and discuss an area of interest to them in a way that would contribute to research knowledge. I acknowledge that it would not have been feasible for me to expect to find participants who covered all manner of different intersections (and neither would that have felt authentic to cherry-pick as such), though I did aim for a diverse group of women to interview (Forrester, 2010). I felt this sampling method to be beneficial, as I would be able to talk with the group of people specific to this research.

After discussions with different women, 14 tattooed women agreed to take part in the final research project. Early in the research process, I had considered the possibility of speaking with non-tattooed women, to see how their thoughts on tattoos might shape some of the discourse we see. However, I did not see the points of comparison or difference as areas I wanted to

explore – I wanted to ensure that it was tattooed women who were the ones given the space to discuss their thoughts. Some of the women had been recently tattooed, and some of the women had been tattooed for as long as 30 years. There was also a variety of styles, sizes, placements and total tattoos for each of the women. As the women were of different ages, we were able to discuss some of the generational differences in views towards tattooed women. Table A1 provides more information about the women who participated in the research. All of the pseudonyms named below were selected by myself as the researcher, as they were names of tattooed women I wanted to honour through the research. Some of the names came from tattooed circus performers, some had celebrity status as tattooed women, and some came to be known for their tattoos:

Table A1. Interview Participants.

Name	Age	Tattoos
Maud	48	One tattoo – small, on the foot
Artoria	23	Multiple – mostly larger pieces of work across legs, arms and torso
Ruth	47	Multiple – small tattoos on back, bum and upper arm
Betty	31	Three medium size tattoos, on arms
Nora	21	Multiple medium/large pieces on arms and legs
Violet	19	Multiple, medium size, mostly on legs and torso
Irene	22	One small tattoo on the wrist
Annie	33	Two tattoos – one large arm piece and one smaller hand piece
Amelia	21	One small foot tattoo
Jean	24	One small arm tattoo
Lydia	40	Multiple – small to large, whole back covering, arms and legs
Mae	30	Multiple large tattoos – all of legs and arms tattooed
Belle	45	Four large tattoos, including whole back and upper arm
Gabrielle	21	Two small and hidden tattoos on torso/hip

The Interviews

Before the interviews, I developed a flexible interview schedule, taking into account past research, and my theoretical framework, as well as my own experiences as a tattooed woman. I wanted questions that would enable me to explore the complex representations and constructions of women with tattoos. I explored issues relating to femininity and definitions of femininity, aspects of identity, how tattoos come into play with regards to identity and

how factors like employment might shape women's perceptions of tattoos. All of the questions were open-ended, inviting the participants to expand upon their answers and allowing for explanations of things that they felt to be important. Before conducting the interviews, I made it clear that I had no ideas about 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and invited them to be as open and honest as they felt comfortable.

Within the interviews, the women constructed their accounts of tattooing within our interaction, drawing on memories, but constituting their current narrative in conversation. I had the interview schedule with me for all of the interviews to ensure that I asked the central questions, though each of the women expanded on different points and took the conversation in different directions, which helps provide a wealth of data for analysis. For example, the women who shared their experiences of motherhood came out organically through the conversations – this was not an area that I had set out to discuss. Moreover, within the interviews I was able to consider gestures and body language performed by the women, and this helped to enrich the conversations. This involved the body within the research process, which was important given the overall focus on tattooed bodies – it would have felt odd to not consider how they moved their bodies or showed body parts through our conversations. For example, when the women were talking about the tattoos they have, they would often show me them specifically, touching them whilst they talk about them, and in a couple of interviews, the women stood up and turned around, removing clothing to show me tattoos that were more hidden. This to me demonstrated how the body is a part of the conversation, and that we should not detach from it, especially in discussing the tattoos we have on our bodies.

As I knew each of the participants in some respect, the interviews felt like normal conversations, and flowed well rather than being strained. We sensed each other's expressions, and became aware of situations we may have mutually experienced, such as being called out on 'what we will look like on our wedding day', for example. I felt that some of the women felt that they could be more open about their opinions because they knew me, and they knew that I was not there to judge them.

Developing the Analytic Framework

In using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, I was able to focus on how the discourses that were produced constituted and reproduced power, resulting in forms in inequality (Gee, 2014). Parker (1992, p. 5) defines discourse as 'a system of statements which construct an object'. In relation to my research, the 'objects' were things such as tattoos, the self, the body and femininity. Also, the tattooed women themselves were constructed as both object and subject, depending on how they produced their tattoos, themselves as agentic and how they constructed their tattooed bodies within the interview dialogue.

Power for Foucault is not so much about possession or having something over another – rather, it is about knowledge as being power, and people having the power to define others (Burr, 1995). Specifically, Foucault considers the body as a site of power, linking this to the notion of 'normality' and what acts, activities and behaviours are considered to be 'normal', against those that are othered (Burr, 1995). Here, the links between Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and a focus for how tattooed feminine bodies are produced are made clear, in that some practices of modification may be produced as 'normal' within these discourses, and some may not (we see this throughout the analytic chapters in this book, specifically relating to social class and traditional ideals of femininity). In addition, how tattooed bodies are discussed within the interviews were regulated by what was considered acceptable and not acceptable. The regulative potential of the media articles depended on the readership of the newspaper they came from (still, all classed), though regardless of this, it was clear what was considered 'right' and 'wrong' in respect to being a tattooed woman.

Initial analysis started during the interview stage. Through the dialogue between myself and the women, there were moments where I would require clarification or expansion on certain points, as to explore what was being said, and from what position they might be coming from. In addition to the conversations, there were also occasions throughout the interviews where the women would physically show me parts of their body – more specifically, their tattoos – and whilst this is not captured within the recordings of the interviews, it enriched the conversation, as the women were able to give some context to the tattoos they were talking about. Whilst the interviews were being transcribed, I began to take notes on things that I felt stood out. This included things such as recollections from the interviews and the ways they unfolded, how I as the interviewer played a part in the way that the questions were answered and finally, initial observations and thoughts with regards to the transcript.

I followed Parker's (1994, cited in Banister et al., 2011) step-by-step guide for carrying out discourse analysis, the first part of which provides a process for analysing text, and the last part, a deeper analysis into discourse. The first steps involve 'free associating' to the text, so I made notes on things that came to mind as I was reading through the interview transcripts. Following from this, steps include identifying different 'ways' of speaking, and what these different voices served to produce within the text. Deeper analysis conducted on the transcripts focus on how the discourses that were produced operated to normalise issues – for example, the stereotypes of femininity that the women discussed being taken for granted as 'normal'. I followed the same approach with the media articles, reading and re-reading them to identify 'who' was saying what within the articles, and what this was producing about tattooed feminine bodies.

For the media articles specifically, I conducted a systematic search, using specific search terms to obtain the best possible sample for the analysis. The specific terms used were 'tattoo' or 'wom*n' within the headline of the article, or 'tattoo wom*n' having major mentions within the article itself. There were articles that contained 'tattoo' in the headline, but did not contain any mentions within the article itself – I wanted to ensure that the focus of the articles were centred on tattooed women, rather than just being in the headline in order to grab reader attention. The original search for 'tattoo' provided hundreds of media articles, with too much data to analyse for this chapter. It made sense to adjust the search terms, to ensure that there was a balance between having a sufficient amount of relevant data, but not too much that it detracted from the intended focus. The search dates for the articles fell between 2014 and 2018 – the start of my research, through to the end – to ensure that the content was current, given the fast-developing pace of tattooing and opinions of the practice. Having since completed the research, I still search these key words within online newspaper articles, and see little variation beyond what was explored just a few years ago. Around 40 articles were sourced for the final analysis, many of which you will find within the references to this book, having being discussed with the media chapter. One of the important elements for the media analysis was in understanding the readership of the newspapers, so that I could draw out the class-based differences in reporting. For example, Gani (2014) noted how *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* were considered as 'serious' or quality newspapers, containing content that is more associated with a middle-class readership. *The Sun* and *The Mirror* are considered as 'red top' or popular papers, likely to contain sensationalised content, associated with a more working-class readership (Hilton, Patterson, & Teyhan, 2012). It was important to break down some of this nuance in readership, as this fed into how the discourses were produced within the articles.

Being Reflexive

As knowledge is always positional, I made sure that throughout the research process, and even in the process of writing this book, I unpacked my positions as a woman, an academic and a tattooed and working-class woman amongst others, to understand the knowledge produced here. The first thing to consider is the role of myself as the researcher as an insider or outsider to my research. Being a tattooed woman, I am an insider to my research, meaning that I am a part of the community within which my research is based (Yakushko et al., 2011), but at the same time, I am also an objectifying researcher. I will have influence in the research from the ways that the questions are designed, how the interviews flow and the ways that the data are analysed.

One of the key points of being an insider to my research is the position of power and privilege that I was granted (Yakushko et al., 2011). It is often hard to cite one's own power relations with regards to their research, but here I must acknowledge my position as a researcher, and not attempt to empower others through my own personal experiences, but rather, let their own voices be heard. In all honesty, the idea of 'giving voice' is something I wrangled with throughout the process – it makes me feel uncomfortable (as in, it is my power and position here that allow their voice). The concept of 'giving voice' is recognised as problematic, as discussed within other key feminist research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). The women I interviewed did not speak as one, homogenous voice, and therefore, I took the time to acknowledge the contradictions and tensions within their accounts. As discussed by Burman, 'we have to recognize the complexity of the stories that "they" as well as "we" tell' (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996, p. 23).

As a reflexive researcher, I have also considered some of the pre-conceptions and feelings that I might have about tattooed women, and that some information provided might be overlooked (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). My own ideas about tattoos have shifted through the course of this research, and even in writing this book. I have moved from the naïve perspective of seeing tattoos as celebratory and liberatory objects, as I did at the very start of this journey, to more of a complex and nuanced view of tattooed bodies, exploring the multiple tensions felt by these subject positions. Whilst I have been afforded privileges in being able to conduct research in an area I am passionate about, I have also experienced negative perceptions of my research and questioning of my capability as an academic because of my age, my tattoos and my gender. To me, this is not a process that finishes once the research or this book is complete, but is an ongoing project of reflection, important for feminist research.

As a tattooed woman myself, I feel strongly about the ways that women with tattoos are viewed – I am frequently told I will regret my tattoos when I am older, people despair at the sight of them and ask what I will do with them on my wedding day and I have been told numerous times that I will never hold a good job. In talking to women about their tattoos, I was aware of how my own experiences came into play – in shaping my approach to the research, in the interviews and in the analysis. For example, when discussing employment and the workplace in relation to tattoos, I was highly aware of the differences between my tattooed body in an academic space, as opposed to a visibly tattooed body within a customer service environment. The way that workplaces were discussed in this context were with contempt, a clear understanding of a difference between different professions, especially when talking to previous work colleagues with whom we had previously had the shared experience of having to cover our tattoos. This meant that I became aware of this new difference, not a shared experience, in the positions held between myself and my participants. For this reason, it was important to

acknowledge my subjective position on these issues, and also to be aware of how that position shifted and changed over the course of the interviews. This helped me in turn to understand that the women I spoke to were also not producing final, permanent statements of their experiences. Rather, their accounts were contextually produced – coproduced in their interactions with me – and located at a specific point in time and place.

The research methods that were used for this research were selected to fit with the analysis of social discourses, in combination with interviews, and importantly, in acknowledgement of my own position as a qualitative researcher. There is a wealth of excellent qualitative research available in our disciplines, though we still see quantitative research favoured in highly-rated journals, in research excellent ratings, and in funding applications. As qualitative researchers, we have a duty to demonstrate just how important qualitative research is, alongside of our quantitative and mixed-methods counterparts. I could not pit qualitative and quantitative research against each other because the two approaches give us something different, and each have their place. Our own position as qualitative researchers, regardless of the topic we look to explore, is important to the overall process, and it would be insincere to act as though we are not a part of our work. As qualitative researchers, we should continue to push boundaries in publishing excellence and broaden our ideas of what good and innovative research is.