

**(Re)Figuring Pedagogical Flesh: Phenomenologically (Re)Writing the Lived Experiences
of Tattooed Teachers**

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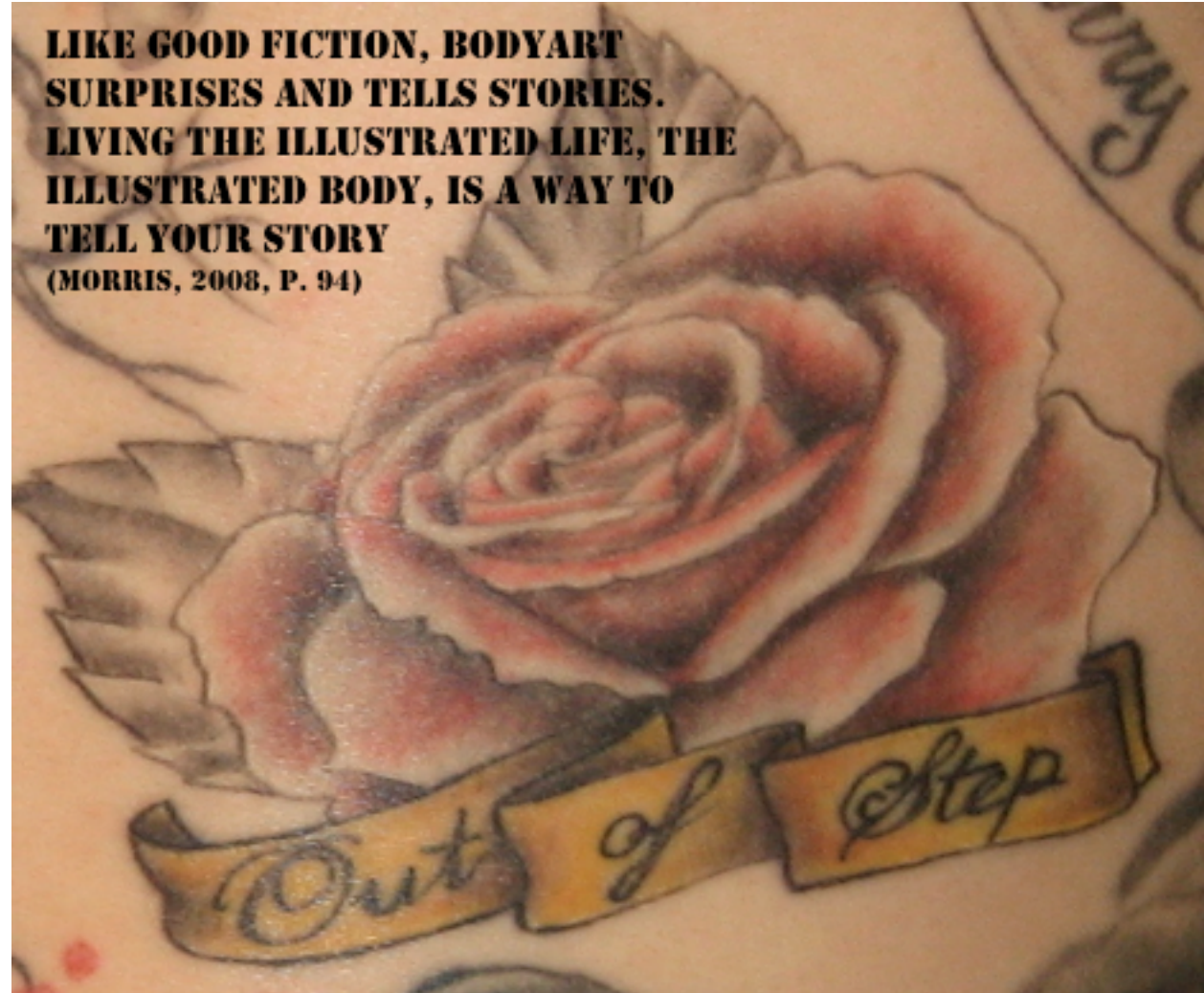
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Abstract

This hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry describes the lived experiences of three visibly tattooed teachers and what it is like to sense their tattooed flesh while they are at school. Lived experience descriptions were collected during in-depth interviews and from personal reflective writings conducted by the study author, who is also a tattooed teacher. Using hermeneutic research approaches outlined by Max van Manen and Linda Finlay, lifeworld descriptions of visibly tattooed teachers are presented in the form of anecdotal passages that urge readers to ‘step into tattooed skin’. Drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, Luce Irigaray’s work on intersubjectivity, Michel Foucault’s notion of the disciplinary gaze, theories of the look in education forwarded by Madeline Grumet, and Judith Butler’s notion of subversive bodies, meanings are made of tattooed teachers’ experiences of adopting uncomfortable teacher identities and then growing comfortable in their professional roles. Through hermeneutic analysis, five main themes are presented, constituting the “essences” of the phenomenon of living as a visibly tattooed teacher: Trying to Fit; Mis-fit; Fit. You? Fit You!; Fitting In; and One Size Does Not Fit All.

Keywords: Teacher identity, tattoos, tattoos in the workplace, tattooed teachers, body modification, body art, education, hermeneutic phenomenology.



If one allows oneself to live in the body, rather than detached from it, the body has things to teach... Many scholars disconnect from their bodies because their scholarly work comes from the intellect only... but intellectual works must be embodied, emotional, intuitive and grounded in the senses...

To try to capture something phenomenologically and psychically one must think not only with one's head but from one's embodied being. Working from the gut, as it were, is a difficult task. Pain is felt in the gut. Writing pains (Morris, 2008, pp. 95-96).

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Chapter 1: Inked Musings: Tattooing, Teaching

Enter this, my multi-layered inquiry into the lives of tattooed teachers. The intersection of text, photos¹, theory, and personal reflection found within dialogue with each other, build on one another, to artfully describe what it is like to work in education while dwelling in flesh that is visibly different due to inked images apparent on the surface of the skin.

Bodyart is a scandal, no doubt. It is a school for scandal (Morris, 2008, p. 90).

This study starts with a novel that quite literally gets under my skin, its ink seeping deep into my pores. I'm 11 years old, and I'm reading *Wizard*, a science fiction novel by John Varley (1980). Riveted, I turn the page to encounter Robin, a fascinating female character whose body bears marks unlike anything I have encountered before. Tattoos. They grip my imagination from this moment forward. I devour the details of her description voraciously. A third eye on her forehead. A geometric design on one side of her half-shaved head. A multicoloured snake that travels the length of her body, slithering from baby finger to baby toe. I am enthralled. To shape the body this way, to appear so physically unique, to *wear art* everywhere you go. Incredible! Have I ever seen tattoos in real life before? No. At 11 years old I have not. But Robin's character kindles a yearning so strong it borders an ache. I want tattoos. Years pass but the alluring pull of the ink fails to dissipate. Convicted, I know that one day I will experience firsthand, in the flesh, *What it is like to be tattooed*.

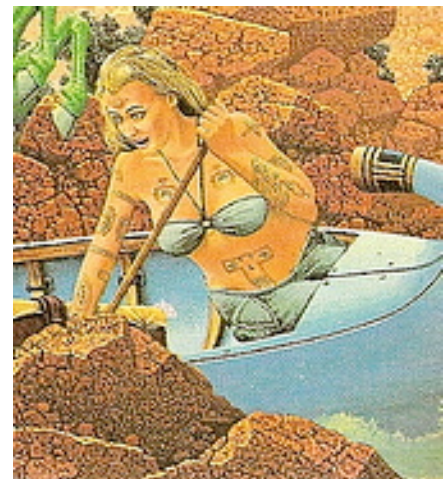


Figure 1: Robin (Varley, 1980)

The year I turn 15, I am hired as a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the city pool. I enjoy a level of physical freedom not offered in many

¹ All images are my own unless otherwise indicated as Figures.

teenage jobs. My uniform is a bathing suit, a tank top, and flip flops. The rules say I must wear a whistle and a fanny pack of fist aid materials in case of emergencies. Bikinis are off-limits. Otherwise I am unencumbered by uniforms or dress code strictures. Between the splashing of waves and the applications of Band-Aids to cut feet, I discover a genuine love of working with children. Watching a flabbergasted two-year old learn she can blow bubbles. Congratulating the toddler who screws up every ounce of courage to dunk his entire head under water. Every crayon picture drawn for me, every goodbye hug at the end of a class, every appreciative handshake from student's mother or father when their child passes a swim level, it all makes the job worth it despite the wrinkled toes, chemical-crisped hair and a chlorine smell I *swear* sweats out my pores even after I shower. For my swim classes, I write thousands of report cards and mid-term progress reports, fill in hundreds of student skill assessments. Even the evaluation paperwork can't dampen my spirits over my first teaching-style job.

The constant thrum of desire to become tattooed finds its harmony in wanting to work with children. My work environment nurtures both desires equally. I spend 20-30 hours a week with tattooed coworkers and instructing youth under the age of 16. My fellow aquatic staffers possess large tattoos, small ones, colourful ones, heavy black geometric designs. A few times a year, I accompany a colleague to a tattoo appointment, where I marvel at the physical process of needles sewing ink into skin. Layered atop the constant mental image I hold of Robin's extensively inked character, I absorb the real-world buzz of the tattoo machine, the tang of disinfectant, and the squeak of bare skin on padded vinyl benches. I talk to tattoo artists, listen to sage advice about caring for new tattoos – no soaking in water for at least two weeks to prevent the ink from 'falling out'. Lifeguarding is my lifeline to university, for tuition money. I can't afford to stay dry for

14 workdays to heal a tattoo properly, so my yearning draws out a while longer. To compensate, I draw. With waterproof, fine-tipped Sharpie markers and an endless canvass of willing lifeguard flesh, I ink semi-permanent designs on legs, arms, feet, ankles, the back of necks. Even earlobes. I take requests or follow whims for those who give me license to be creative. I draw fish and flowers and family crests and Zodiac signs. I trace calligraphy script lettering and reproduce band logos. Real or drawn by my marker, none of my coworkers' tattoos ever cause a stir at work. Yes, we work with young children. Yes, we are viewed as



role models and leaders. But the truth is, our managers don't care what we look like as long as we monitor the pool diligently, prevent accidents proactively, treat injuries expertly, and effectively teach our students. Want to dye your hair blue? Go for it. Want to get your nose, lip and tongue pierced? Sure, why not? Just got a new tattoo over half your back? Cool, what studio did you go to? Not a peep of critique is heard from parents. No stern reprimands are issued by the boss. I spend six years in this atmosphere of comfortable acceptance, contentedly surrounded by a harmonious blend of kids and ink.

First year university. I move downtown. I get my first tattoo, then a second. I start planning a third. I transfer pool locations and work reduced hours between my journalism classes. My first month on the job is an eye-opener that makes my skin crawl with a dawning realization. Being tattooed on the job isn't always going to be comfortable. It can be stabbingly hurtful. I learn this in the change room after shift one evening while showering. To remove as

much chlorine as possible, it's common for female staff to wear a two-piece sports style bathing suit that lets you soap your back and stomach. So, my back and midriff are exposed when a mother ushers her daughter into the shower beside me. Only half paying attention, I lather shampoo and rinse, scrub vigorously with a bath puff. Then, with a strange pricking sensation as if the water has suddenly turned cold I feel the hair on my arms stand on end. I am being watched. I take a quick glance over at the mother, who is leaning against the far wall holding her daughter's towel out of the shower's spray. She is *glaring* at me. No wonder my blood feels chilled. She bites words, flings them like insults, "*I would appreciate if you didn't expose my daughter to such a bad example. Those things all over you, that's not an example the teachers should be making at this facility.*" Her voice is clipped, sharp. Things. These things are my tattoos, the images inked on either side of my rib cage, one side an angel, the other a vampire.



Does this mother really find two very common mythical creatures so objectionable to be displayed to her child? Has she never read her daughter a storybook or watched a cartoon that has an angel or vampire in it? Even *Sesame Street* has The Count! As these thoughts reel through my head, she pushes on, voice veritably hissing with distaste, *“If all you teachers have tattoos, it makes it look like it’s okay to get tattoos. Is that the message you want to send to the children?”* I am shocked speechless. Inside my head, I scream, *Yes, yes, YES! That’s exactly the message I want to send. What on earth is wrong with getting a tattoo you nasty...* In my moment of internal fury I lose my final chance to reply. She collects her daughter into the cocoon of her bath towel and leads her off to get dressed around the corner. Standing motionless under the spray of water, fists clenched, breath fuming, bath puff crushed mercilessly in my grip, I get my first bitter dose of what it feels like to be judged as a student’s role model for having tattoos. I stand in the shower a long time, letting the mist swirl around me as angry thoughts ricochet back and forth between *Who does she think she is?* and, *Should I be worried about this?* As the soap and shampoo wash down the drain, I can feel my naïve conception that being tattooed at work is always going to be okay flow down the pipes with them. I start to think of my future and wonder, *Is being tattooed going to become a problem in my professional life?*

It’s six years later. I have graduated with a journalism degree, worked for and been downsized from a magazine company, and hired to research and write curriculum for a distance education company. I finally make up my mind. I *do* want to be a teacher, in a classroom instead of a pool, in front of children instead of writing documents at a desk. Teachers’ college feels a perfect fit. Until I get there. Nothing can prepare me for the mental and emotional blow this experience deals me. I have started the longest eight months of my life. If someone had told me before first term that I’d be spending most of the upcoming year feeling out of place, squirming

in my own skin, and storming home angry and disillusioned more nights than not, I probably would have declined my acceptance. Thus begins a series of confounding, disheartening and often outright upsetting scenarios that leaves me wondering, *“Is this really what people think when they see me?”* and the more frequent, *“I don’t think I belong here”*.

Student teachers start to talk about practicum placements a few weeks into the term. What I hear feels like a rock thrust into the pit of my stomach, cinching my sense of malaise. The one person in my class with a sleeve tattoo shrugs off his ink as a non-issue for practicum, *“I’m not worried. I’ll just wear long sleeves and nobody will see.”* I can’t help but interject, *“But why?!”* The answer: *“I don’t want to be judged. I want to get a job.”* Three deep breathes. Okay. Already, in my first week of teacher training, the insinuations start that tattoos give the wrong professional impression. I see the privately, but what I really want to do is stand at the front of the room and shout, *“Why are we compromising ourselves? Don’t you like your tattoo? Since when do we have to stop being ourselves to become teachers?”* My instructors reinforce a ‘cover your tattoos’ stance. The advice doled out in class: take your piercings out and cover your tattoos if you want to get a job. I start wondering in earnest, how do I fit into the role of ‘the Teacher’? Aside from feeling out of place, I must have looked the odd one out amongst my teacher candidate peers, because some bizarre questions are put to me in the first few months of my program. The most memorable comes from a classmate. With practicum placements still on the horizon, I haven’t made any efforts at this point to look ‘like a teacher’. I’ve spent the whole week in my usual garb, pulling my dyed black hair with its bleached white stripes into a ponytail to facilitate sitting on the floor and working on chart paper. With all the bending over chart paper in so un-ladylike a position, I guess my shirt slips up a number of times to reveal my lower back tattoos. The last thing on my mind is whether anyone is going to catch a glimpse of my tattoos –

or think much of them if they do. At least one person has noticed. A classmate approaches me in the hallway, whispering in a barely audible voice, *“Hey, I’m new in town and was hoping you could, um, hook me up with drugs or tell me where to buy them?”* She looks at me eagerly, hopeful expression on her face. What she sees in return causes her to pull back as if she’s touched a hot surface. My eyes pop wide, my mouth hangs open uselessly, and I’m fairly certain I can’t look any more offended than I already do, not even with a deliberate effort. *“Sorry,”* she fumbles. *“It’s just, you know, the…”* and she gestures towards my ears, which I have plugged with various metal and stone flesh tunnels and rings, and then my back, where she must have seen one of my tattoos. *“What?!”* I blurt out, incredulous. Who does she take me for? I know, vaguely, that it’s possible for people to associate drug use with tattoos and body piercing. But I’ve never directly experienced this assumption being placed on me. I am stunned and offended. *Okay, cool it. She doesn’t know you. Relax,* I coach myself in my head. *Be nice, or she’ll think you’re a self-righteous snob. “I’m sorry, I wouldn’t know what to tell you. I don’t do drugs,”* I offer to mitigate my initial harsh reaction. *“Oh, I was really just looking for some pot, you know where to get that, right?”* She asks, as if I’ve simply misunderstood the type of drugs she wants. Irritation seeps back in, and I tersely grind out, *“No, I really can’t help you.”* She shrugs and walks away. I simmer. Being straightedge², having someone assume I buy and do drugs feels insulting, even if it is just a misunderstanding. But how could she know? I don’t go around wearing a sign that says, *“I’ve never taken drugs and I never will.”* Did she deserve my less than pleasant reaction? No. How can I blame her for something she has no way of knowing about me without asking – which is exactly what she did? She sees my clothes, my hair, at least one of my tattoos, my piercings, and draws a faulty connection in her mind: the tattooed and pierced girl is

² To be straightedge means a lifetime commitment to never drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, take recreational drugs, or engage in promiscuous or irresponsible sexual relationships (Haenfler, 2006).

likely to know where in town to buy drugs. Based on social stereotypes about people with tattoos, this probably isn't nearly as shocking a conclusion as I personally feel it is. I know who I am inside (or hope I do) but all she has access to is my outside. As the first revelation of my teacher's college experience that people are going to see me much differently than I see myself, this exchange stings more than it probably should. I find myself dwelling on a question I don't yet have an answer for, *Will people question me as a teacher because I have tattoos?*

Today, I am a licensed teacher. I continue to get tattooed. I feel stared at and judged sometimes. I catch myself pulling down on the hem of my shirt to hide my tattoos and wonder what I will do about my clothes and body piercings if/when I get a teaching job interview. I continue to find myself squirming in my own skin, which makes me question what this intersection of tattoos and teaching means in my life, and in the lives of other tattooed teachers. I wonder if I will ever feel comfortable in my tattooed teacher skin, confident enough to acquire the visible arm tattoos I've always wanted and to walk into school with them on full display for students and colleagues to see.

Which brings me to this study: my hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of tattooed teachers. My fascination over tattoos has never faded; neither has my drive to better understand what tattoos mean within the lived world of teaching. In the chapters that follow, I will explore the world of the tattooed teacher, what it is like to live within and sense their tattooed flesh while they are in the classroom, and how their tattoos shape their interactions at school. Teacher or not, tattooed or not, my invitation is to step within tattooed teacher flesh, to feel what its like to walk the halls of schools day in and day out with difference displayed on your skin for all to see. I wonder anew at the everyday experience of teaching from a fresh, possibly unconsidered perspective: that of a tattooed teacher.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Sketching a New Body of Literature

Tattoos and teachers: two words that rarely intersect in academia. As I embarked on this study, digging ever deeper in my attempt to locate related research, it soon became apparent that an established body of literature has yet to be developed specifically about the experiences of tattooed teachers. So disparate it seems, are these two research topics, that the few sources I located that discuss both highlight their distance from each other rather than considering the meanings of their intersection. One passage in particular stuck in my mind as an example of this distance, written by former professor and now tattooist Phil Sparrow:

I'd been teaching at the university level in Chicago for 20 years. I was an associate Professor of English Literature and have received a Ph.D from Ohio State ... Somehow I became awfully tired of teaching and decided I would get out of it if I could. I had always been fascinated with tattooing and thought it would be as *far away from academia as I could get*. (cited in Sanders, 1989, p. 165; emphasis added)

Unlike Sparrow, my goal is not to get as far away from academia as possible, but to bring tattooed teachers into the space of scholarly thought. Teachers with tattoos work in plain sight in today's classrooms. Yet, their lived experiences have gone largely unexplored to the point of being invisible. With the exception of a small number of peer-reviewed publications, for example, Colbert (2008) on advising student teachers to cover tattoos during practicum placements, very little has been written about tattooed teachers' experiences in schools. With this phenomenological inquiry, I hope to make the first bold mark on the empty page that is research specifically about the lived experiences of tattooed teachers. However, before delving into this new topic of inquiry, related areas of scholarship provide important context to frame my study,

as they informed the research I conducted. To talk about tattooed bodies, one must situate them within society. Thus, I review literature on historical and cultural trends in body modification, and provide an overview of shifting North American attitudes towards tattooing to illustrate the unique social space tattooed teachers occupy. Then come notions of acceptable teacher bodies and teacher images. These societal norms, which dictate how teachers ‘should’ look, illuminate the challenges and pressures tattooed teachers might feel for having bodies that look different from the expected norm. Lastly, there are the very few peer-reviewed studies that show how tattoos can enter into the space of the classroom as a topic of study or a tactic to engage students, showing how tattoos and schools need not remain worlds apart from each other. In the literature review that follows, pertinent research from each of these key areas is discussed to help sketch an outline of what it means to be a tattooed body, a teacher body, and sets the stage for considering what it might mean to be both at once.

Becoming a Tattooed Body: Past and Present North American Trends

To understand why people become tattooed and the shifting place they occupy in North American society, it is helpful to start with how tattoos became integrated into Western society. Prior to the 1800s, tattooing was primarily practiced by non-Western indigenous tribal cultures in countries such as Polynesia and

Along the Arctic coasts of Canada, Siberia, Alaska, and Greenland, records of Inuit tattooing date back at least 3, 500 years (DeMello, 2007, p. 162). Inuit tattoos were traditionally worn by the women of the tribe, who bore distinctive facial tattoos applied in geometric lines and patterns to cover parts of the forehead and cheeks, with particularly prominent designs applied to the chin. Chin tattoos were applied after puberty as a signal that a woman is marriageable, to protect her from enemies, and to show her ability to endure pain – a desirable trait in a wife. Women sometimes tattooed their thighs to make childbirth easier, and to show infants “something of beauty” as they emerged from the womb (2007, p. 162). Inuit men traditionally wore tattoos to show success in hunting or warfare. Both men and women within Inuit tribes wore small dot tattoos on the joints of the body to protect them from evil during funerals. Spirits were believed to enter the body through the joints, causing sickness or death, and the tattoos were used to seal these entryways. Inuit tattoos were traditionally applied by elderly women who sewed the tattoo into the skin using bone or ivory needles blackened with soot, a skill developed through making clothing (2007, p. 163).

Tahiti (Caplan, 2000; Sanders, 1989). European explorers, most notably Captain Cook of the British navy, observed in fascination how tattooing was performed by aboriginal groups such as the Maori of New Zealand (DeMello, 2000; Caplan, 2000). These explorers, along with members of their sailing crews, often became tattooed during their travels, later returning to Europe where others would observe their permanent souvenirs (Sanders, 1989; Caplan, 2000; Mifflin, 1997; DeMello, 2000). Once tattoos reached Europe, they captivated the attention of royalty and rich nobles, many of whom traveled to the Orient to obtain tattoos of their own (Sanders, 1989; DeMello, 2000). Working-class individuals such as sailors, factory men, and “circus freaks” were soon to follow this unusual new manner of decorating the body, obtaining tattoos within their cohesive social groups (Mifflin, 1997; Sanders, 1989; Caplan, 2000; Pitts, 2003).

By the 1960s, tattooing spread from Europe to North America, where it became regarded as a low-class pursuit followed by sailors, bikers, blue collar workers, military servicemen, gangs, prison inmates, and social “rebels” such as punks (Sanders, 1989; Atkinson, 2003; DeMello, 2000; Mifflin, 1997; Pitts, 2003). However, this soon changed. In the 1970’s, a “tattoo renaissance” began, bringing unprecedented numbers of middle-class clients into tattoo studios, where conditions had become much cleaner and more professional than in earlier decades (DeMello, 2000; Sanders, 1989; Mifflin, 1997). As the 1980s and 1990s pressed on, Westerners become increasingly involved in tattooing (Caplan, 2000; DeMello, 2000).

Since becoming more prevalent in Western society in the 1980s, the act of getting tattooed has accumulated a complex tapestry of motivations. The reasons for becoming tattooed are as varied and unique as the people who obtain them. Many of us are familiar with the popular storyline that tells us tattoos are an “impulse buy,” a bad decision made during a night of drunken revelry or obtained as a dare under peer pressure, an indelible reminder of a mistake to

be sorely regretted in the years to come. For some tattooees, this story rings true (Fisher, 2002; Wohlrab, Stahl & Kappeler, 2006; Sanders, 1989). But this is just one scenario that fits a small portion of people with tattoos. The literature on tattoo motivations highlights a panoply of reasons that go far beyond snap decisions, which I explore next.

A fitting place to start is with V. Vale and Andrea Juno's work *Modern Primitives* (1989), a landmark text on body modification made famous for exposing the general public – for the first time – to detailed descriptions of practices such as tribal tattooing, body scarification, and extreme piercing, topics which had previously been discussed only amongst fringe or underground sub-cultural groups. *Modern Primitives* was also one of the first comprehensive studies documenting the re-emergence and surging popularity of body modification in Western society in the 1970s and 1980s. Vale and Juno coined the notion of the “modern primitive,” the Westerner who turns to practices such as tattooing, particularly of the heavy black ink tribal style, to replace modern society's lack of rooted personal identity, ritual, and thresholds in life. Modern primitives identify with indigenous cultures, whom they feel provide authentic and spiritual experiences. They view traditional tattooing as a way to rescue the body and the self from the problems of the modern world (Vale & Juno, 1989; Pitts, 2003). With modern primitivism, a new narrative for tattoo motivations was born, and spread in popular conscious (Pitts, 2003).

Since *Modern Primitives* numerous scholars have sought to uncover and explain the additional and complex reasons that compel people to become tattooed. Sociological researcher Clinton Sanders (1989), who is himself a visibly tattooed scholar, conducted extensive fieldwork observing and interviewing tattooees³ in studios and at tattoo conventions in four major urban

³“Tattooee” is a term commonly used in body modification research to describe a person who is tattooed (see especially Sanders, 1989; DeMello, 2000).

American cities. The resulting work, *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, reveals a range of reasons for getting tattooed: to feel included in a group, to ritually commemorate a significant life transition, to visually separate oneself from others (parents, employers, spouses) in order to be unique, as an act of taking control over one's body, to symbolize a vow, or to represent an aspect of personal identity on the body (occupational activities, hobbies, significant personal involvements). Summarizing the many motivations described by his participants, Sanders (1989) writes, "drawn by both the affiliational and individuating consequences ... tattooees chose to mark their bodies with indelible symbols of what they see themselves to be" (p. 61). The concept of "writing oneself" on the outside of the body as motivation for becoming tattooed thus took hold.

Where Sanders studied all ages of men and women tattooees, Margo Mifflin (1997) focuses on the history of women in tattoo culture in her work *Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Women and Tattoo*. While the motivations she writes about are not entirely different from those found by Sanders, Mifflin's in-depth research on women's experiences highlights a unique range of motivations amongst female tattooees. Mifflin determined that women's motivations included: symbolizing empowerment or sexual independence; wearing a badge of self-determination in the face of rape, sexual harassment, or abortion; re-claiming the body after it had been somehow compromised; to commemorate the start or end of a relationship; to beautify the female human form; to memorialize an important person in her life; or as a political statement of rebellion. In a beautifully worded passage Mifflin uses to reflect back on her work, she captures the world of women and tattooing in the following paragraph:

Tattoos are diary entries and protective shields, conversation pieces and countercultural totems, valentines to lovers and memorials to the dead. They celebrate ethnic pride and

family unity; coming out, coming of age, marriage, divorce, pregnancy and menopause. They trumpet angry independence and fierce commitment. They herald erotic power and purge sexual shame. They're stabs at permanence in an age of transience and marks of individualism in a culture of mass production. (Mifflin, 1997, p. 178)

Sociology and women's study scholar Victoria Pitts (2003) discovered similar motivations to Mifflin in her more recent study, *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification*. Pitts found that body-modified women use tattoos, in part, to reject the pressures of beauty norms and "proper" femininity (p. 3). Men and women, she also found, use tattooing to reject mainstream culture and to address sexual politics, gender inequality, and cultural identity.

At the forefront of tattoo cultural research is Margo DeMello (2000), in particular her study *Bodies of Inscription: A Cultural History of the Modern Tattoo Community*. As part of her extensive research on tattoo communities, DeMello collected "tattoo narratives" from men and women attending tattoo conventions. In reviewing the numerous stories she heard, she unveiled a series of common themes related to why people choose to get tattoos and what their tattoos mean to them. First was individualism, the idea that a tattoo would make a person unique or different from others, most often expressed by selecting a custom art tattoo over a flash⁴ design. Next was spirituality. For some, the tattoo design represented a religious belief or affiliation, while for others the process of becoming tattooed is a spiritual experience. Next came personal growth, or the notion that tattoos can help heal emotional or physical trauma, a sort of "self help" exercise. Then came the sacredness of the body, the idea that one's body should be well attended to, and how tattoos can be a testament to this when thought and planning goes into the act getting

⁴ "Flash" is an old-fashion tattoo style characterized by thick black outlines coloured in with primary hues and basic white highlights. Flash tattoos are pre-drawn and displayed on the walls of tattoo studios, offering ready-made designs that are often tattooed on numerous people (DeMello, 2000).

tattooed DeMello's narratives also supported Vale and Juno's (1989), Mifflin's (1997), and Pitt's (2003) motivations related to modern primitivism and women's body power.

Mike Featherstone (2000), editor of the well-known text *Body Modification*, notes that taking control of the body and inscribing it with a visible sign of personal identity is one of the most common reasons given for becoming tattooed (p. 2). Paul Sweetman (1999), whose work is included in *Body Modification*, took a post-modern lens to the tattoo experience. He interviewed numerous tattooed individuals and found that many became inscribed as a way to resist consumer culture, make "anti-fashion" statements, or to follow their desire to resist superficiality while lending "corporeal solidity to expressions of individuality" (Sweetman, 1999, p. 53).

As the colourful variety of motivations described thus far demonstrate, getting drunk and making an impulse decision to get tattooed far from paints the complete picture of why people decide to get permanent ink images on their bodies. For an especially comprehensive overview of the many different motivations scholars have studied in recent years, an excellent resource is Silke Wohlrab, Jutta Stahl and Peter Kappeler's (2006) *Modifying the Body: Motivations for Getting Tattooed and Pierced*. In this work, the authors consult the considerable body of literature about why people obtain body modifications and distill from it 10 motivational categories: 1) beauty, art, and fashion (to make the body more attractive, pretty, appealing, trendy); 2) individuality; 3) personal narrative; 4) physical endurance (endure the pain of obtaining the tattoo); 5) group affiliations and commitment; 6) resistance; 7) spirituality and cultural tradition; 8) addiction (after obtaining one tattoo, the strong desire to "collect" more); 9) sexual motivation; and 10) no specific reason. Tattoos, as the research shows, are more than acts of deviance practiced only by low-class or impulsive people. The desire to ink the body comes from numerous places, some intensely personal, some spiritual, some physical, and some social.

Regardless of the motivation for becoming tattooed, the tattooed body has occupied a shifting space within North American society since the 1990s, which I review next.

Tattooing in Western culture has moved notably away from its former lower class, “deviant” roots, both demographically and in public perception. In fact, since the 1990s, tattoos have surged in prevalence in North America, most notably amongst educated, middle-class, and female individuals (Sweetman, 1999; Polhemus & Randall, 2000; DeMello, 2000; Featherstone, 2000; Pitts, 2003; Wohlrab, Stahl, & Kappeler, 2007; Laumann & Derick, 2006; Tate & Shelton, 2008; Armstrong, Roberts, Ownen, & Koch, 2004; Swanger, 2006). Derek John Roberts’ (2012) recent study of the tattoo’s place in current American culture estimates a range of one in 10 to one in five Americans have tattoos, the majority of whom are from the middle class. Amongst youth, Roberts explains, tattoos are currently viewed as acceptable form of self-expression and no longer connote social deviance. Aside from youth culture, tattoos are also appearing more frequently in mainstream media, shown in advertisements, on celebrity bodies, on famous athlete bodies, and through the world of design, such as Jean Paul Gauthier’s work (Roberts, 2012; Sweetman, 1999). Today, tattoos continue to be popular with and prevalent within college and university-age student populations, supporting the claim that increased numbers of educated individuals are becoming tattooed (Mayers & Chiffrieller, 2008; Horne, Knox, Zusman, J. & Zusman, M., 2007; Mayers, Judelson, Moriarty, & Rundell, 2002; Makkai & McAllister, 2001; Huxley & Grogan, 2005; Gold, Schorzman, Murray, Downs, & Toletino, 2005).

From a Canadian perspective, the work of sociologist Michael Atkinson (2004) is instrumental in understanding the current landscape of tattoo culture. Atkinson conducted three years of participant observation research of tattoo artists and tattooees from across Canada, and found that “tattooing is ascending to unprecedented levels of popularity” and now acts as a

signifier for a “full panorama of social statuses, roles and identities” in Canada (p. 125). Notably, the average age of his study interviewees was 24, with an overall age range of 18 – 50. Sixty-two per cent were women (40) and 38 per cent were men (25). Sixty-three percent were middle class, 12 per cent were upper class, and 64 per cent had a university degree or at least one year of university education (Atkinson, 2004). Atkinson’s (2003) additional work, via his in-depth sociological study of tattooees in *Tattooed, the Sociogenesis of a Body Art*, explores in great detail the shift of tattooing away from social stigma and into the realm of social inclusion. Atkinson’s participants shared numerous stories of “celebrating” and enjoying their difference through the outlet of tattooing, positioning their tattoos as positive form of personal expression. Margo DeMello’s (2000) research on tattoo communities likewise supports the view that tattoos are moving closer to mainstream acceptance, largely due to the increase of middle-class tattooees.

While tattoos have undeniably shifted a long way from their early negative roots in Western society, they currently sit in what could be called a social “limbo – neither fully damned nor fully lauded” (Roberts, 2012, p. 163). While North Americans, especially younger generations, are more willing than ever to accept tattoos as a form of personal self-expression, society still condemns some tattooees for their deviant appearance (Roberts, 2012). Whether by excluding them from employment or chastising them socially, tattooees have yet to become fully normalized (Swanger, 2007; Roberts, 2012). Victoria Pitts (2003) has also found that discourses of body mutilation, deviance, self-harm and mental pathology surrounding tattoo practices persist in current society. Mary Kosut (2006) expresses concern over the teetering position tattoos currently occupy between mainstream acceptance and non-acceptance. If, as she finds, over half of all adolescents have seriously considered getting a tattoo, then it is a “bleak future...

should they get tattooed only to enter a workforce where two in five adults think simply having a tattoo justifies being denied employment, including nearly half of all people holding supervisory roles” (cited in Roberts, 2012, p. 164). Roberts (2012) supports Koust’s view, suggesting that with so many highly skilled and educated Americans getting tattoos, combined with the trends of increasing discrimination against tattooees, a cultural clash may yet ensue where productive members of society are “forever disqualified based solely on pigmentation” (p. 164).

Supporting Roberts’ (2012) and Koust’s (2006) worries, much evidence suggests – whether this is warranted or not – that tattoos can and do continue to harm social perceptions. Children and adolescents, for example, have been found more likely to label images of tattooed adults as delinquent over images of non-tattooed adults (Durkin, & Houghton 2000). Images of body-modified women in particular are interpreted in ways that also point to lingering misunderstandings. For example, in recent studies, photographs and drawings of women with tattoos or facial piercings were viewed as less attractive, more promiscuous, and less favourable overall than those without tattoos or piercings (Martino, 2008; Swami & Furnham, 2007). Research also indicates that tattooed university, college, and high school students are more frequently linked to delinquent behaviour (e.g. drug use or gang membership), more likely to engage in risky activities (e.g. excessive drinking, sexual promiscuity), or more likely to experience social problems than non-tattooed students (Brooks, Woods, Knight, & Shrier, 2003; Deschènes, Fines, & Demers, 2006; Nicoletti, 2004; Struyk, 2006). An Australian study surveying over 8, 500 people between the ages of 16 – 64 concluded that while tattoos are clearly increasing in popularity, they also act as a marker for risk-taking behaviour in adults (Heywood, Patrick, Smith, Simpson, et al., 2010).

Why should these negative perspectives be so tenacious? In a society where we spend hours sculpting our bodies at the gym, where nose jobs and tummy tucks are barely given a second thought, why are tattoos still a focus of such criticism? Tattooed professor Marla Morris (2008) questions this viewpoint, and compellingly asks why tattoos should be so ostracized at a time when cutting off parts of the face or saturating the body with drugs and alcohol are reified as good ways to fit in. In a very thought-provoking passage, she pushes us to consider this double standard, especially when comparing tattoos to the gamut of other body modifications (or possibly body abuses) humans engage in:

Is it okay to cut off your nose, change your chin or get rid of crow's feet around the eyes, but not okay to tattoo the body? Is it okay to drink yourself into oblivion (which seems to be acceptable in American society) and not okay to get tattooed? It seems strange to me that drinking is more acceptable than tattooing. Drinking is toxic, drinking is a drug ... Interestingly, altering your nose is a way to fit in. Nose jobs signify assimilation into Hollywood mainstream culture. But tattooing is an act of alterity. When you see someone in a coffee house with tattoos crawling up the neck, the usual response is: *oh my god!* Or, *good lord!* Tattoos symbolize difference. Nose jobs are normalizing. (Morris, 2008, p. 91; original emphasis)

Morris' words give us meaty food for thought. Why do we react the way we do different types of body modifications in comparison to tattoos? She pushes us to ask difficult questions about where we draw the lines of social acceptability in other peoples' bodies. Are we okay with surgically removing parts of our facial flesh to have a nicer looking nose, but we cringe at the coffee shop employee whose neck bears permanent colour? We endorse the personal pleasure that comes from drinking alcohol, but not the personal satisfaction the tattooee feels upon

obtaining a new tattoo? Do we accept the teacher who has had an eyelift or a tummy tuck, but shun the one who has tattoos? Which leads me to ask, just what does society find acceptable in a teacher body, if not tattoos? In the section that follows, I review literature about acceptable teacher bodies, thus situating the tattoo trends and motivations described up to now within the world of teaching and schools, setting the scene for the social world tattooed teachers inhabit.

Teacher/Tattooed Bodies and Tattoos in the Classroom

If academic literature were the only indicator at our disposal, it would appear as if tattooed teachers are an extremely rare occurrence, almost never seen and even less frequently studied given the mere spattering of mentions they have gained in research (for example, Marla Morris' (2008) personal reflections on being an educator who is both chronically ill and tattooed). There is no shortage, however, of literature that describes what teachers are "supposed" to look like, the expected and normalized images they are meant to occupy in our schools. In the section that follows, I review what these images constitute, historically and in present day.

Teachers hold a special place in public imagination; they occupy the dual role of purveyors of knowledge and moral role models. This has been true since the 19th century, when teachers were expected to provide young future citizens with examples of acceptable behaviour and appearances (Smaller, 1997; Wall, 2008; Blount, 2000; O'Donoghue, 2007; Cavanagh, 2006). This resulted in school boards and other authorities such as unions exerting controls over teachers' bodies, from the clothes they could wear, to what their underwear could look like, to how they were allowed to spend their leisure time and with whom (Smaller, 1997; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Today, "the image of teachers as moral guides and upstanding members of

society remains strong in people's minds, and still determines, to a large extent, occupational dressing codes" (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 64).

Teachers are also held to a higher level of expectation from society when it comes to the *type* of image they choose to display at work. As educational researcher Becky Atkinson (2008) rightly notes, teachers are "compelled to enact socially and culturally approved versions of masculinity and femininity that conform to dominant interests" (p. 107). To adhere to these dominant interests, teachers have a rather "small set of coercive identities" to choose from (Hawkey, 1996, p. 106). What does this small set of selections look like? Well, a schoolmarm perhaps, with a tight gray bun and a matching gray countenance. Or, a crisp businesswoman sheathed in high heels and skirt suit, pressed to perfection and ready to perform in front of her pupils will do quite nicely. For a softer touch, a teacher can also be a kindly mother figure, swaddled in sweaters adorned with apples and crayons and school buses (Atkinson, 2008). It is also perfectly fine for the teacher to blandly fade away into the background of school walls, unassuming and rather unnoticeable in dull daily outfits (Atkinson, 2008; Johnson, 2006). We also accept a teacher who is ever so slightly subversively sexy in short skirts and vixen-worthy knee-high boots (Johnson, 2006). Who has not heard that teachers are nurturing bodies, with caring smiles and open arms for small children (Wall, 2008)? A bumbling professor is okay too, complete with scatterbrained wanderings, tweed patches and cap, and a rumpled but oh-so-amiable appearance (Eastman, 2006). Some teachers are supremely professional with their ironed everything; others are infamous for donning kitschy themed accoutrements that coincide with seasonal holiday shifts – think springtime bunny earrings or midwinter snowman scarves (Atkinson, 2008). We've all known a teacher who wears a sweater vest or thick glasses, looking the part of endearing "nerd" (Mitchell & Weber, 1995). Sloppy or dowdy is never a problem;

what better way to advertise that “Teacher” is an uninteresting, asexual being preoccupied only with matters of the mind, who will gladly lap up your indifference, derision, or pity, whichever you choose to send their way (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 71).

Nowhere within this slim repertoire of acceptable, normalized teacher image descriptions are tattoos mentioned as expected details to observe on teacher flesh. As Sandra Weber and Debra Mitchell (1995) explore at length in *That’s Funny, You Don’t Look Like a Teacher*, an in-depth interrogation of teacher image and identity, most acceptable teacher identities reflect mainstream middle-class images and ideals. While exceptions to these standard (or even stereotypical) teacher images certainly do occur, they gain notice precisely because they are unique, not from any sense of normalcy or typicality. It is not impossible to imagine teacher as cool, teacher as goddess, teacher as hero, teacher as gentleman, teacher as rebel, teacher as artist; every so often we meet a teacher like this (p. 59). But these are romantic images rather than norms, memorable because they remind us this “is not how things usually are” (p. 59). Many teachers would not recognize themselves amongst the stereotypical norms; they might point out distinguishing features that set them apart: scruffy shoes paired with a tailored jacket, elegant hair and makeup worn with jeans, a leather coat hung in the cloakroom, velour worn under a lab coat (p. 71). The need for teachers to assert distance from their image stereotypes, the objection, ‘I don’t look like that!’ should remind us just how confining normalized, expected, and socially acceptable teacher images can be.

I never encourage my students to capitulate – to give up the personal beliefs that are often the very basis for why they became teachers in the first place – in order to ‘fit in’ with the stereotypical culture of many American schools. However, I have also worked with students who have decided not to be secondary school teachers because of the perceived demands and expectations based on a narrow set of beliefs (Alsup, 2006, p. xiv).

On the rare occasion that tattooed teachers' bodies are mentioned in the literature, the intent is almost always to highlight how tattoos can harm professional image and career standing. Ron Colbert (2008), for instance, provides clear advice to pre-service teachers to hide or remove all body piercings or tattoos to attend classroom placements, and to cover body modifications during job interviews to increase the chance of securing a position. A second brief example is found in a study conducted by Becky Atkinson (2008), who observed a teacher education program in which pre-service teachers were given similar advice to cover tattoos and piercings during practicum placements. While not framed as advice to hide tattoos, a mention of the tattooed teacher body appears in M.J. Vick and Carissa Martinez's (2009) work on teacher subjectivity, performativity, and the body. They argue that teachers' bodies are expected to present normalized ways, and note how tattoos are widely discouraged as visual adornment because they demonstrate a variation from the norm. Vick and Martinez (2009) suggest this type of normalizing judgment is often made in the name of a-sexualizing the propriety of the teacher body or corporatizing its professionalism. Even teacher handbooks discourage tattoos. In recent study of 102 school employee handbooks, tattoos, under the category of "unconventional dress" were identified as one of the negative norms said to have a bad affect on the school environment (Freeburg, Workman, Arnett, & Robinson, 2011).

While the teacher body is rarely described in conjunction with tattoos unless for cautionary professional presentation purposes, tattoos are not entirely foreign to the classroom and have gained a small number of scholarly mentions as lesson material, namely where art, English, and literacy education are involved. Art educator Lorrie Blair (2007), for instance, offers a hands-on approach to bringing tattoos into high school classrooms. She argues that because identity construction is an important life stage during the teenage years, and because

tattoos are inherently linked to expressions of personal identity, tattoos – which teenagers often find compelling – form a useful base for planning meaningful lessons. Blair offers a number of teaching strategies for those who wish to incorporate tattoos into their lesson plans, with a focus on interdisciplinary or integrated curriculum. Using Dart’s lesson template of “hook, foundation, reflective action” as a framework, she suggests that teachers begin by using teenagers’ interest in tattoos as a “powerful motivational hook” (p. 42).⁵ The foundation portion of the lesson can be provided across curriculum areas: studying the history of tattooing, learning basic facts and statistics, debating opposing societal views, reviewing how tattooing is approached in world cultures, examining pop culture depictions, or studying health and safety implications. The reflective action part of the lesson is framed in terms of artistic and reflective writing activities. As a source of inspiration Blair (2007) describes a collaborative project between an art teacher and tattoos artists. The teacher provided thrift-shop dolls to tattoo artists, who drew tattoo designs on their bare cloth bodies. The dolls were then returned to the classroom, where students were asked to write a story about a doll’s life, considering the style of the tattoos and their possible social and cultural meanings.

Jennifer Rowsell, Cheryl McLean and Mary Hamilton (2012) also discuss the implications of using tattoos in the classroom, but for teaching literature and visual literacy rather than art. Using the novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* as an example, they describe how literature can be used to explore the social meanings of tattoos in different cultures. They argue that using visual images, including those of tattoos, is an effective way to enhance effective teaching about literature, and is a way to develop related visual literacy skills. Robyn

⁵ The notion of a motivational hook alludes to a teaching technique of baiting students’ attention using an entertaining item, and using it to ‘convince them’ a lesson topic is of interest to them. I question the use (or necessity) of using tattoos as a motivational hook. Naturally flowing interactions between teachers and tattoos precipitated by answering a question or responding to a curious look are, in my opinion, a more appropriate way to introduce discussion about tattoos in the classroom.

Seglem and Shelbie Witte (2009) likewise explore using tattoos in the English classroom as a way to promote visual literacy. They argue that visual media are “not confined to glossy pages or



Figure 2: The Tattoo Artist. Retrieved online:
<http://cdn100.iofferphoto.com/img/item/891/369/01/fJCgyghZz0zA6ne.j>

computer screens. Perhaps one of the most fascinating forms to today’s youth are the colorful images that span the bicep or peek over the top of a sock” (p. 218). Today’s current fascination with tattoos, they note (from celebrity actress Angelina Jolie bearing tattoos for the tabloids to network reality shows like *Miami Ink*), can be translated into an introduction to visual media. By way of example, they describe a learning exercise conducted with a group of grade nine students who are introduced to Norman Rockwell’s painting *The Tattoo Artist*. Students share their initial reactions to the irony of the image: a Navy sailor in

a tattoo parlour getting his love of the day’s name tattooed on his arm, under which a long list of crossed out names from former failed relationships have been inked. Students are encouraged to consider the permanence of tattoos in relation to their own dating history, and are asked to approach the painting like a movie, filling in what the sailor might think, do, say or feel. The health safety and tattooing is taught next by reading factual articles. Students are then asked to design a tattoo that symbolizes an important life event and write about its personal meaning. The lesson is extended even further by incorporating Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Students create a tattoo representing a memorable character from the play, an exercise designed to teach them how visual representation can be used to precisely convey their literary comprehension.

David E. Kirkland's (2009) study on tattoos in relation to literacy takes a different approach, exploring tattoos' potential to contribute to a new understanding of English education. Kirkland forwards that today's youth write in many ways beyond the traditional text; tattoos written on the flesh being one of these ways. He examines how one Black youth's tattoos speak to the "quiet and often unexamined story of human literacy," (p. 375) and argues that tattoos negate the myth of an absence of literacy in Black youth. He also calls on English educators to take tattoos seriously as literacy artifacts, to view them as an example that literacy as a practice is not limited to technical, prescribed, or academic functions that privilege only specific forms of texts or groups of people.

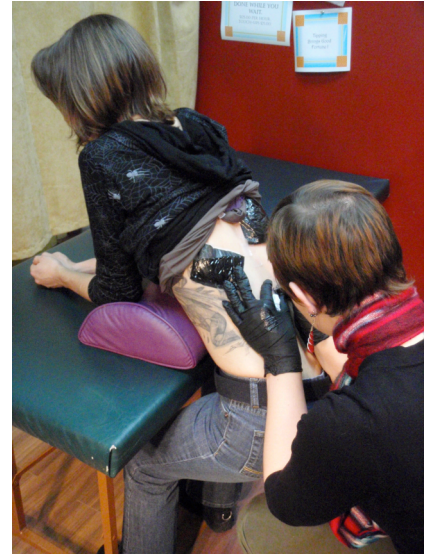
In this literature review, I have outlined existing scholarship on tattoo trends in Western society, explored notions of acceptable and expected teacher bodies, and examined the small space tattoos have gained within classroom learning, all with an aim to establish the context that tattooed teachers occupy in today's schools. With my phenomenological inquiry into the lived experiences of tattooed teachers, I hope to add a new dimension to the literature surrounding tattoos and teaching and delve into (until now) an unstudied facet where these two worlds intertwine. I also intend to think anew what Shapiro (1999) calls "pedagogy of the body,"⁶ specifically how tattooed bodies are understood and related to. I also hope my study generates some wonder: "wonder in the face of the world" as phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) would put it. In sharing my and my participants' experiences, I wish to instill a curiosity in educational professionals (and others) for how they view and interpret tattooed colleagues' bodies and how they consciously or subconsciously react (or do not react) to the tattoos they

⁶Shapiro (1999) develops a critical pedagogy of the body, which is a process that take the body seriously as a site for the self and social transformation; a process where the "body/subject" becomes the means for producing liberatory knowledge about the person and culture through engagement with our own body experiences and memories (pp. x-xx).

encounter on others. I hope to spark readers' wonder at how their own flesh is customized or left bare and prompt reflection on *what this might mean*. I hope my study, and the lived experiences shared within it, leads readers to consider the wide range of personal meanings contained within tattoos, and how they do not necessarily define a person's skill or professionalism in the field of education or elsewhere. Tattooed or not, I hope that all educators will take away from this study a better understanding of how it feels to walk the hallways of a school day in and day out, with difference displayed on exposed flesh for all to see, sometimes accepted, sometimes comfortable, at other times discomfiting and misconstrued. And, for teachers who, like myself, are already tattooed (maybe not yet in a visible place) perhaps this study will give them a space to reflect and see they are not alone; a space where they may catch familiar glimpses that resonate with their own experiences. Clearly, tattooing is not a choice every educator will make for him or herself. It is likely not a choice even the majority of teachers will make. But for those who do decide to ink their skin with indelible images, I hope that they may come away from this study feeling acknowledged, understood for their uniqueness within our schools, and perhaps just a little more comfortable in their own skin.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approaches

I did not select this study out of mere curiosity, detached fascination, or for its novelty. I did not pick it to prove that educational topics studied phenomenologically are quite unlike those pursued in mainstream research, though this is true (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000, p. 409). While I do feel the lives of tattooed teachers deserve a place in academic research, I did not conduct my study simply because it adds something new to educational scholarship. I chose this study because *I am this study*. I am a tattooed teacher.



The driving question that leads me through this inquiry, that follows me from library, to research interviews, to computer, to tattoo studio and back again is: *What are the lived experiences of visibly⁷ tattooed teachers?* This question is fitting, for phenomenological questions are “what” questions that seek to discover what something is like (van Manen, 1997, p. 42). These questions cannot be “solved”; they are to be more deeply understood (p. 23). As I work my way through the ever-deepening layers of my inquiry, from the dermal surface layer, to the underlying sub-dermal meanings, to the deeper inner significance of being a tattooed teacher, I also keep two sub-questions constantly in mind to build understanding and reveal meaning: *What is it like for teachers to live in and sense their tattooed flesh when they are at school?* and, *What is it like to be seen by others at school, specifically how do their visible tattoos shape their interactions with colleagues, students, and other members of the school community?*

⁷Visibly, for the purpose of this study, will mean tattoos that can be seen when an individual wears short sleeves or shorts; i.e. tattoos on the arms, wrists, legs, ankle, neck, cheek, lower back.

Hermeneutic phenomenologist Max van Manen (1997) says that to conduct a phenomenological study is to “live” the research question and requires that we “become” the question (p. 43). I live my research question every day. Since starting graduate school, I have been tattooed four times. I have attended three educational conferences; in the same year I went to an equal number of tattoo conventions. For every scholarly article or book I have read, I matched it by reading a post on Body Modification E-Zine (BME)⁸ or the Facebook group “Tattoo Acceptance in the Workplace.”⁹ As I entered the throes of interviewing participants and

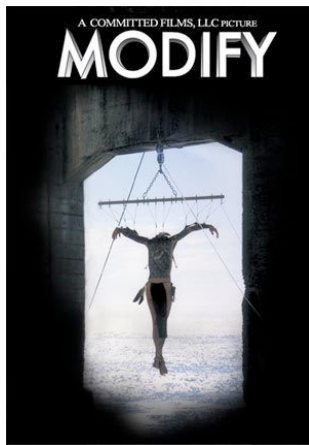


Figure 3: *Modify*.
Retrieved online:
<http://www.thefatpunk.dk/pics/movies/modify.jpg>

transcribing recordings, I met my thesis supervisor Professor Rebecca Lloyd for analytic advice and then took her (courageous soul!) to watch *Modify*, a uncensored documentary about getting tattooed, pierced, and scarred, along with a few graphic scenes of genital modification and flesh hangings¹⁰ tossed in for good measure. I talked about my study to my tattoo artist and body piercer, and to employees at a number of tattoo studios across Ontario. In all of these ways I have done what a phenomenologist is meant to do: I constantly live my research question (van Manen, 1997). Max van Manen (2002) also tells us that in research, “to write is to be driven by desire” (p. 246). What drives me to write this study is desire to *better*

⁸Body Modification E-Zine (BME) is a website, Wikipedia information resource micro-site, repository for photos/videos/interviews, and a store devoted to body modifications of all types, tattoos included. The site can be accessed at: <http://www.bme.com>.

⁹“Tattoo Acceptance in the Workplace” is a Facebook group with over 1.1 million followers (as of June 2012) from around the world. Their self-described goal for running the group is “to take away the stigma attached to people who have tattoos in the workplace. Tattoos are art. Some of us have chosen to express ourselves not with vibrant shoes, or a colorful tie, but with body art. What is the difference?” (accessed June 5, 2012 at <http://www.facebook.com/ThINKequality>).

¹⁰Flesh hanging is an indigenous-inspired form of extreme body piercing. It involves inserting a number of large metal hooks in the skin, usually on the back or chest but sometimes on the limbs, and then suspending the pierced individual in the air so their body and the hooks are the only thing holding them up. Flesh hanging practitioners engage in these practices as an exercise in mental and/physical stamina, to enjoy the flood of endorphins it produces, or as a spiritual exercise (Pitts, 2003; Vale & Juno, 1989).

understand what it means to live as a tattooed teacher. I am not an objective analyst, but in a study of this kind, divorcing myself from the research or being a clean slate is neither possible, nor desirable (Boden & Biklen, 1998, p. 34). I am a teacher whose flesh bears the indelible ink images I have lovingly selected over the years to shape my body, both before and after entering the world of education. I may choose to hide my tattoos under carefully selected shirts to attend graduate classes or to work with students in classrooms. But this superficial covering will never change the fact that I am and always will be tattooed, and that my tattoos colour the meanings of my experiences in education as surely as they colour my skin. It only seems natural then, that I take this tattooed body of mine and launch into my inquiry. For, if nothing else, it fits me like a second skin.

A “Tattoo” Phenomenology

Centuries ago, tattooing was known as “pricking,” and did not gain its modern moniker in western/European parlance until the Captain James Cook took his voyage to the South Pacific seas. In 1769, Cook recorded a ship’s journal entry that provides us with the first known modern description of what a tattoo is: “Men and women of Tahiti paint their bodies. In their language, this is known as ta-tu. They inject a black colour under their skin, leaving a permanent trace” (Sanders, 1989, p. 14). More than 200 years later, we continue to call permanent ink pictures on the skin tattoos. In more recent times, World-famous American tattooist Don Ed Hardy (2000) provides a rather pragmatic description for a tattoo, calling it something that is, “on your body, it’s permanent; you have to live with it and it hurts (cited in Featherstone, p. 4). In its most basic physical definition, a tattoo is a permanent¹, ink-based drawing inserted into the top layers of the skin using a needle or another sharp object, to a depth of 0.25 – 0.5 cm deep (Caplan, 2000). Today, the majority of tattoos are applied using a tattoo gun, which is an electric or pneumatic tool wielded like a pen that drives a single or multiple needles of various sizes into the skin (DeMello, 2000). Whether called a “ta-tu” or a “tattoo,” these body inscriptions invariably have as their fundamental traits permanence and visibility on the skin.

As this study comes together, in the weeks and months I have been reflectively considering tattoos, teachers, and academics, I cannot not help but notice how the process for getting tattooed maps onto the approaches for conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research provided by Max van Manen (1994; 1997; 2002). No, this has not occurred because I toted one too many journal articles along to my tattoo appointments! I cannot deny this happened more than once. But it is more

than this physical juxtaposition that brings the two together in my mind. The more I write and analyze, the more I view my study method as a “tattoo approach” to phenomenology. Consider this: A tattoo cannot be skillfully produced without significant preparatory work. Before ever touching a client’s skin, the artist must prepare the materials required for the job: the needles, tattoo machine, gloves, and cups of ink. A stencil must be applied to the skin, for it ensures the injected ink meets the requested image, but is faint enough to provide leeway for creative inspiration, additions, or changes along way. The same could be said for my hermeneutic phenomenological study. As a researcher, my materials are my personal experiences and reflections, questions, approaches, and the theorists from whom I draw guidance and inspiration. The outline of my methodology acts like a tattoo stencil. It does the important work of organizing where my creative work goes and ensures the end result (this study) artfully reflects the initial vision (my research proposal). In the sections that follow, I explain how this “tattoo methodology” approach has grown out of significant guidance from Max van Manen’s (1997; 2002) approaches toward hermeneutic phenomenology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1962; 1968) phenomenology of perception, and aspects of Linda Finlay’s (2009) relational phenomenology, with slight alterations made along with way to fit the unique contours and requirements of studying the lived experiences of tattooed teachers. But first, let me briefly introduce the key thinkers who were instrumental to shaping how I approached this study.

Max van Manen (1997; 2002) is a leading contemporary figure in the realm of hermeneutic phenomenology, a well-regarded scholar known for his approaches to conducting this methodology, especially as they apply to educational inquiry. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), prior to his premature death in 1961, was the seminal founder of the phenomenology of perception, which relates directly to matters of the flesh and making meaning of how we live and

experience the world through “Being” in the flesh of our bodies. As my inquiry’s focus is to interpret and make meaning of the lived experiences educators *and* their tattooed flesh, van Manen and Merleau-Ponty form an ideal pair to inform my research. Furthermore, tattooed teachers’ bodies look and are *looked at* differently compared to more traditional or conservative teaching bodies. Merleau-Ponty (1968) also speaks of “the look,” which “envelopes” and “palpates” visible things and creates an intercorporeal (between two bodies) interaction of bodies in relationship with each other (p. 133). In this study, it is the tattooed teacher’s body that is being “palpated” by the looks of others within the school environment, and being set up in relation to other educators, students, parents, and administrators. Lastly, but no less significantly, Linda Finlay’s (2009) relational approach to phenomenology was instrumental in helping me negotiate my place as the tattooed teacher researcher in relation to my study participants to whom I did not “do my research,” but co-engaged to make meanings together.

As my methodology unfolds, note how it is organized around six phenomenological research activities provided by van Manen (1997), to be described fully in the sections that follow. The vital details about my participants, recruitment strategies, data collection, data analysis, validity, and the writing and re-writing approaches I took are embedded within the context of these six research activities. Prior to reviewing these six steps, I will first provide: an overview of hermeneutic phenomenology (as I have applied it in this study), an explanation for how I incorporated aspects of relational phenomenology into my study, and my use of the phenomenological essence(s). The basic terms, definitions and phenomenological tenants explained in this overview will provide the foundation for why I conducted my study the way I did and why the “results” appear as they do not as conclusions, findings, or answers, but as descriptive writing paired with insightful interpretations of meaning.

Strong phenomenological studies do two things: they provide concrete portrayals of lived experiences and they offer insightful reflections on the meanings of these experiences (van Manen, 2002, p. 49). They are not interested in the frequency of events or their contiguity to other events (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000, p. 407). This method does not offer a procedural system; it requires an ability to be insightful, sensitive to language, and constantly open to experience (van Manen, 1997, p. xi). As such, my study does not contain charts or itemized datum. As van Manen (1997) further explains, “phenomenology does not allow for empirical generalizations, the production of law-like statements, or the establishment of functional relationships. The only generalization allowed in phenomenology is this: Never generalize!” (p. 22). With this in mind, what is found in the pages of my study are not statements that attempt to show what life is like for *all* tattooed teachers, but rather a variety of descriptively written passages that are sensitive to language, that insightfully explore the meanings of my participants’ and my own experiences as tattooed teachers, and writing that led me (and hopefully readers as well) to be open to new and different experiences. This writing is key. Writing cannot be separated from hermeneutic phenomenology, for in this type of research “the writing of the text *is* the research” (van Manen, cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2000, p. 439; original emphasis). Max van Manen (1997) calls phenomenological research a “poetizing activity,” and, “as in poetry it is inappropriate to ask for conclusion or a summary” (p. 13). Instead, it seeks to be “an incantive, evocative, speaking, a primal telling wherein we aim to involve the voice in an original singing of the world” (p. 13). Thus, I do not provide a conclusive answer to *What it is like to be a tattooed teacher?* I offer evocative descriptions of tattooed teachers’ experiences, writing that seeks to sing their world into being on the page, and passages

that invite readers to step into their lifeworld¹¹ and better understand what it means to be a tattooed teacher.

While hermeneutic phenomenology provided the main foundation for my research approaches, I often found myself reflecting back on the physical experience of talking to my three participants. The sound of their voices as they spoke, tone and pace changing from one memory to another. Facial expressions, gestures, posture. The clothes they wore; the layers they removed or added over the course of our conversations. These small bodily echoes repeatedly appeared in the paragraphs as I wrote my analysis. Neither van Manen (1997) nor Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggest including these minutiae in phenomenological writing; their focus is to achieve a description of the phenomenon under study, not the interview during which it was discussed. But I could not ignore the vivid concreteness and immediacy these details lent. They built on the importance or impact of certain experiences to my participants, helped illustrate the feelings and mood evoked by the act of remembering them. And so came a significant shift in my methodological “stencil,” one that let my writing rest more naturally on this inquiry into tattooed teacher’s lives. I discovered I was borrowing from Linda Finlay’s (2009) relational approaches to phenomenology. Doing relational phenomenology means having the capacity to be surprised by what others say and being sensitive to the unpredicted or unexpected; it also means being bodily present. The researcher’s presence, attitude and responses are critical.

As Finlay explains, relational phenomenologists “believe that when doing research, much of what we can learn and know about another arises within the intersubjective space between the researcher and co-researcher. Each touches and impacts the other, and that affects how the

¹¹The idea of the “lifeworld” or *Lebenswelt* derives from phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, who described it as the world of lived experience, the concrete world of our practical involvements. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Max van Manen also make use of the lifeworld in their applications of phenomenology (van Manen, 1997, p. 182; Toadvine, 2008, p. 20).

research unfolds” (p. 2). In writing details of my participant interviews into my analysis, I was responding to these intersubjective cues: a laugh shared between us, or a sad moment of reflection. I learned to acknowledge silent pauses, a rush of excited words, relaxed reposes in chairs, or intense leanings-forward over tables. I took note when one memory was discussed hastily for two minutes versus another that gained 20 minutes of focused discussion. I pursued intense stares or a brisk rubbing of arms, asking what more lay beneath a story’s surface. The answers to these questions often unveiled some of the most poignant recollections my participants had to share. I was, as Finlay would call it, allowing them to be my co-researchers rather than participants. In relational phenomenology, the “research does not involve a participant subject talking/telling to a passive and distant researcher who receives information. Instead, what is revealed emerges out of a constantly evolving, negotiated, dynamic, co-created relational process to which both researcher and participant co-researcher contribute” (p. 2). As part of this understanding, Finlay highlights being attentive to physical details during interactions – gestures, facial expressions (Finlay, 2009b). In other words, the details I reflected on were not incidental or separate from the phenomenology I was creating, but integral to drawing meaning from my own reflections in conjunction with my participants’ understandings of what their experiences might mean. Finlay’s (2009) relational approach to phenomenology made a mark on my study, visible in the details describing my interview sessions interspersed amongst anecdotes and my participants’ experiences. It also led me to shift how I looked at my study transcripts; prompted me to return to moments that body language indicated might have more to tell, and to ask my participants to consider my interpretations against their own. It also appears in the introduction of this study, where I personally orient myself to the phenomenon of living as a tattooed teacher, and again in the final chapter where I reflect on my own lived experiences in

relation to my participants' experiences. Without leaving the core phenomenological "stencil" of my methodology behind I added a new feature, a characteristic to enhance the final picture that is reflected in the written passages describing the lifeworld of tattooed teachers.

The ultimate goal of any phenomenological study, whether hermeneutic or relational in approach, is to discover an essence. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes "essences" as linguistic descriptions of a phenomenon, a "true singing of the world". Max van Manen (1997) builds this view, further suggesting that the word essence should not be "mystified" or taken as some "ultimate core or residue of meaning" (p. 37). Locating and describing an essence within a lived experience is not unlike an artistic endeavor. It is a creative attempt to capture a certain phenomenon with a description that is holistic and analytical, unique and universal, evocative and precise, powerful and sensitive (van Manen, 1997, p. 39). Max van Manen suggests that an essence has been adequately described "if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller and deeper manner" (p. 10). This is what I strive to provide in this study: a description of the essences of what it means, significantly and deeply, to be a tattooed teacher. I say *essences* rather than essence deliberately. I do not believe there is a single, reductive description that can fully capture the experiences of tattooed teachers. Phenomenologists such as Moustakas (1994), and to a lesser degree van Manen (1997), highlight the importance of searching for an "essential, invariant structure" formed by the vital characteristics that without, the phenomenon under study would not exist (Creswell, 2007). Yet tattooed individuals, even if they share the common ground of being teachers, are known to be highly diverse in their motivations, interests, life situations, and social standings (Pitts, 2003; DeMello, 2000). There is no one "tattoo community;" there should be no single phenomenological essence describing the experiences of tattooed teachers. As such, I perform

what Rebecca Lloyd & Stephen Smith (2006) call “essensing,” which are multiple descriptions that provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon than a single-essence view (p. 300). And so, by blending together foundational approaches towards phenomenology offered by Merleau-Ponty (1962), van Manen (1997; 2002), layering them with Finlay’s relational approach (2009), and incorporating the notion of essensing offered by Lloyd & Smith (2006), I created a tattoo approach to phenomenology, shifting elements until they fit smoothly onto the unique scenario of studying the lived experiences of tattooed teachers.

Tattoo-Styled Research Activities

Phenomenology is emergent by nature and requires changes along the way: altering questions for a particular participant, following an unplanned path of interpretation, welcoming an unexpected meaning stumbled upon during reflection. In the same way, tattooing is an emergent process. Sometimes, more or less ink is required than planned, or a colour needs adjusting, or the needle must carefully navigate around an unexpected mole or scar unique to the body being tattooed. But this does not mean a tattoo should be applied without a stencil to bound it and ensure the creative application of ink results in a productive, desirable image. Likewise, a disciplined, rigorous effort to profoundly understand the lived experiences within a phenomenological study requires a guiding path (Pinar, et al., 2000). I drew my stencil based on Max van Manen’s (1997) six research activities for conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry: 1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us, 2) investigating experiences as we live rather than as we conceptualize them, 3) reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomenon, 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing, 5) maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon, and 6) balancing the research

context by considering parts and whole. In the sections that follow, I elaborate on how I engaged in each of these six activities, shifting them to fit the requirements of studying tattooed teachers.

The first research activity, to say this inquiry seriously interests me, is an understatement. *I am this phenomenon*. I live and breathe and embody the questions, the tensions, and the experiences that constitute the very essences of being a tattooed teacher. I cannot erase this fact any more than I can rub out the tattoos on my skin. I literally wear part of the research stencil on my body; it goes where I go and informs me every step of the way. The second research activity, investigating experiences as we live rather than as we conceptualize them, recalls the need I

encountered to be flexible and welcome changes to my study plan along the way. The process reminds me of a tattoo stencil, which is an impermanent outline – for good reason. Sometimes it gets applied in the wrong place, or appears an incorrect size or even crooked. Other



times it's just a poor fit and the design needs to go back to the drawing board. Thankfully, with an observant eye, some rubbing alcohol on a cloth, and a willingness to wipe it off and try again, the tattoo does not have to turn out poorly. I could say the same for this study. At first, I chose to recruit and study visibly tattooed and body pierced teachers. I did this because I have 14 body piercings along with my tattoos, and personally feel they have shaped my experiences in education, especially my time in teacher's college and on practicum. I went into the study believing other tattooed and pierced teachers would describe similar experiences. My research

experience proved me wrong, and it was attentiveness to the possible need for redirection that allowed me to step back, reconsider study and construct a better fit.

After meeting my participants, I quickly noticed how body piercings took a distinct back burner in their experiences compared to their tattoos. All three have or have had and since removed visible body piercings (eyebrow, nose, ear cartilage). During interview conversations, however, piercings came up only cursorily and were often described as making negligible, if any effect on their teaching experiences. Reviewing transcript files after the interviews made this de-emphasis more apparent. Pages of discussion on tattoos were interrupted by a mere line here or a few sentences there to mention a body piercing. As good phenomenology allows participants to shape what is important to them and the direction the research takes, I could not ignore this fact (van Manen, 1997). I went back to the study drawing board, as it were, and shifted my focus to tattoos. Curious to discover what existing research has to say about body piercing versus tattoos, I returned to the literature, which actually supports this downplay of body piercing over tattoos as a serious body modification process. With the exception of “extreme” body piercings (i.e. on the genitals), most piercings, especially those in the ears, have become normalized as a decorative or fashion-based practice (Pitts, 2003; Caplan, 2000). Permanence and visibility set body piercings apart from tattoos: most piercings can be removed with little or no visible mark left behind, whereas a tattoo remains permanent and permanently visible for the life of the person who wears it (Sweetman, 1999; Featherstone, 2000).

Once my study focus was redirected to tattoos in specific, I moved forward with Max van Manen’s (1997) second research activity by collecting the lived experiences, which constitute the material (some may call it data) phenomenologists work with (p. 36). A lived experience is a description, story, anecdote, or recollection that directly and concretely describes an experience

(2002; 1997). A strongly suggested starting point for gathering these descriptions is to write about one's own lived experiences with the phenomenon under study (Silverman, 1980; van Manen, 2002, 1997). As a first layer of analysis, I wrote personal descriptions about my lived experiences as a tattooed teacher in the form of journal entries, some handwritten in notebooks and others typed on my laptop. You will find these personal reflections in the introduction to this study, and again in my final chapter. I began journaling at the very start of my study and continued throughout, sometimes writing entries directly before or after research interviews, but more often whenever a pensive mood took me. Frequently, I interrupted my analytic writing to journal, prompted by an attention-grabbing detail in a transcript passage. These interruptions often led me to reconsider early meanings made in my analysis, which is an encouraged part of the phenomenological writing process (van Manen, 1997). The research purpose of these journal entries, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) suggests, is to create descriptions that are direct and concrete, without offering casual explanations or interpretive generalizations about my experiences. More than just personal musings, they served to make tattooed teacher experiences "vivid and real" in my mind and brought "lived experience into nearness" (van Manen, 2002, p. 49). This nearness is vital, as provided me with a space to closely examine my personal assumptions and pre-existing beliefs about what it means to be a tattooed teacher. What did the text on the page show me? My supposition that tattooed teachers would have mostly negative experiences to share based on uncomfortable feelings of hiding at school. I also saw in myself an unwavering support for an individuals' choice to become tattooed, and a belief that tattoos are healthy outlets for self-expression. My entries contained no regrets for being tattooed person, but indicated strong trepidation over displaying my tattoos at school. Thus, journaling not only oriented me to my study and revealed my personal biases, but also allowed me to reflect on whether my personal

experiences might be – or might not be – the same as those of other tattooed teachers (van Manen, 1997).

After personal descriptions are collected, Max van Manen (1997; 2002) suggests turning to the experiences of others to deepen understanding. I turned to the experiences of three other visibly tattooed teachers¹². To locate and recruit these teachers, I employed a combination of criterion and snowball¹³ (drawing from contacts I know have experience with the phenomenon) sampling strategies (Creswell, 2007). The criterion strategy is vital, for a phenomenology can only be properly explored via individuals who have direct, personal lived experience with the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997, 2002; Creswell, 2007). The first criterion I set was that participants had to possess at least one visible tattoo, with visible being defined as easily seen when the individual wears summer attire (i.e. short sleeves and shorts). Participants had to be teachers because they would be required to share workplace experiences that occurred in school environments such as classrooms, staffrooms, hallways, and schoolyards. Thirdly, participants had to be currently or recently (with a limit of three years prior) employed in the field of education to ensure their ability to recollect their lived experiences as tattooed teachers. This also meant they had to be professional educators, with post-secondary level licensing (college or university) to work as a teacher or a professor. Lastly, I set the criteria to include at least one male and one female participant, a variety in their board of schooling (public, Catholic, private,

¹² As phenomenology has no one method to follow, I looked beyond van Manen (1997) to John Creswell (2007) to inform how I recruited tattooed teachers for my study. Creswell suggests that a small sample group of three to five is effective for collecting detailed phenomenological data related to life experiences.

¹³ Snowball sampling “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell, 2007). I drew from my personal contacts in Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto to locate such cases. My tattoo artist put me in contact with Chloe, who also gets tattooed by this same artist. I met Vanessa through my teacher connections; a friend did his practicum placement with her during teacher’s college and informed me she was interested in being interviewed for the study. I met Adam at an educational research conference, where he viewed a poster presentation I had prepared about tattooed teachers. He let me know he was a tattooed teacher himself and provided me with contact information so he could join the study.

alternative, or supply teacher) and various levels of teaching (pre-service, primary, elementary, middle school, high school, college, or university). Two female teachers and one male teacher participated in my study. One of the female participants has experience teaching preschool and elementary school students in private and Catholic school boards. The second female participant has experience teaching high school students in an alternative public school board. The male participant has experience teaching high school and university students. All three were employed as teachers at the time of this study, and all three have more than one visible tattoo on their bodies. Each participant works in a different city; one in a downtown area, and the other two in suburban neighbourhoods. The variety reflected in these criteria was intended to increase the diversity¹⁴ of the teachers I interviewed, increasing the likelihood that I would collect experiences that speak to different “types” of teachers with tattoos. Body-modified women and men, for example, are perceived quite differently in social situations (Mifflin, 1997; Pitts, 2003; Pitts, 1998). Younger and older children view tattoos quite differently, as well (Durkin & Houghton, 2000; Resenhoef, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008; Manuel & Sheenan, 2007), which means that elementary, secondary, and post-secondary teachers might have very different experiences to share. Various school boards might have different professional policies for staff to follow, which could influence teachers’ experiences.

Now, I introduce Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam¹⁵, the three teachers who generously shared their lived experiences with me throughout this study. Vanessa, a teacher of six years, works at a technical high school located in a large urban city. She has taught Grade 9 and 10 mathematics at

¹⁴Margo DeMello (2000) and Victoria Pitts (2003) found in their research on tattoo communities that most of their participants were white, as they were in my study. This was not intentional on any of our parts, nor does it mean that individuals with dark skin or different ethnic backgrounds do not become tattooed. This may highlight an avenue for future research to explore: the experiences of tattooed teachers of specific ethnic groups.

¹⁵Pseudonyms are used throughout this study, including interview transcripts, to protect the anonymity of the participants. For details of additional steps taken to protect the privacy of the study participants, please see Appendix D.

the applied and English as a Second Language (ESL) levels, Grade 9 applied science, Grade 9 and 10 essential science, Grade 9 ESL science, Grade 11 forensics, Grade 13 chemistry and biology, and summer school classes. She is tattooed on her wrists, right arm, upper chest, and left thigh. Chloe began her teaching career in a private school in a rural area. After four years working with preschool-aged children, she moved to work for a Catholic school board in a suburban area. Currently in her fourth year of teaching, she has worked in both urban and suburban elementary schools teaching grades 2, 3, 5 and 6 as a French as a Second Language (FSL) teacher. Chloe is extensively tattooed on both arms from shoulder to wrist. She also has tattoos on her upper chest, behind her ear, on her back and legs, and a small tattoo on her ankle. Adam spent the first two years of his career teaching Grade 10 and 11 Special Education English in an urban school. He now supply teaches while pursuing a doctoral degree. Adam also currently teaches Bachelor of Education classes at the university level. His tattoos are located on his arms, wrist, chest, and calf.

Over the course of this study, I spoke for many hours with Vanessa, Chloe and Adam. It was only natural for us to share our tattoo stories – why we got them and what they mean – as we got to know each other as individuals and as tattooed teachers. For Vanessa, her first two tattoos, a Celtic knot and her nickname in Lebanese (*Farasha*, which means “butterfly”) were obtained to honour her Scottish and Arabic heritage and her strong familial ties. Her memorial tattoo, the name “Ramsiz” inscribed on her arm, commemorates the death of her infant son and is also a symbol of family support; her sister, brother and mother share related tattoos on their own bodies, all personal variations of the name Ramsiz. Vanessa’s wrist tattoos are “Hamsa”¹⁶ hand

¹⁶ The “Hamsa” hand design originates in Moorish culture and is found today in Arabic and African cultures around the world. Composed of a five-fingered hand with an eye shape in the middle, the hamsa is a good luck symbol, meant to ward off harm (Nocke, 2009).

designs, selected for their symbolism as wards against bad luck. The flowers on her arm and her thigh are just pretty, attractive floral designs in which she takes aesthetic pleasure.

Chloe's tattoos are both numerous and enormously varied in their motivation. Some, such as the cherry blossoms and butterflies on her arm, are just for the pure pleasure of their appearance. Chloe adores art and colour, expressed through a number of her tattoos. First is the Alphonse Mucha-inspired image on her upper bicep, an intricately drawn woman surrounded by



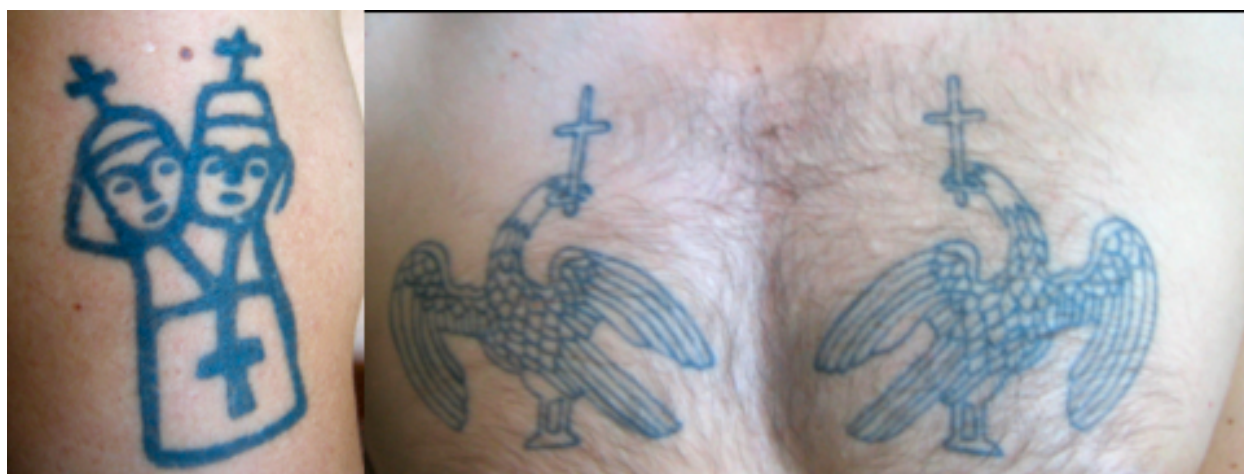
foliage and flowers.¹⁷ She also has a photo-realistic swallow near her elbow and two very lifelike portraits on her thigh – one is of actor Robert Downey Jr. depicted in his role as Sherlock Holmes and the other shows a realistic image of a woman vampire/zombie face. These she obtained to support the portraiture skills of her tattooist, offering her

blank skin as a canvas. Chloe also has a poignant commemorative life event tattoo that marks the end of her first marriage: a red-haired woman with turquoise skin drawn in an old-fashioned tattoo style. This tattoo reminds her some matches were never meant to be; Italian script inscribed underneath translates to “Some Things Will Never Change.” The words are in Italian because Chloe speaks Italian, homage to her family heritage. Just above this commemorative tattoo is a series of broken hearts that symbolize the romantic turmoil she has endured in life. The word “repeat” sits at the end of the row, the embodiment of Chloe's strong and sometimes sardonic personality. Tucked behind Chloe's ear is a shooting star tattoo with four trailing “tail” lines, each representing a past long-term relationship. Chloe also loves her cats; she has a cartoon

¹⁷ Alphonse Mucha was a Czech painter and decorative artist known for his flowing, idealized images of women executed in the Art Nouveau style, popular from 1890-1910 (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 2012).

caricature of herself with one of her cats tattooed on one arm. On her ankle is a tiny symbol for Cancer, her zodiac sign. Not to leave expressions of her teaching career in the shadows, Chloe also portrays her profession on her flesh. On her forearm is what she calls her “sexy teacher librarian”. Hidden on the inside of her upper bicep nestles her “Death Before Detention” tattoo, a comic spoof on the classic “Death Before Dishonor”¹⁸ design. Rather than the traditional heart being stabbed with a dagger, Chloe’s teacherly version shows an apple being stabbed with a pencil. The “Polly and Sukie” tattoos on her wrists have a double-meaning: they reflect her love for tea and desserts and also represent a nursery rhyme song she loves to sing with students.

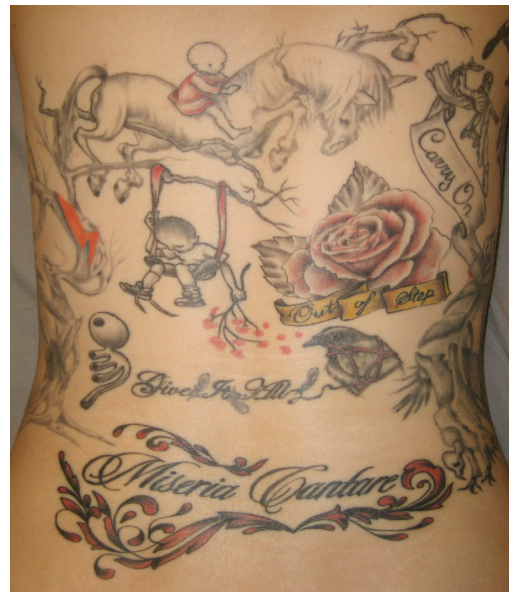
Adam’s tattoos are a mix that recall his youthful whimsy and his adult social commentary. His first tattoo, obtained as a teenager, was inspired by a drug-filled afternoon of watching TV with a good friend. The result was circular logo with a panther head inside, based on the cartoon series *Thundercats*. The show’s “Code of Pantera” is written around the design: Truth, Justice, Honour, Loyalty. Adam also sports a tree design with a dove on his forearm and a hybrid moth/Ace of Spades tattoo on his wrist; both were acquired for no particular reason at all. Two nuns adorn one arm, a tongue-in-cheek play on traditional Catholicism; Adam grew up with a



¹⁸ A classic tattoo design is the “Death Before Dishonor” tattoo, traditionally drawn as a dagger piercing a heart (DeMello, 2000). Chloe’s “Death Before Detention” tattoo parodies this by depicting an apple pierced by a pencil.

very religious mother. A related image rests on his chest, two fierce looking bald eagles clutching crucifixes in their talons. On his calf, Adam bears a tattoo echoing his choice to pursue an educational career in English literature, an image inspired by a Walt Whitman poem: a group of tiny human figures forming a tower tied with a bow. Underneath is a quote from the final line of the *Communist Manifesto*, “A world to win.”

For me personally, deep-set commitment and conviction are reflected through my tattoos. I live a straightedge lifestyle, which means a lifetime commitment to never drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, take recreational drugs, or engage in promiscuous or irresponsible sexual relationships (Haenfler, 2006). Being a straightedge, non-religious female in my late twenties, one who adopted this lifestyle long past its peak of trendiness when it first emerged out of the 1980s punk music scene (2006), is rare. I have never met a person from my own city who is straightedge. It was not until my first year of high school, when I stumbled across a small straightedge punk band from California, that I became aware of others adults who, like me, are living straightedge today, not having abandoned their resolve after leaving adolescence behind. Drawing inspiration from this band’s lyrics, early glimmers of my tattoos were born. The various designs for the seventeen tattoos I bear are each in their own way a visual testament to my straightedge lifestyle. A few designs commemorate strong connections forged with close friends I have met through mutual interest in this band over the years. A friend drew two of my tattoos. Across my back I have a large horse and rider tattooed, with imagery inspired by my favourite visual artist James Jean. It reflects my one



nostalgic throwback to my childhood, when I spent many hours horseback riding.

In order to learn about Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences as tattooed teachers, I engaged them in hermeneutic phenomenological interviews. This type of interview has two goals 1) exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, and 2) generating conversations to develop a relation with participants about the meaning of an experience (van Manen, 1997). To achieve this, I conducted tape-recorded, in-depth, in-person, one-on-one interviews, held in locations "natural" to Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam as tattooed teachers (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1997). Both interviews with Vanessa took place in the science teacher's lounge at her high school. We also spoke in the school lobby and on the steps outside the school. My first interview with Chloe took place at a local pub of her choosing where she likes to "hang out after school," and the second interview took place at a downtown café located close to her preferred tattoo studio. I met Adam the first time on a university campus, where we sat outdoors. The second interview took place at a restaurant in the city where he is currently pursuing a doctorate degree. I interviewed my participants two times each, with occasional email and phone correspondence in between to ask clarifying questions about transcripts I used for analysis. Interviews lasted between one hour and 15 minutes and two hours and 40 minutes. To capture physical details not recorded on audiotape, I also took hand-written observational notes during and directly after each interview

When talking to participants about their lived experiences, van Manen (1997) suggests using a "conversational interview" method, whereby experiences are both collected and reflected upon (p. 63). Following this method, I used the first interview sessions with Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam to collect their lived experiences as tattooed teachers, encouraging them through conversation to share personal stories and anecdotes (1997). While I did use an interview guide

(please see Appendix C) to shape the questions I asked, it is impossible to anticipate fully how discussion will unfold during a phenomenological interview (1997). As such, each interview followed its own conversational path, led by what Vanessa, Chloe, or Adam felt was most important about her or his experiences. For instance, Vanessa spoke at much greater length about her relationships with her students, whereas Adam reflected more deeply on the meaning of his role as a teacher. All three teachers talked in extensive detail about clothing, whereas only Vanessa and Chloe wanted to talk in-depth about the meanings of their tattoos. To ensure the experiences shared were as concrete as possible, I asked for specific examples and detailed descriptions, using phenomenological prompts including, ‘What was that like,’ ‘Can you describe how that felt,’ and ‘What was that sensation like’ (van Manen, 1997).

After the first set of interviews concluded, I transcribed the tapes in full and selected memorable or particularly emotional moments for further discussion. The passages I selected were based on multiple readings of transcripts; I highlighted experiences that were discussed numerous times, were described in greater detail, or that elicited the strongest emotional responses during their telling. I then emailed these selections to Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam (excerpts from their own transcripts and each others’) in advance of our second interview sessions with reflection questions attached for consideration. During the second interview sessions, I brought these excerpted passages along for further reflection, and conversed with Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam about what they might mean to them, myself, or other tattooed teachers, achieving what van Manen (1997) calls “co-reflection” (1997). I also transcribed the second interviews, in keeping with van Manen’s suggested approach.

An important part of the phenomenological research and interview process is making one’s beliefs, understandings, biases, and assumptions explicit up front (van Manen, 1997, p. 47;

Creswell, 2007). As such, during our first interviews together, I openly shared with Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam what my thoughts towards tattooing and body modification are, how I feel personally about being a tattooed teacher, and disclosed that I am tattooed. In their fieldwork interviewing tattooees, Clinton Sanders (1989) and Margo DeMello (2000) also disclosed their tattooed status, and both found this built trust and led to open discussion with interviewees. Likewise, I found that telling my participants about my tattoos helped open up our research relationship and positioned me as a (supportive) member of the tattoo community. At certain moments during our discussions, details about a tattoo or classroom experience were swapped and freely discussed in a way that may not have been achieved if I wasn't tattooed or hadn't experienced my own classroom moments.

Themes and Theory: Delving into Meanings

For a tattoo to take shape, a tattoo artist must carefully shade the colours, apply highlights, incorporate shadows, and use blank spaces in just the right combination to define the image just so, until it pops on the surface of the skin with visual clarity. In the same way, the



phenomenological researcher must sift through lived experiences, search for the moments that highlight phenomenon, and bring into sharp relief the feelings and essences that define what something is like. As I reviewed the lived experiences collected in my journal

entries and participant interview transcripts, I looked for themes, the nuggets of illustrative experiences that would capture on the page in concrete detail, *What it is like to be a visibly tattooed teacher*. These themes, as van Manen (1997) describes them, became the “fasteners, foci, or threads” of meaning used to arrive at a true grasping of what renders a “particular

experience its special significance” (p. 32). Reflecting on themes also constitutes the third of van Manen’s (1997) research activities (1997). To locate these themes, I applied what van Manen calls the “wholistic reading approach,” whereby the whole text (in this case interview transcripts and my journal entries) is read in its entirety while constantly asking, *What phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of this text?* (p. 93). Then, by writing and re-writing an answer to this question, I arrived at a statement that captured the essence of the lived experience being described, such as “feeling pressured to wear long sleeves,” or “pressing back at judgmental looks,” or “a jolt of misunderstanding,” to provide a few examples that are covered in the analysis chapters of this study. I also applied what van Manen calls “interpretation through conversation” by discussing the themes I located with Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam and asking them to share what they felt these themes meant to their experiences as tattooed teachers (van Manen, 1997, pp. 97 – 99). In this way, we worked together to interpret early themes and their potential significances.

Lifeworld existentials¹⁹ can also be used to mine meaning from lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). Looking closely at Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s experiences, it became clear that the existentials of “lived body” and “lived human relation” had the most applicable insights to offer, given their tattooed bodies and their interactions with others were at the core of the experiences they described. Lived body, or corporeality, refers to the phenomenological fact we are always bodily in the world (p. 103). When we meet others, it is always through our bodies, which both reveal and conceal things about us, not always consciously or deliberately. And because our bodies are visible in the world, we can become objects in other peoples’ gazes, be made to feel awkward or graceful depending how we are being looked at (1997). I found this

¹⁹ There are four existentials frequently used to guide phenomenological reflection: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality) (van Manen, 1997, p. 101).

existential mapped well onto Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences, and kept it in mind as I considered how they chose to reveal/conceal their tattoos at work, how their tattooed flesh might be gazed at, and how these gazes might make them feel. Lived other, or relationality, was also central to my participants' experiences, as they interacted with colleagues, students, and others within the working environment of their schools.

Lived other refers to the relation we maintain with the people we share interpersonal space with (1997). We meet each other through handshakes, or looks, or through conversation. We form physical impressions of others, sometimes before we formally meet them. When we do formally meet each other, we have opportunities to converse, learn from each other, and even to transcend ourselves. This existential is about the human search for the communal and social, the sense of purpose in life we draw from each other (1997). Along with lived body, I kept lived other top of mind as I analyzed and made meaning of Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences with their colleagues, supervisors, students within their school communities.

Locating themes and applying lifeworld existentials marked the beginning of my analysis, but to draw deeper meaning from my study I turned to academic experts, the professional theorists whose work bolstered my interpretations. Given the prominent role played by tattooed flesh and the teacher's body in my study, I drew from seminal theorists known for their works related to various aspects of the body: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Luce Irigaray, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Madeleine Grumet. What is most important to take from the following brief theoretical overview is how I did not interpret my study data and make meaning from Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's lived experiences in an isolated hermeneutic or academic 'vacuum'. Rather, you will see in my analysis chapters how I dialogue with these five esteemed theorists and their works, which represent some of best regarded phenomenological and

sociological/cultural knowledge related to the body. This led me to unveil rigorous meaning that could not be accessed based solely on my personal reflections, or even through co-reflection with my participants.

My study's focus on the tattooed teacher's body aligns directly to the vital foundational tenets of the phenomenology of perception as developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968). As a philosopher who was largely concerned with bodily perception, he challenged dualistic notions that viewed bodies as vessels for minds. For him, the body is not matter or mind, but a very element of Being which he termed *Flesh* (1962). *Flesh* does not separate our bodies from the world or those around us; quite the opposite: it inserts us into relation with the world and with others, and is our sole means of communication. It is through the body, Merleau-Ponty he writes, that we "are at grips with the world" (p. 303). To be conscious, embodied, and "at grips with the world" are not three separate notions for him, but are overlapping, interconnected, internally related aspects of our existence (Cerbone, 2006, p. 132). Throughout this study, the word 'body' and the word 'flesh' are used. 'Body,' in the sense I use the term, refers to the physical body of teachers and connotes that their lived bodily experiences take place within physically situated institution of schools. 'Flesh,' however, is to be viewed differently. More than just the living canvas upon which tattoos are inked, flesh – as Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) views it – is an enmeshed, intertwining substance: the flesh of the body, the flesh of the world, and the flesh our experiences are one and the same; they overlap and intertwine, shaping how we experience the lived world around us.

Merleau-Ponty also speaks of the *chiasm*, which is the intersection between the *Flesh* of the body and the *Flesh* of the world (1968). The *chiasm* is the fold wherein the body experiences itself in a reversible way, a concept he famously describes through the example of shaking one's

own hand: you are both the touched and the touching, the perceived and the perceiving in this act of intertwining. Merleau-Ponty (1962) also approached the concept of perception as embodied. More than just our means of communication, he refers to the body as our “condition of possibility ... of all expressive operations and all acquired views which constitute the cultural world” (p. 303). For him, to talk about expression and living in the world without our bodies would be akin to talking about paintings without paint or music without notes. Bodies transform meaning. With the flick of a wrist, a nod, a glance, the body is itself a meaning at the same time is conveys a message (Adam, 2008, p. 153). Using these views of embodied perception, I analyzed what it is like to perceive the world from within tattooed teacher’s *Flesh*, reflected on what this *Flesh* communicates to others, and considered what it is like for tattooed teachers to relate to others. Notions of seeing and visibility are also central to Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) phenomenology of perception. He writes, “To see is to enter a universe of beings which display themselves” (p. 79). To have a body is to be visible, and to be visible means “I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and, in my turn, look at *him*” (p. 193; original emphasis). Drawing from Merleau-Ponty’s approach towards visible bodies, I analyzed various ways in which tattooed teachers’ bodies are looked, explored what it feels like to be made an object under another’s gaze because of tattoos, and reflected on what it feels like to press back against objectifying gazes.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) challenged the notion that there “are two views of me and of my body: my body for me and my body for others, and [he wondered] how these two systems can exist together” in the perceptual world (p. 122). This view on perceived bodies speaks directly to the experiences of tattooed teachers, for tattoos, first and foremost, are inserted into personal

flesh and are frequently used to reflect one's notions of self to the world (Pitts, 2003). However, the teaching body cannot be kept solely to oneself: it is subjected to the perceptions of students, colleagues, principals, and others within the school environment. How the "other" views this body might not align with how the teacher views this body. I used this view in my analysis to reflect on instances when such perceptual dissonance occurred for my participants, moments when their views of self as tattooed teachers did not align with others' perceptions, leading to assumptions and misassumptions about what the tattooed teacher's body might mean.

An excellent complement to Merleau-Ponty is Luce Irigaray (2004; 2001), a feminist scholar and philosopher who both draws from his work and takes the body beyond a singular limiting "sack" of flesh to explore how the interrelationality of bodies influences identity (Whitford, 1991). In her exploration of Being, identity, and intersubjectivity, Irigaray (2001) argues that we form ourselves and our identities through an intertwining with the other. In her view, it is possible for a meeting of two individuals to allow for a slippage of identities, for one to partially merge into the other. She further explains, "The subject who offers or permits desire transports and so envelopes, or incorporates, the other" (p. 170). In this sense, if a tattooed teacher "permits" desiring others to understand what it is like to live inside their flesh (without entering directly inside it), it is possible that two divergent identities (the tattooed body and the non-tattooed body) will envelope each other through meaningful interaction to form a better understanding of what goes on inside the other. Using this view of intersubjectivity, I analyzed how Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's interactions with their colleagues and students became meaningful and allowed for productive understandings of each other's subjectivities to occur.

Irigaray (2004) also explores the notion of difference and how we, as human beings, often fail to negotiate encounters with different "others" well. She writes, "human becoming

corresponds to stages of differentiation ... The most difficult, and still unaccomplished, task, lies in the way of differing from another human” (p. xi). In Western culture, she argues, we approach what is different through a lens of sameness, which is what makes it so hard for us to recognize and accept each other as different, and makes it difficult to respect our differences. She further explains:

We have been accustomed to reduce the other to ours or ourselves. On the level of consciousness as on the level of feelings, we have been educated to make our own what we approach or what approaches us ... We act in this way especially towards others who are closest to us ... welcomed on the condition that he, or she, agrees to being assimilated into our way of living, our habits, our world. (p. 5)

Irigaray (2001) offers an alternative for how we approach each other, one based on the notion that “you who are not and will never be mine” (p. 18). When encountering the other, she argues, we must recognize the other as you, not me. And, “recognizing you means or implies respecting you as other, accepting that I stop before you as before something insurmountable, a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, as subjectivity that will never be mine, a mine that will never be mine” (2004, p. 8). While this approach to interacting with others takes more work, it “also gives more satisfaction because we then remain faithful to ourselves, capable of becoming by ourselves and also with an other recognized as such: not better or worse than we are, but different. Now difference is a source of fecundity, not only physical but also cultural, spiritual” (Irigaray, 2004, p. ix).

Irigaray’s view of difference relates directly to the experiences of tattooed teachers, who look different from their colleagues and students, and who might also have different ways of living, values, or habits from others in the school environment. I use Irigaray’s philosophy to

explore this dynamic of difference as it applies to notions of teacher image and identity, to interrogate norms applied to the teacher body, and to reflect on how we might come to accept the difference of a tattooed teacher body. In accepting each other as different, whether as tattooed or non-tattooed, we can learn from each other, come to respect each other better, and might reveal new avenues for coexisting in productive, meaningful ways that go beyond ourselves, thus enriching our lives by incorporating the truly different subjectivities of others.

In addition to Irigaray's views on different and intersubjectivity, I also extended Merleau-Ponty's notions of perceived bodies to include Michael Foucault's (1973) theory of the "gaze". This gaze is the critical look that is both inflicted from outside by others and the look we turn inwards on ourselves. It becomes a way for institutional authorities (i.e. the education system) to watch over us, and is also mechanism of self-regulation that leads people to constantly monitor their bodies, actions, and feelings (Foucault, 1973; Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2001). Using this notion of the gaze, I unpacked Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences of being looked at, and considered what impact these looks had on their daily lives – in some cases leading to self-regulation by hiding tattoos from gazing eyes under stereotypical "teacher clothes," and other times pushing back at the pressure of regulating gazes by displaying tattoos at work.

Foucault (1979) also forwards the theory of the power of the Normal or normalization, and how it is used to create "docile bodies" via "disciplines". Disciplines are often very minute, repeated, and overlapping techniques that work to establish what is "Normal" in an institution, and are based on observation – how those with power exercise surveillance on people they want to look, act, or feel a certain way within a particular societal structure (i.e. teachers and students within the institution of the school). The Normal became an established principle of coercion in teaching with the introduction of standardized education and the creation of teachers' training

colleges, and were seen at work in both secondary and primary schools at a very early date (Foucault, 1979, p. 184). Normalization operates by establishing a range of normality used to indicate a person's membership in a homogenous social body. Compared to established norms, those who deviate by looking or acting different are subject to punishment (1979). Observation, or surveillance, makes it possible to assess how normal individuals are, and makes it possible to draw up difference, map attitudes, assess characters and form rigorous classifications (p. 203). Drawing from Foucault's notions of observation and the power of the Normal, I made meaning from my participants' experiences of discomfort in trying to fit established teacher norms, and also to reflect on the ways they resisted this power as they grew confident in their roles as tattooed teachers.

Complimenting Merleau-Ponty's views on the body and Foucault's notion of the gaze, I turned to Madeline Grumet's (1988; 2007) theory of the look and body within the context of education and in schools. Grumet agrees with Merleau-Ponty's view of the body, saying that it "part of teaching, learning, knowing" (2007, p. xvi). In her landmark work *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*, Grumet (1988) discusses how the body (in particular the female body) has become ill attended to in the space of the classroom. She observes how in the tradition of Western education, disciplining the body and disappearing it to the point where we barely notice it has become an intrinsic practice (2007). When we do bring body consciousness back into the classroom, we stand "mute and awed" in the very presence of "toes or navel, gonads or drool" (Grumet, 2007, p. xv). Building on Grumet's views, I explored what attending to the tattooed teacher's body in the classroom is like, and reflected on what Vanessa, Chloe, Adam *and* their students learned by noticing and discussing the tattooed teacher's body rather than trying to "disappear" it from their daily experiences.

In addition to attending to the tattooed teacher's body, I also looked to Grumet's (1988) notions of how subjectivity and personal identity shape the teaching experience. She finds that in schools, identity is formed not through symbiosis and differentiation but through mimesis and convention, which is often based on surveillance. She writes, "Peer culture reinforces this surveillance, punishing nonconformity" (p. 112). To further explain this view, Grumet dialogues with the notion of the Foucaultian gaze, noting just how strong an impact this gaze can have on teachers' subjectivities. She explains, "Standing in front of the room, receiving the gaze of students, teachers risk that objectification and often cope with it by assuming stereotyped costumes..." (2003, p. 250). Building on this, she argues that the look in education is often impersonal, inevitable, and determining, which leads to less meaningful relationships between teachers and their students (1988). But, as Grumet points out, it does not have to be this way, for "the structure of the look is essentially dialogical. Like speech, the look can be given and received, returned or refused" and in fleeting moments of fusion, those instances in lives of teachers and students, the look can "contain the reciprocity of which the poet dreams" (p. 97). As this type of reciprocal glance moves between teacher and student, "it picks up pieces of the world" and thus "enlarges our collective consciousness" (p. 97). Grumet's views towards the body in education, teacher subjectivity, and the nature of the look in the classroom did much to inform the meanings I made of my participants' choice of teacher "costumes" worn to work, and how their personal experiences and individual histories shaped their actions at the school. I also explored the wondrous moments when curious or questioning looks from their students or colleagues were dialogically exchanged, and how these instances sparked by the presence of tattoos on their teacher bodies led to reciprocal learning, identity development, and strengthened student-teacher relationships.

Moving beyond Grumet, I also drew from Judith Butler (1999; 2004), a philosopher noted for her work in feminism, queer theory, and political philosophy who speaks about the social and cultural implications of identity and gender in her works *Gender Trouble* (1999) and *Undoing Gender* (2004). Butler forwards that identity (in particular gender) is performative – a sort of act – that is socially inscribed on the body. There are, she argues no “natural bodies,” just bodies inscribed with cultural values (1999). Acts, gestures, appearances, are *fabrications* of identity that display themselves on the body. They are manufactured and sustained through social discursive means such as talking or walking or dressing a certain way, and do not in fact reflect the true essence of what constitutes the core of a person’s self-identity. Characteristics such as gender, Butler further argues, are the product of a “*stylized repetition of acts*” that reinforce established social meanings in mundane, ritualized, legitimated forms (1999, p. 179; original emphasis). Using Butler’s theory on identity and the body to guide my reflection, I considered the dynamic of my participants’ tattooed bodies, reflected on how there are no “natural teacher bodies,” tattooed or not, just those inscribed with culturally accepted values. I used Butler to make meaning of their experiences portraying themselves at school through “stylized repetitions” of acts meant to show the socially acceptable identity of a teacher.

The tattooed body has a history of being viewed as “subversive” (DeMello, 2000; Pitts, 2003; Mifflin, 1997). As I analyzed Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s experiences, I wondered: does this connotation carry over into the current world of education? To explore this possibility, I looked again to Judith Butler (2004, 1999). In *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler writes extensively about “subversive bodily acts” (p. 101). Tattooed teachers’ bodies reflect subversive acts in the way they portray non-normative images of the teacher. Butler (1999) also notes the latent possibility for social change bodies possess. For, she claims, repeating *non-normative*

performances of the self might, over time, create a place and space to transform what normativity means in a certain context (1999; Lloyd, 2007). Drawing from this, I explored how Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam persisted in revealing their tattoos at work, an act which, over time, might re-figure what is considered normal – or at the very least acceptable – in their schools, and might potentially provide a new version of what the teacher body can “be” (Butler, 1999).

Describing Through the Art of Writing

The approaches towards analysis I have described thus far – how I reflected on my personal experiences, how I located themes, and how I drew meaning from theorists – all weave inseparably into the act of writing, for in hermeneutic phenomenological research, writing *is* the research (van Manen, 1997). All analysis conducted in this study was fundamentally achieved through a process of writing, re-writing, and more writing, which constitutes van Manen’s (1997) fourth phenomenological research activity. Aside from being a tattooed teacher, I am also a writer and trained journalist with years of experience observing concrete details and bringing them to the page. This has informed my study a great deal, in particular during interviews, a setting in which being attentive has been drilled into me as a second nature, along with taking the utmost care to describe scenarios authentically. Drawing from what journalism taught me about writing descriptively and accurately, and how to be mindful of mood, atmosphere, and situational nuances, I worked to bring my participants’ lived experiences to life through written language. I bring the lived experiences of tattooed teachers “into nearness” for readers, presenting them through poetically crafted descriptive passages and given life through rich, vivid descriptions (1997). The meanings I reveal in Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s experiences depend on the words, phrases, styles, metaphors, figures of speech, and poetic images I used (van Manen, 2002, p.

237). In chapters four through eight, you see the results of this writing, the pages and paragraphs that describe for you the essences of what it is like to be a tattooed teacher.

Beyond externalizing internal knowledge, the writing in a phenomenological study is sensitive to the fact that “certain meaning is better expressed through *how* one writes than *what* one writes” (van Manen, 1997, p. 131; original emphasis). This does not mean that clarity and accuracy are subordinated by literary technique; rather, it means that writing shows us what we know through a dialectic process of constructing a text (van Manen, 1997, p. 127). “How” I wrote was guided in large part by phenomenological writing techniques suggested by Max van Manen (1997; 2002) for creating successful “lived-experience descriptions,” which refrain from trying to “explain why” an experience happened as it did or otherwise explicate it in some way (1997, p. 55). I invoked the use of “I” or “we” as a linguistic device to lend vividness to my descriptions and to increase the sense of involvement readers would have with my text (2002, p. 50). I also rendered accounts of Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s experiences in the present tense, even when recounting situations that happened in the past. This lends the text a sense of introspection, as if what my participants experienced is actually happening “right here and now,” despite the fact that reflection on lived experience is always a reflective recollection on something that already passed (van Manen, 1997, p. 10). To bring the reader directly into the experience van Manen (1997) suggests “describing the experience from the inside” by showing state of mind, feelings, moods, and emotions (p. 64). In chapters four through eight, my descriptions of Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s experiences include *italicized text* without quotation marks. These sections indicate the states of mind, feelings, moods, and emotions van Manen pushes the phenomenologist to access. Max van Manen also stresses the importance of focusing on specific instances of experience and to avoid generalizations (p. 65). Following this, I delve

in-depth into particular experiences lived by Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam. For example, I describe not a general account of what it is like to be tattooed in the classroom, but what it is like for a silent student to stare fixatedly at a leg tattoo. I did not just share what it was like to dress for work, but what it was like to try on the first outfit worn to school and the sensations produced on the body. Attending to bodily sensations – how things smell, sound or otherwise evoke the senses, is also important to successful lived experience writing (van Manen, 1997, p. 65). As such, my text contains descriptions of the sights, sounds, feelings, tastes and smells my participants lived during their experiences as tattooed teachers. Max van Manen (1997) warns against trying to “beautify” accounts of lived experiences with “fancy phrases or flowery terminology”. As such, note how my text is written descriptively but not fancily; I would even say straightforwardly, and to some it might even appear un-academically. But this is the nature of phenomenology, which does not read like other qualitative-style research reports (van Manen, 1997). My chapters contain contractions and colloquialisms, expletives, plain words and strange ones, dialogue between people, and internal musings – all used in order to describe lived experiences in their rawest possible sense.

I began getting Tattoos because I felt that I needed power to fight my illness. So I chose Tigers. My tattooed Tigers scare. They scare away the illness. They also scare away other people! But my students think tattoos are cool. The ultimate cool, in fact. Students often ask, ‘Can we see your tattoos Dr. Morris?’ I say ‘Only if you promise not to tell!’ And so we share a secret – my students and I (Morris, 2008, p. 89).

As I wrote this study, I also drew a great deal of inspiration from educational theorist and tattooed professor Marla Morris (2008). In her book, *Teaching through the ill body: A spiritual and aesthetic approach to pedagogy and illness*, Morris uses remarkably evocative, descriptive, poetic writing to describe her personal experiences as a professor who is both tattooed and chronically ill. She uses exquisitely artistic writing to bring her readers into her fascinating (and often painful) lifeworld. Her frank style and notably direct

approach to discussing atypical (for most of us) experiences, and her always thought-provoking, immersive writing fuelled my own writing muse.

Beyond style, anecdotes, which van Manen (1997) emphasizes as valuable rhetorical and methodological devices, became an especially important part of my analysis. An anecdote is defined as a short narrative of an interesting, amusing, or biographical incident (Miriam-Webster, 2012). While anecdotes are stories written in narrative form, they are not just “mere illustrations” used to “butter up” a phenomenological study or make a boring passage more interesting; they “make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us,” and offer “minute passage[s] of private life” (p. 116). Anecdotes about my participants’ experiences appear throughout this text, distinguished by the following presentation features: single spaced, indented text; a shift in writing style that flows like a ‘story within the analysis;’ and the presence of literary devices such as dialogue, descriptions of settings, the use of first-person perspective, and sharing of internal thoughts as they occur to my participants. These anecdotes are also valuable because they form a concrete counterweight to the theory I used to analyze my participants’ experiences; they help make the phenomenon of being a tattooed teacher clearer to understand, especially for those who are not tattooed or who are not teachers. Anecdotes also compel readers’ attention, call on them to relate their own stories to those I share about my participants: what was it like to get dressed for the first day of work, or attend a teaching job interview? What does it feel like to be misunderstood by a colleague? These anecdotes are meant to touch readers, to move them, teach them, or lead them to think more deeply about the experiences of tattooed teachers (van Manen, 1997).

Writing is but an entry into the involved process of re-writing required in phenomenology. I should not have been so startled, then, when my file boxes burst open, quite

literally spewing pages of my study all over my floor. What at first appeared as “Thesis Armageddon” burped up from split boxes that once housed my research-in-progress was really just my personal encounter with Max van Manen’s (1997) forthright explanation of phenomenology: “to write it to rewrite” (p. 131). As the days and months went by, I accumulated piles of transcripts with my reflections logged in the margins ... and between lines, and on the backs of pages. A look at them now would display a riot of thoughts expressed in all colours of pen and highlighter, a crosshatching of thoughts that nearly obscures the original words typed on the page. Notebooks and manila files brimmed with my hand-scrawled journaling. My overburdened laptop now houses half a dozen “Draft” folders for this study, and easily four times as many rough chapters. To create the required depth of description, to construct the multiple layers of meaning that move us towards the essence(s) of an experience, and to lay bare truths within these experiences, a single writing will not do (van Manen, 2002). As van Manen (1997) explains, “To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-reflecting, re-cognizing)” (1997, p. 131). And so it did. At least triple the pages that made it into this study were discarded during my rewriting process. I tackled chronological approaches to my analysis that, upon much re-reflecting and re-cognizing, were set aside for being too rigid to capture the nuanced variations my participants’ experiences. Entire lived experiences were supplanted by new ones when a third, fourth, or tenth reading of a transcript revealed a more concrete, accessible, or evocative anecdote. This process, including the accompanying editing and revising, creates depth, and from this depth the meanings of lived experience are laid bare (van Manen, 1997).

To present research by way of reflective text is not to present findings, but to do a reading (as a poet would) of a text ... One must meet with it, go through it, encounter it, suffer it, consume it and, as well, be consumed by it (van Manen, 1997, p. 153).

During the writing and re-writing process, it is important to remain strongly oriented to the phenomenon under study, which is Max van Manen's (1997) fifth research activity. This means diligently working from a particular vantage point, interest, or station in life (1997). My orientation throughout this study has been that of a newly licensed, female tattooed teacher in her late twenties who values tattooing as a healthy form of self-expression. To best reflect this orientation, I have included my early orientations (before research began) in the introduction of this study and my later orientations in Chapter 9, which contains personal reflections and journal entries. Max van Manen also points out the irony that many researchers who study a phenomenon distance themselves from it in the very act of studying it, losing their strong orientation in the process. The example he uses is educators who write about teaching children, but who lock themselves away from all children and pedagogic situations in order to research and write. Mindful of this, I did not separate myself from tattooing or the world of teaching while I completed this study. I got tattooed during my research, spent hours in tattoo studios talking to tattooists. I met Kat von D, world famous female tattoo artist. I asked her what she thought of my study; she told me she thought it was important²⁰.



Simultaneous to these ink-based endeavours, my days were filled in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, surrounded by teacher candidates, employed teachers, retired teachers, and teacher educators. I visited my participant Vanessa's

²⁰ I met with Kat von D for approximately 15 minutes in Ottawa on March 10, 2009 while she was visiting for a celebrity book signing of her autobiography, *High Voltage Tattoo* (2009). Due to security restrictions, I was unable to tape record, but I did take hand-written notes. I told her I was studying the experiences of tattooed teachers, and asked what she thought of this. Her reply was instant and firm. She said, "That's a really important study. I bet there's a ton of teachers with tattoos. Some even come into my shop, I bet. And doctors and nurses and lawyers and all sorts of people. I have a job where it doesn't matter. But it does for others. That's really cool. What a great thing to study. And unexpected!" When I asked if I could arrange a longer interview at another time, she referred me to her sister, Caroline von Drachenberg, who works as her publicist. Via email correspondence from Caroline in May 2009, I was politely informed an interview would not be possible due to Kat's TV schedule and personal difficulties.

workplace to immerse myself in the high school environment, and re-familiarized myself with elementary school where I completed a practicum placement with grade five students. I met a number of employees at the Ontario Ministry of Education, curious to observe their physical appearances (not a tattoo to be found). I applied for at least 10 teaching jobs, made the short list for one school board. In short, I did not complete this study walled off from the lifeworld of tattooed teachers. I straddled the space between researching tattooed teachers' lived experiences and *experiencing* the experiences. It is as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1980), considered one of the first modern pedagogical theorists, said: the heart often lends surer insight than reason, and that heartless knowledge is dead knowledge. Throughout this study I have worn my heart on the page and on my skin (one of my tattoos is a stylized heart tattoo), which has hopefully breathed life into the insights and meanings I have made of tattooed teachers' experiences.

Max van Manen's (1997) sixth and final step to conducting a phenomenological study is to balance the research context by considering the part and whole, which speaks to how the study is organized and conducted. As van Manen explains, while it may not be possible to anticipate a study with a fixed outline or table of contents, it should be possible to organize the overall approach required to address the fundamental study question (p. 167). As van Manen says, I could not foresee the exact placement of the strokes of this study until they occurred. It was not until I sat down and talked to Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam that their most memorable lived experiences came to light. I was able to anticipate, however, the most likely experiences for teachers or tattooees: what it was like to get hired, what it is like to interact with students, or what it is like to be looked at by others. Likewise, it was not until I engaged in reflective writing and analysis about my participants' lived experiences that I could anticipate what meanings might flow from them. I was, however, able to predict that meanings about the body, the look,

teacher identity, and intersubjectivity would surface. Even so, what van Manen notes is true. I could no more predict the exact questions I would ask Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam or the themes that would emerge until they occurred as part of *doing* the research— no more than a tattoo artist can predict from a stencil exactly how they must wield their needle across the variegated, shifting surface of living skin. While using a methodological stencil did prevent me from flinging descriptions, themes, and meanings at the page without sound research reason, the stencil flexed to allow for “modifications” of its own.

Once my analysis was complete and text organized into the study presented here, I turned one last time to Max van Manen (1997) to ensure its validity. He outlines four conditions that lend a phenomenological study convincing validity: the text must be oriented, strong, rich, and deep (p. 151). To be oriented, the researcher must not separate theory from life (van Manen, 1997). As I have outlined previously, I took numerous steps to ensure I remained closely connected to the phenomenon I studied. For a text to be strong, the researcher must try to gain clarity and understanding about the experiences they study, and should draw from their personal orientation as a resource for the interpretations made of lived experiences (van Manen, pp. 151-152). To accomplish this, I wrote reflective journals regularly, and took note when my participants’ experiences echoed or contrasted my own and used this as a starting point for analysis. For a text to be rich, the descriptions must be concrete, often exposing the phenomenon through a story or anecdote (van Manen, 1997, p. 152). Lastly, a phenomenological text must be deep. Depth gives a lived experience its meaning, and is based in descriptions that explore beyond what is immediately experienced (van Manen, 1997, p. 152). To accomplish this, I not only described Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s lived experiences, I interpreted and made meaning of them using theories about the body, the look, and teacher identity, as described in my

theoretical overview. Phenomenology finds its rigour in the effort to understand experiences profoundly and authentically (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 2000, p. 405). In the various approaches I have described for you throughout this methodology chapter, I share how I worked towards a text that profoundly understands tattooed teachers' lived experiences. Multiple re-writings, constant reflection, rich descriptions: all worked towards creating a better understanding of and deeper meaning from exploring the question, *What are the lived experiences of visibly tattooed teachers?*

The First Glimpse for Readers

Directly after a tattoo is applied, it is covered with gauze to keep it germ-free and dry for the first 24 hours. As the swelling goes down and the lymph fluid collects on the surface, the redness begins to subside and the colours start to show clearly, a proper preview of the tattoo's appearance. Then comes the first anticipation-charged moment when a corner of the gauze is lifted and peeled back, revealing the fresh image at last. But before reaching this moment, a full process must be worked through (or endured, depending on personal perspective): having the tattoo designed, deciding where to place it on the body, applying the stencil, inking the outline, filling in the shades or colours, adding highlights and details, and the minutes or hours of sitting under the sting of the needle.

In a parallel unfolding, the methodological approaches and analysis of this study recall the tattoo process. The study question must first be formed, the research equivalent of deciding on a tattoo design. Next, the study "stencil" must be sketched, fleshing out the details of how to collect lived experiences and reflect on them. Then comes hours of sitting, not under a needle but with a pen and keyboard, putting words to page and screen like ink to skin. Writing is the image

outline. The re-writing becomes the shading, highlights, bursts of colour, and carefully applied details that refine descriptions and bring lived experiences to life.

And now, in the five chapters to follow, there is the peeling up of the gauze, lending readers a glimpse at the product that coalesced out of all the writing and re-writing. Layer by layer, detail by detail, just like ink droplets slowly filling the pores, a clearer, more vivid, and deeper picture of tattooed teachers' lifeworlds coalesces. As readers move through the experiences shared in this study, I urge them to approach what they encounter reflectively. Just as cool water invites us to drink, just as an easy chair invites our tired bodies to sink into it, a phenomenological text invites us to dialogically respond to it (van Manen, 1997, p. 21). For my thesis, this means to read while re-thinking and reflecting on the everyday act of looking at a colleague, in specific looking at a teacher colleague who has visible tattoos.

The chapters that follow offer opportunities for readers to adopt new understandings, to consider or reconsider how they think, act, and react when they encounter a tattooed other, whether this is a stranger, a colleague, or a teacher colleague. I encourage readers to revisit the assumptions they might make about the meaning of tattoos or about the people wearing them, and to question whether these assumptions can be changed or better understood after reading about Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences. When perceiving an individual with tattoos, do readers mutter comments, look away, stare, ask a question, or pay a compliment? And after sharing in my participants' experiences via the text, will they act or think differently than before? Will the lifeworld descriptions lead them to pause, to reflect on how their actions might make others feel? Will they think about how *they* feel when they are looked at, stared, at commented at, or asked a question about something personal on their body? If a reader happens to *be* a tattooed teacher, my text invites them to compare how their experiences are the same or different

from my participants' experiences, and to reflect on what this means to them (van Manen, 1997). Perhaps reading this study will lead them to feel less isolated, better understood, or lend them confidence to openly display their tattoos at work.

The following five chapters offer a space for readers to vicariously feel what my participants feel. Rather than just reading these passages and then setting them aside, I hope that readers will become increasingly thoughtful about tattooed teachers, and be more prepared to act tactfully during interactions with them (van Manen, 1997, p. 21). A text such as this "appeals to the common human experience" (p. 19). It doesn't matter whether the reader is a teacher or not, tattooed or not. What matters is that they are moved to reflect on how my participants' experiences could be anyone's experiences (1997). Feeling uncomfortable starting a new job; the sensation of receiving judgmental looks; the relief of locating a comfortable workplace or social niche; the joy and satisfaction found in meaningful personal interactions with others. How readers engage with the text will be personal. But it should also be an appeal to each and every one of us to re-think how we understand experiences, and how we understand ourselves as individuals or as educators (van Manen, p. 156).

Now, accept my invitation to step tattooed teacher's skin, to live through Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences, to feel what they feel, think what they think, see what they see, and sense what their bodies sense. In the next five chapters, five themes that describe the lifeworlds of tattooed teachers are laid bare on the page. These themes, which interconnect the lived experiences of my participants, all have to do with variations on the notion of 'Fit': 1) Trying to Fit; 2) Mis-Fit; 3) Fit. You? Fit You!; 4) Fitting In; and 5) One Size Does Not Fit All. From first impressions in job interviews to feeling comfortable in their teaching environments, their stories speak to the degree that they first feel pressure to conform or 'fit' in a normative sense, to an

emergent feeling of fitting or finding a sense of comfort in their skin in a phenomenological sense (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Not to be over-simplified, ‘Fit,’ as in finding one’s place within the phenomenological flesh, is not representative of the body-as-object notion of matching a round peg seamlessly into a round hole. A tentonality of ‘Fit’ is present within these teachers’ experiences, a sense of ‘Fit’ that aligns with David Abram’s (2010) extension of Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) elemental flesh to include a flesh that is no way bounded, and is attuned to the Gaia hypothesis, which connotes a vibrant, self-organizing, alive world. So finding one’s ‘Fit’ has more to do with opening up and becoming aware of the malleable, chiasmic, sentient fleshy folds, as if receiving an embrace from another without being consumed or owned by them, but respected as separate and insurmountable to them – not the same, different (Irigaray, 2004).

The experiences described within these emergent themes of ‘Fit’ might be familiar to teachers or tattooed individuals; or completely foreign to those who are neither educators nor inked. Either way, as the experiences unfold, keep in mind the original sense of questioning and wonder that drove my desire to write this study: *What is it like to be a tattooed teacher, to sense tattooed flesh while at school?* And on a more personal level I have wondered throughout: What is it like to grow into comfort within tattooed teacher flesh, to feel confident in displaying an arm or wrist tattoo at work? What is it like to feel acceptance, belonging, and connection within the school community? With all its looks, and pressures, and clothing discomforts, with all its assumptions and misunderstandings, with the moments of relief and release, and the instances of connection, I slip now inside tattooed teachers’ skin to describe just *what it is like*.

Chapter 4: Trying to Fit: The (Self)Restrictive Crush of the Professional Teacher Image(s)

Tomorrow is your first day of teaching at an inner city school where you have never taught before. Or perhaps your posting is in some unfamiliar posh public school ('private school' in North America). What question races at least once through your mind?

You are an experienced teacher or university professor. You are invited to give a talk to a group of feminists, or unionists, or parents, or politicians, or psychologists, or social workers. What question sends you rummaging through your wardrobe? 'What should I wear?' (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 54)

Sweat It: Uncomfortable Identity Struggles

What does it mean to fit, to fit in? By definition, it means "to be suitable for, to harmonize with" something, or to conform correctly to shape or size, to adjust until correctly in place (Miriam Webster, 2012). Sometimes things fit well: a new shirt is slipped on and 'fits like a glove,' implying a comfortable size and shape. Socially, fitting in means feeling accepted, often by looking or acting similarly to your peers. It feels like walking into a room to be greeted with smiles, invitations to participate in activities or share opinions. When things are a bad fit, they are inherently uncomfortable. If a shirt fits poorly, it binds too tightly or billows askew. Not fitting in socially feels like exclusion, being unwelcome or made fun of, judged for being different. Sometimes, in order to fit something that does not naturally harmonize with the body or values, conforming is required, adjustments and compromises that render a fit where there wasn't one before. Conforming feels like dressing in foreign clothes, talking about unfamiliar topics, or feigning interest in an activity. It can translate to a new hairstyle, a hidden scar, learning a new language, adopting a particular physical mannerism... all in the effort to fit in. Tattooed teachers feel this struggle to fit in, to conform to the expectations of their profession. Inked arms are covered with overly warm clothes or long-sleeved dress shirts in order to harmonize with established teacher norms, to avoid being judged at job interviews or by supervising principals. The process of is not an easy one. Fraught with physical discomforts and

emotional tension, it is a messy, often arduous ordeal. It can lead to feeling compromised: *This isn't me. I don't feel like myself anymore.* It can be downright exasperating: *Why am I doing this? I'm the same person whether I wear a tank top or a long-sleeved dress shirt. This is so pointless!*

Before I understood who I was as teacher I had to sort of inhabit who I was not as teacher.

– Adam
(Interview,
April 1, 2010)

The start of a novice teacher's career, tattooed or not, is a tumultuous, amorphous time of experiential blobs waiting to be refined into a more distinct vision of what it means to “become” a teacher. A cohesive professional identity does not appear on day one; new teachers don't cross their classroom thresholds perfectly formed into ideal educators. Their “teacher pores” must first be filled by experiences like surmounting job interviews, mastering supply teaching, de-riddling classroom management, and de-mystifying report cards. But before any of these experiences can be negotiated, new teachers must first and foremost conquer what could very possibly be the toughest personal challenge of all: *assuming the look of a teacher*. For many educators, taking up an “expected” teacher identity, that is, one that parallels the conservative expectations of most elementary and secondary schools, causes significant distress (Britzman, 2006). The process of becoming a teacher might even be described as painful, just like getting tattooed can be painful. What happens to those of us, especially newcomers to the field of education, who:

Don't look like the teachers in the school where [we] are working? Or act like them? Or value what they value? How do you develop a teacher identity that is both accepted by the school and palatable to you? How do you get and keep a job without giving up the very essence of who you are? (Britzman, 2006, p. xiv)

Internal struggles ensue. Push and pull forces surface with intensity, driven on one side by a career-oriented desire to impress the principal and secure a job, fuelled on the other side by a wish to hold onto who you are and what you believe in. These desires tug, wrench even, inexperienced teachers in uncomfortable opposing directions, and can leave them feeling the pressure to “play the part” of teacher convincingly in order to fit in better with their established colleagues, often by downplaying or suppressing aspects of their self-identity or self-expression (Alsup, 2006).

Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam experienced these disgruntled tensions as they embarked on their careers, trying to fit into teacher images that looked little like themselves. Each brought with them a mental image of how teachers “should look,”²¹ a benchmark to measure their own appearance against formed from years of observing their own teachers and viewing portrayals in TV, movies, and books. All three approached their early days as educators envisioning “the teacher” as someone who possesses a very different body and sense of style from their own, and none – despite being hired as tattooed individuals – imagined the teacher as tattooed. Vanessa, for instance, describes teachers in square terms quite unlike her own urban look:

Dress pants, dress shirt. Conservative. Plain. Boring. You know, not urban. Which I really identify with because I listen to rap music and have my whole life. So ya – square. [Laughs].” (Interview, May 25, 2010)

When I ask Vanessa how she pictures a chemistry teacher, given her role as a senior high school chemistry teacher, her answer paints a portrait entirely unlike her young, tattooed self:

“I can only relate it to my own experience in high school, which was [chemistry teachers] were much older. And even if they were younger they were super nerdy. Like they fit

²¹ In participant interviews (2010), Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe used the phrases “how a teacher should look,” and, “how teachers should look” when describing what type of image they were trying to achieve.

every kind of nerdy stereotype that you can really imagine. And my OAC chemistry teacher actually wore a pocket protector, but I loved him dearly, he was a wonderful, wonderful man...” (Interview, May 25, 2010)

Adam also describes individuals much unlike himself, at the same time admitting that his memories are likely hyperboles for the teachers he had when young:

What’s the image that I have in my head? I don’t know. Bad pants. Bad shoes. Bad shirts... It’s like oversized shirts and I don’t know. P.E. teachers with shorts that are too short. [Laughs]. Which is not reality. Like in reality, I have worked in a school with eighty teachers; there’s a diversity of different styles that exist. But ya, in terms of the teachers that stand out in my mind, I only remember those instances of, you know, very plain, drab... I’m sure memory is different from what it actually was. But in terms of the images that pop into my mind, that’s all I can think.” (Interview, November 14, 2010)

Chloe’s notion of how teachers “should” look is an amalgam of what she remembers from television, books and movies, combined with the teachers she saw every day growing up. By her own account, she can’t recall a single teacher who had tattoos:

Oh, there’s definitely a simple visual of course. I mean, you think of movies like *Dangerous Minds*, or what was that other, Hillary Swank... *Freedom Writers*. I mean, you have this tall woman, long hair – whether it’s blonde, whether it’s dark hair – it’s usually this tall, straight woman (for the most part), you know, dressed in these little floral dresses and whatnot. So, that’s what I see. Or I see an older, grumpy crusty lady with her glasses on



Figure 4: Teacher, *Dangerous Minds*. Retrieved online: <http://static.thecia.com.au/reviews/d/dangerous-minds->

the end of her nose. I mean that's the image that I think has been put into our minds from literature, movies.

Even when I was younger there was a very mainstream, or a very specific picture [of teachers] that you would see in the school... Even now, whether it be male, whether it be female, I don't think I've seen a movie yet where you had, you know, someone who had visible tattoos or piercings [as a teacher]. It's always these thin, well-dressed people (not to say I'm not well-dressed, cause I do feel that I go to school with a professional look). But there's a clear image in my mind of what a typical teacher 'should' look like.

(Interview, October 23, 2010)

Comparing these descriptions with Vanessa, Adam and Chloe's own appearances, it's immediately apparent they don't match their own accounts of how teachers should look. Vanessa with her Air Jordan sneakers, jeans and sporty t-shirts. Adam with faded black jeans, black shoes, and plaid shirts. Chloe with hip leggings, unique hairstyles, vintage skirts and a ton of fun jewelry. There's not a pair of glasses perched on the nose, a bland outfit, or pocket protector to be found among them. They all have visible tattoos on their arms, wrists, chests, or ankles (or all of these locations)²². Yet not one of them remembers having a tattooed teacher when they were students or even recalls seeing a depiction of one in the media. What then, was it like for them to step into their new teacher identities given these disparities?

Before exploring Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe's experiences of fitting in as teachers, just what does it mean to discuss "teacher identity"? Teacher identity encompasses many things. It includes a teacher's values and beliefs, what he or she thinks about education and pedagogy, and how personal experiences shape his or her approaches to the roles and responsibilities of being

²² Descriptions of Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe's clothing and personal style taken from hand-written research notes kept during interview sessions (Interviews, 2010).

an educator (Beijaard et al., 2003, p. 108). But teacher identity also includes aspects that are far more physically tangible. Clothes, for example; what teachers wear every day and how these garments make them feel. Clothing plays an important role in teacher identity, for it is “through our choice of clothes and adornment [that] we voice our struggle to become teacher, while remaining individuals” (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 61). The act of presenting your body in clothing also signifies a sense of ease or dis/ease, an expression or repression of aesthetic, a sense of what is appropriate in relation to being accepted by a particular audience, and most of all, a “sense of oneself” (Blaikie, 2009, p. 2). It might seem easy to dismiss getting dressed as inconsequential to a teaching career when compared to elements such as relating to students, working with colleagues, speaking to parents, and delivering lessons. But the fact remains: how we dress can affect us. Unless one lives in a nudist community, most of us “experience the world primarily clothed; we, therefore, experience the world, not just in, but more importantly, through our clothes” (Barney, 2007, pp. 90-92). If these clothes make us feel constricted uncomfortable, what does this say about how we experience our daily life?

Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe’s early career experiences demonstrate how clothes, in particular when used to conceal their tattoos in order to adopt a professional teacher image, can become an enormously important part of teacher identity formation. Their memories are embroidered with the unwelcome pinch of button-down shirts and collars, the ill-fitting sensation of dress pants, and the humid sweatiness produced by long sleeves in summer weather. Some teachers may find dressing for work routine or even enjoyable. For Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe however, their novice career clothing experiences were more akin to donning straightjackets than stepping out in professional garb. They describe sensations of stifling, scratching, constricting, binding, pressing, faking, forcing themselves into molds as unnatural as costumes. In a word:

uncomfortable. Whether your work clothes are adored or abhorred, these sensations are not difficult to imagine. It's the endured self-torture of sucking in your breath and trussing yourself up too tightly for the sake of a black tie affair. That eveningwear looks smashing, but forget the hors d'oeuvres because there's not a millimeter to spare. That neon shirt gifted from a best friend comes out of the closet on Friday night because admitting it's awful would hurt feelings. A ridiculous hat topped with a massive pompom that would make a clown proud finds its way to your noggin because darn it, it's so cold your ears have gone numb. Sweating buckets behind the kitchen grill has to happen because safety regulations state long sleeves are mandatory; drip and bear it. Flat hair is awful, but bike accidents are even uglier so on goes the helmet. And, as many of us have experienced, we sometimes resign ourselves to weekday wardrobes we'll never cherish in order to look professional in the workplace.

This is especially apparent in Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe's experiences as they navigated the formative stages of their careers: practicum placements, job interviews and the first year on the job. In an awkward layering act of hiding and revealing, each recalls a terribly uncomfortable relationship with their early teaching wardrobe. For each, this obstacle course of long sleeves, sweaters, dress pants, and even Band-Aids, was constructed out of their own internal motivations. In the absence of written rules or formal regulations dictating a teacher dress code²³, they adopted their own appearance-related parameters. Prodded into self-regulation by past judgments made about their tattoos, parental cautions, or reminders from teachers' college instructors, they recall instances of resigning themselves "teacher clothes", a process that is physically stifling and often emotionally draining.

²³ None of the study participants' schools of employment had written rules dictating what they may and may not wear to teach at school. This included a lack of rules regarding tattoos, and none were ever told verbally by a member of the school community (superior or otherwise) that they must cover their tattoos at work.

Vanessa, for instance, describes a shopping experience so acutely uncomfortable during our first interview together I can feel my own skin start to crawl as she pulls at the threads of her memories. With distaste palpable in her words, she recounts how it felt to part ways with her jeans and t-shirts the week before starting her first teaching job:

Vanessa stands in front of the entrance to the dressing room and frowns. *I don't want to do this. Get me out of here now.* She glances over her shoulder to see her mother mere steps away, smiling encouragingly and energetically shooing her into a changing stall. Vanessa enters, locks the door with the little metal bar, and rests her forehead on the wall. She holds her breath and stares at the lint-flecked floor, stifling the rude remarks on the tip of her tongue. She'd love nothing more than to vent her frustration and discomfort. Loudly. But that won't get her anywhere. Work starts next week. She can't arrive without something to wear. It's her first fulltime teaching job. Her jeans and well-loved t-shirts will have to wait for her at home. A groan escapes from deep in her chest. *What about my Air Jordans? They can't expect me to wear heels can they? Can they?!* Her heart starts to beat faster. She feels sweat break out on her palms. *Funny. I felt way less nervous at my job interview than I do now.*

She clutches with near desperation to her double fistful of clothes hangars. They make her fingers tingle, as if she's suffering mild contact burns from something corrosive – or, if not corrosive, then definitely unpleasant and certainly to be avoided. She's holding onto the metal handholds a little too firmly. Her jaw is clenched a bit too tightly. In an attempt to calm her flight response, she mentally inventories her selection: button down tops, blouses, a blazer, slacks. Yes, slacks. Those cause a shudder, a scowl and a mild sense of horror. Not once in her life has she worn slacks all day long. Her jeans are her familiar friends and she's not ready to abandon them now.

It's a good thing she brought as much into the tiny stall as possible. Without the clothes' sheer bulk blocking the door, she'd likely turn tail and bolt straight out of the mall without looking back. It's a large load. Her professional wardrobe is starting from scratch. She tosses the lot of it down on the chair in front of her, casting a nasty look at the heap of fabric as it pools blandly in a muddle of beige, brown, black, white, and cream. Resigning herself to the task at hand, she doffs her comfy casuals and tries on a pair of dress slacks and a blouse. As she fastens the buttons on the shirt, she feels stifled. The sleeves press against her arms. The cloth pulls strangely tight as she bends down, restricting her natural motions. The neck is too close, too stiff. The pants constrict her hips, don't flex with the cozy stretch of her worn-in denim. She feels crammed into a mold that doesn't fit. A teacher mold. A teacher mold made for someone shaped utterly unlike herself. It's like trying to fit a Vanessa-sized peg into a teacher-sized hole: it doesn't want to go in willingly.

Vanessa stands stalk still in front of the mirror. Paralyzed by the uncomfortable unfamiliarity, she stands motionless. *Why am I doing this to myself?* As if in reply, she

hears the voice of a teacher's college instructor in the back of her mind. Primly it reminds her, "*Oh, you have to dress like this. You need to look professional*"²⁴. She gives a long hard look at herself in the mirror. Her reflection shows her shoulders drawn, her brows knitted, her fists clenched. *I sure don't feel professional. I feel choked*. She tugs at the shirt collar and wiggles awkwardly in the slacks. Reinforcing the necessity of her new style, the voice of her science subject matter professor from teacher's college chimes in, "*You shouldn't be showing piercings and tattoos. You want to make a good impression. You should be wearing professional, business-type clothing*."²⁵ As the words echo in her mind, she remembers sitting in the university classroom. She can picture her professor as she stands at the front of the room, addressing the roomful of teacher candidates with this candid advice. With these memories fresh at hand, Vanessa holds her arm up for inspection. The blouse sleeves cover her upper arm tattoos. The stiff opaque material reveals nothing. It rasps coarsely against her skin.

With the slow, deliberate movements of accepting the inevitable, Vanessa grabs a blazer from the pile on the chair and slips it on over the blouse. She smiles ruefully at the mirror, reminding herself this day was bound to come. She went through similar image adjustments during teacher's college, preparing for practicum placements. Even before starting her degree, her friends' parents and men would sometimes judge her for being a young tattooed woman. Her mind darts back to the year she turned fourteen, when she got her first tattoo. The judgments began. Her friends' parents wrongly judged her for being stupid and unsuccessful in school. Men started to mistake her tattoos as symbols of promiscuity, or a sign she was "easy," even though they're located on her arms and chest and not the lower back "tramp stamp"²⁶. Teenage experiences, but their effects trickle through to the present as she fast approaches her first teaching job. As she continues to stand rigid as a board, loathing how this work "costume" feels, she can almost hear echoes of past rude remarks. The sleeves against her arms carry the weight of those words in their starched weave.

Vanessa heaves a sigh. Pulls off the blazer, removes the blouse as swiftly as the buttons will allow, and rubs her arms briskly. She tosses the offending garments on the chair in the tiny stall. Her t-shirt and jeans slide easily back into place, like pulling herself back on instead of simply re-dressing in what she arrived.

With a final glare at the pile of clothes, Vanessa scoops them up and heads bitterly to the cashier. Getting ready for work on Monday is going to be a struggle.

Vanessa's experience highlights how new teachers don't just check their personal identities at the door and painlessly step into perfectly prefabricated teacher molds the moment they complete

²⁴ (Interview, May 25, 2010).

²⁵ (Interview, May 25, 2010).

²⁶ "Tramp stamp" is a colloquial term used to refer to lower back tattoos on women. Because these tattoos typically show when a woman is wearing very low-cut pants, they are frequently viewed as a sign of sexual promiscuity. For a further discussion of tramp stamps and other tattoo placements traditionally associated with women, see Margot Mifflin's (1997) *Bodies of subversion: A secret history of women and tattoo*.

their education degree. As Deborah Britzman (1995) rightly points out, “Teacher identity is too often treated as unproblematic and singular in nature. It is usually taken for granted in some a priori way as an outcome of pedagogical skills or an aftermath of classroom experience” (p. 25). What is also taken for granted is how viscerally uncomfortable the process of teacher identity formation can be. Learning to mark assignments and manage a class is challenging enough. But who stops to consider the physical angst some teacher candidates will experience as they re-make their self-image into how a teacher is supposed to look? If they’re not already inclined to appear teacherly (insofar as a particular school community defines this look), who will ease them through this reluctant, if not painful makeover? Where Vanessa’s formal teacher’s college instruction did not usher her through this, she fell back on cues from her personal history. A teacher’s biography, including early teaching role models, previous teaching experiences, important people, and significant prior experiences are instrumental to the process of professional identity formation (Beijaard et al., 2003, p. 115). Vanessa’s contains numerous elements that impact her teaching identity: her friends’ parents judging her as unintelligent for being tattooed, men assuming she is promiscuous, her father’s strong negative reaction upon seeing her first tattoo, her teachers’ college instructors’ stern words warning, and her own high school science teachers she remembers as nerdy, middle-aged, non-tattooed men with pocket calculators (Interview, May 25, 2010). Vanessa cannot discard these biographical elements like old fashions gone out of style. They are with her when she signs her first teaching contract; they join her in her classroom when she arrives to work. And they most certainly follow her into the dressing room at the mall, silently prodding her into dress slacks and blazers against all sense of personal comfort.

In a different city, learning high school English pedagogy rather than science, Adam experienced his own distasteful wardrobe struggle during practicum placements and the first months of his teaching career. Like Vanessa, his personal biography shaped his approach to adopting his new teacher image, leading him to endure a shopping trip and sweltering through summer days in long sleeves. Adam describes feeling just as disenchanting and uncomfortable dressing the part of teacher as Vanessa did:

With thirty dollars in his pocket and a mission to dress like a teacher for the next two weeks of his practicum placement Adam arrives at his local Value Village. One endless row of menswear looks equally as bad as the next, so he grabs the first few items in his size and hits the change room. He tries on a pair of slacks followed by khakis, then two button-down shirts. He completes the process as quickly as possible. If they don't fall off and aren't overly tight they'll do. They look and feel strange and he knows they're not flattering, but they're good enough to pass muster for his first classroom placement.

He takes one long, assessing look at himself in the mirror. Non-descript. Bland. He'll blend in just fine. His upper arms are covered, so the red and black ink won't draw any attention. He then notices the less-than-perfect fit of the sleeves leave the cuffs awkwardly too short. His wrists poke free, displaying his moth tattoo. Adam frowns down on the cuff to no avail. In a moment of resourcefulness, he flips his watch around so the face covers the black ink. There. Between the dull khakis, button-down shirt, and camouflaging watch face, there's not a single detail left even the most conservative person can criticize. Satisfied with his de facto temporary wardrobe, Adam pays and leaves the discount store thirty dollars poorer and with two more teacher outfits than he started with.

A few days later, Adam sits at the back of the Grade 10 classroom his teacher's college assigned him to, observing the daily proceedings as he's been directed to do. The students wear uniforms. The teacher wears slacks and a collared shirt. To Adam, they all look void of personal details, lacking visual markers for who they are and what they like. It feels oddly sterile. Adam can't decipher which students are into music, or sports, or literature. He thinks back to his own high school days, when he'd naturally gravitate towards kids who wore clothes that looked similar to his own. He's always felt clothes were an important part of his identity, even today. Looking down at his drab khakis and button-down shirt, it's no wonder he feels fidgety and more than a little uncomfortable.

Adam takes another scan of the room. Tidy rows of desks, tidy rows of identically clad teenagers. It lacks personality. Which is exactly how he feels in his make-do Value Village gear. On the plus side, his goal of blending in and looking inconspicuous seems to be working. Nobody has questioned him about his tattoos, or why "someone like him" wants to be a teacher. In erasing his own personal identifiers off the surface, Adam melds

into the background, avoids being judged for his tattoos and sense of style before he even teaches his first practice lesson. In that respect, his awkward-fitting, uninspired outfit has been a success.

More than four years have passed since Adam bulldozed through his first practicum placement, miserable with his wardrobe. While those unloved Value Village teacher clothes have long since been abandoned to the trash bin, he still clearly remembers how wearing them made him feel. “I was uncomfortable in my own skin, you know? And the first thing I did when I got home was just tear off the clothes” (Interview, April 2, 2010). The effects were felt beyond this end-of-day release; wearing clothes he disliked so strongly began to take its toll emotionally:

I guess I would have loved to have bought really amazing sharp suits or something, you know, like nice clothes. But I just couldn’t afford that. So I did just buy the chinos and the shirts that would tuck in, but I wasn’t able to worry about how good they looked and I figured that that didn’t matter. But if you’re going to be wearing clothes every single day that you don’t feel very comfortable in, then it’s going to affect how you feel about yourself. At least it did for me. (Interview, April 2, 2010)

By his own description, Adam’s first practicum placement was meant to be about observation: to watch how the teacher conducts a class, delivers lessons, manages a room of teenagers (Interview, April 2, 2010). While this surely took place, what lingered longest and made the strongest impression was not the minutia of how the classroom pedagogy unfolded, but how thoroughly uncomfortable he felt in his own skin. Adam’s ingrained physical memory from his teacher training days brings to mind what Janet Alsup (2006) suggests in her work on teacher identity:

Denying or ignoring the bodily component of teaching and insisting, explicitly or implicitly, that teaching is an art that can be learned completely through intellectual study

and critical thought is essentially unfair to the new teacher who must place his or her bodily self in front of 120-plus students every day to enact the role of teacher. (p. 93)

Enacting the role of a new teacher involves more “acting” for some than others. For Adam, it meant trying to blend in like part of the scenery, existing but unnoticed as part of the classroom backdrop. His long sleeves became his tattoo-concealing costume for the duration of his first year of teaching; his classroom and school hallways the stage upon which he tried to present a convincing teacher image to an audience of colleagues. Adam was so committed to his role of “authentic teacher” that he held himself with unwavering discipline to sweating out the hottest workdays in long sleeves, even when encounters with his superiors were unlikely at best:

It is not easy to act like a teacher in the theatre of contemporary schools. It requires seeing others and being seen, without being reduced to our images (Grumet, 1988, p. 116).

Windows rolled down, a tepid breeze streaming into the car, three teachers cruise through morning traffic on their routine carpool towards another day at school. Adam sits in the back, one arm resting over the windowsill, his tattoos visible on the bare skin below the cuff of his t-shirt, the sun glinting brightly off his wristwatch. It is hot. Sweating hot. Adam knows his classroom will be hot today, too; a windowless concrete box the school’s insufficient air conditioning never quite manages to reach. A button-down, long-sleeved dress shirt lies lifeless on the humid upholstery beside him. Not quite a nemesis, but the garment is no friendly presence to him, either. For a few more blessed slow-moving blocks he can continue to sit as is, unconcernedly sporting a t-shirt and bantering with his half-awake colleagues.

The car pulls into the teacher’s parking lot. His friends slide out and grab their bags, heading for the school’s double-doors. Adam reaches into the back seat and snatches his long-sleeved shirt. One arm in. Then the next. He works his way down the row of buttons, carefully fastening each one tight. With a militaristic discipline he smoothes his shirt flat with a sigh. It’s too hot for the shirt. But with a resolve bred from years of Air Cadets upbringing, he dons the “uniform” of his teaching post. The shirt covers his arms to the wrists and keeps his tattoos out of view. His watch conceals the moth tattoo on the inside of his wrist where the shirt doesn’t reach. Now fully clad, a soldier completing his well-rehearsed drill, he walks through the doors to start another day in his over-warm classroom. Adam promised himself he wouldn’t show his tattoos for the year, his first year in a permanent teaching job. He won’t waver from this promise. He is nothing if not stubbornly self-disciplined.

As he walks down the hall to his classroom, Adam feels a surge of annoyance, a sentiment he's been feeling more frequently as the days march on towards July. *Why do I do this? I've been doing this for close to ten months and it still feels awful.* He feels trapped. Trapped in his long sleeves. Trapped in his classroom, with its windowless jail cell atmosphere. Terrible ventilation; kids strapped into uniforms. Adam catches a glance of himself in the reflective glass of his classroom door as he pushes it open. *Here I am, the fake, the imposter dressed up in a teacher costume.*

“Visibility is a trap,” Michel Foucault (1979) states in *Discipline and Punish* (p. 200).

The very *possibility* of being observed at any point during your workday, “surveilled” as he would call it, by a superior who has the authority to punish transgression is often enough to alter behaviour into what is viewed as compliant (p. 201). For Adam, this manifests as wearing long sleeves on hot days, enduring the muggy heat of his classroom covered to the wrist. Sleeves become his guard against the trap of visibility, a shield to protect him from potential judgment from colleagues, students, or his principal, who might view his tattoos as reason to question his teaching ability. They don't know him well yet, and impressions are formed quickly based on what people see; Adam is well aware of this. He knows there's a possibility that someone at school will see his ink and question his motivations for wanting to teach in a special education placement he has not been specifically trained for, surrounded by prim, uniform-clad pupils.²⁷ More than halfway through his first year on the job, he's surprised the principal hasn't paid him a visit yet. As a brand new employee, isn't he supposed to be watched closely, have his performance regularly evaluated? His department head is equally as scarce, has not once ducked in to assess a lesson or pass along pedagogical pointers (Interview, April 2, 2010). So Adam dons his long sleeves every day and waits for the critique that may or may never come:

Adam steps into his empty classroom, focuses on his daily routine: setting up his lessons, preparing assignments to pass back, welcoming students as they come in the door. This buttoned-down version of himself looks like the teacher next door, the teacher down the hall, the teachers in the staff room. Nothing to see here, all is normal, pass along...

²⁷ Interview, Nov. 14, 2010.

Nothing to set him apart, no reason for his peers, his administration or his students to focus on anything but his teaching. Nothing to make them pause and wonder if Adam is a suitable teacher after all, especially not his ink.

Maybe it's the heat and humidity, but Adam feels especially annoyed today. *Why do I keep doing this to myself? I'm hot. I'm uncomfortable. I hate the clothes. I can't wait to get home and change back into my jeans and t-shirt. Does anyone even care what I look like? It's not like they ever come into my classroom.*

Two of his students are complaining about their mothers, how strict and nagging they are, how they're making their lives miserable. Adam takes in their words with an empathetic tic of his cheek. His own mother is a force to be reckoned with. A mother who went out of her mind with anger when her under-aged son arrived home one afternoon with a tattoo. In a rage, she scoured every tattoo studio in town, hunting down the amoral artist who dared defile her son's skin. Horrified but powerless to stop her, Adam took in her maternal fury and vowed to do everything in his power to keep his tattoo out of sight and out of mind. He covered it up in his mother's house. He certainly didn't talk about it. Even when it became wildly infected, he didn't go to his mother for help. Better to not invite a new wave of anger. His father was none too pleased with his tattoo either, and Adam soon learned that it was a matter best left ignored between them. Wearing long sleeves helped with his father too.

Like Vanessa, Adam's personal history also guides his decision to cover his tattoos as a new teacher. Driven by a self-discipline perfected by years of Air Cadets training, and fuelled by his mother's truly memorable fury over his tattoos, Adam buttons down his resolve to dress convincingly like a teacher despite hating the clothes. While his mother's eyesight cannot penetrate the school walls, and even though his principal never visits his class, just imagining the effect of being in their view and what the consequences might ensue suffice to shape his behaviour.²⁸ Adam knows he is visible to the powers at school: the principal, the administration, his department head. He takes full responsibility for the image he projects to them, does so diligently despite not knowing when, or even *if* anyone with clout will look his way. Adam has

²⁸ Stern (1993) discusses "self-conscious affects" such as shame, guilt and embarrassment, noting that to feel these affects requires "...some experience with and some current element of being in the real or imagined 'eyesight' or attention of others... As with joy, anger, and sadness, the question arises for shame, embarrassment, and guilt: whether the interacting partners need be actually present, or whether the memory or some unaware 'internalized' existence of their presence or function suffices" (p. 209).

become, as Foucault (1979) would call it, “the principle of his own subjection” (p. 202). Under the pressure of feeling watched as a brand new employee but not knowing when and to what result he might be evaluated, Adam takes the safe route and always covers his arms. This becomes the school’s silent win over Adam’s subjectivity, “a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation,” or any physical interaction at all for that matter (pp. 202-203). His morning ritual in the parking lot is what Foucault (1973) would call a “technology of the self,” a technique that individuals use to work on themselves by regulating their bodies, thoughts, and conduct (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2001, p. 128). So, while nobody with hiring/firing power has stormed into Adam’s classroom and demanded he cover his arms, he feels compelled of his own volition to safeguard against this possible disciplinary scenario:

Another day over; another day without hide or hair of the principal glimpsed or even a flash of the department head caught outside the classroom door. Another uneventful day of going absolutely unnoticed. Another day feeling like an inmate constrained by the prison of his teaching career, just now released on a 3:45 p.m. yard pass into the parking lot. Adam rolls his shoulders, grabs a cigarette from his shoulder bag. He breathes long and deep, then loosens his buttons as he abandons his “teacher-self” in increments, step-by-step, button-by-button, as he treads closer to the car. He slides into his customary place in the back seat, tossing the long-sleeved shirt down in a crumple. Shrugging the last of his day off, he relaxes for his ride home, arms free to breathe at last.

Vanessa’s clothing battle unfolded the week before her first teaching job began. It was similar for Adam, who grudgingly bought teacher’s clothes for his first practicum placement and then carried through wearing them his first year on the job. For Chloe, wardrobe woes were not as memorable during practicum placements or her first months at work as they were for a specific job interview that occurred a few years into her career. Sitting in a beam of bright afternoon sun in a booth at a favourite local pub for our first interview together, Chloe recalls her instant reaction to an invitation to an unexpected job interview. Her mind didn’t stray to credentials, experience, or portfolios, but to sweaters. I notice in the day’s sticky heat, she has

selected a comfortable black tank top to wear, effectively staying cool in the pub's cloying interior. But as she recounts attending this short-notice job interview on a hot fall day a couple of years ago, she can't help shake her head and laugh out loud at how the situation made her sweat; literally:

Chloe hangs up the phone in the teachers' lounge, takes a deep breath, and wonders what exactly she's going to do about her outfit. She's not ready for a job interview on such short notice, at least not as far as her clothing is concerned. As a current employee of the Catholic school board, she knows she's guaranteed *a* job next September, but which job remains to be seen. Her current school is undergoing staffing changes. She knows she'll likely be transferred elsewhere next year. Rather than let the school board choose where she's going, she's been applying for openings that interest her.



The new elementary school that just opened in the suburbs has caught her attention. The interest appears to be mutual – the principal just called and asked her to drop by for an interview. *This afternoon!* Chloe's not worried about meeting the school's standards, or her ability to do a good-quality teaching job; she's confident she can do both. With a few years experience under her belt, those butterflies are minimal. But she does feel caught off-guard clothing-wise. Tonight is the school board banquet. Chloe planned to leave straight from school at the end of her workday. With no time to go home and change, she came to school dressed for the party. Her tank top and skirt are perfect for a dancing the night away. They're not perfect for a job interview. The tank top leaves her arms bare from shoulders to wrist, putting her many colorful tattoos on clear display.

Her eyes scan the room, searching for a coat, sweater or even a spare long-sleeved top. As she searches for an extra layer of clothing, Chloe's mind wanders back three years to her first job interview with a private school. She showed up with a Band-Aid pasted over her ankle tattoo. She chuckles to herself. Growing up with two lawyers for parents, she's the first to tell you, "*I wasn't born yesterday.*" She knew then, and knows now, that some people will see her tattoos in a negative light. Especially during job interviews. Ever resourceful in a pinch, she didn't let even a shortage of Band-Aids stop her in her early interview days. With a twinge of a calf muscle, she remembers crossing her legs in an admirable show of flexibility, wrapping one foot strategically around her ankle to hide her zodiac symbol tattoo. When she moved on from her private school position and into the Catholic elementary school board, Chloe stuck to her, "*I wasn't born yesterday*" mantra. She dressed in long sleeves to hide her heavily tattooed arms and wrists.

She wishes she had long sleeves today. Slightly frantic feelings start to brew. Even in her air-conditioned classroom, her hurried search for sleeves had brought beads of sweat out on her brow. *Today isn't just hot, it's roasting.* But she's not going to jeopardize a job opportunity by waltzing into an interview with her ink on full display. Why take the chance when someone else could get the job over her – someone with ink-free arms?

What if her interview panel reacts the same way her father did when he saw her first tattoo? She can still hear his cautionary words, *"Oh, now you're marked. Did you know you have a police file now?"* Years later, Chloe knows how ridiculous this claim is. She knew it wasn't possible, even at 16. But her father's words hit home as she realized he was placing her in the same category as criminal troublemakers. Even the TV shows and movies she watched, the books she read growing up, reinforced negative images of tattooed people as gang members, thugs, low-lives, no-goods. To avoid being lumped into this stereotypical view of tattooed people, Chloe is determined to find something to cover her arms for today's interview. Best to show her classy side, even if it means sweating it out.

Ah! An idea hits her. Her colleague next door has a cardigan hanging in the coat closet. *I'll just ask to borrow it. There. Problem solved.*

Less than a half hour later, Chloe saunters into the hiring principal's office, ready to tackle her interview. She takes her seat calmly, resists the urge to push up the thick knitted sleeves of her borrowed cardigan to allow some air on her arms. Instead, she gives a subtle, careful tug down on each cuff, ensuring her wrist tattoos are tucked completely out of view. With a polite smile she greets her panel, acting for all the world as if wearing thick black wool on a 35-degree-Celcius day is perfectly normal. She bites her lip to stop an unseemly giggle from escaping. *How I must look to them! They must think I'm crazy, dressed like it's snowing outside. But better to let them think I'm strangely cold than lose out because they don't like tattoos.*

Chloe's reaction is automatic, her search for sleeves honed to the point of reflex. She has no way of knowing in advance what her interview panel will think about her tattoos. What she does know for certain is that walking in sleeveless will display an eyeful of her ink, and that the old adage is true, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," which is especially true during a job interview (Swanger, 2006, p. 156). Rather than taking a risk to discover directly what her interviewers might think, possibly jeopardizing her job offer in the process, she lets habit take over. No matter how hot the day, how sweaty she'll feel, she'd rather cover up than chance being judged. Foucault (1979) would call Chloe's ingrained actions a form of

“discipline,” which can also be thought of as a series of small, self-subjecting actions people impose on themselves (p. 138). These often minor processes stem from various origins, but they always overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another until they gradually converge into “a blueprint of a general method” (p. 138). Chloe’s discipline stems from various memories that overlap and support her belief that not everyone loves her tattoos as much as she does: her father’s words echoing a criminal connotation for tattoos; the repeated stereotypical images she encountered on TV, in movies and in books; the scornful comments tossed her way in grocery stores and from sidewalks by elderly women who find her arms distasteful (Interview, October 23, 2010). These minor details, experienced multiple times over many years, sketch out the blueprint for Chloe’s automatic reaction when invited to a job interview. Ingrained as her actions are, Chloe admits she doesn’t feel fully comfortable with her compulsion to cover up at interviews. And this goes beyond just sweating in the heat:

Her interview over, Chloe leaves the principal’s office and heads back to her own school to get ready for the evening banquet. Stepping into her familiar cozy classroom she peels off the damp woolen cardigan. She rubs the moisture off her arms and lets the air conditioning breathe its relieving breeze across her skin. After a moment, she bends down and absent-mindedly pulls the Band-Aid off her ankle, revealing the black ink below. The motions are automatic, instinctual. Cover for interview; peel off afterwards.

Chloe sighs. Every time she interviews, her mind darts to the same question, *What will cover me best?* But underneath the fabric layer, she knows she’s the same person with the same teaching skills, ink or no ink. As automatic as her covering actions are, the aftermath leaves her perturbed. She sits for a moment, silently questioning the usefulness of the process she just went through. It’s not like she’s willing to cover herself every single day on the job. Eventually, someone on that hiring panel is going to find out, and it’s not like she can peel off her tattoos the same way she just peeled off her Band-Aid. She sighs again. The best she can do tonight is step out at the school board banquet comfortably herself in a tank top and skirt. With the lank, sweat-sodden sweater left behind on her desk, she heads out for an evening of fun, tattoos in plain view.

Chloe’s sweater borrowing and ankle-hiding tactics hint at the literal Band-Aid nature of her tattoo concealing approaches. Whether it’s a rectangle of flesh-coloured adhesive or fabric

sleeves, these temporary fixes do not change the person underneath. Covering her tattoos will not magically enhance her ability to teach French. Sleeves won't boost her pedagogical powers. Her frustration stems from knowing how shallow her ruse is; how beneath a thin layer she might look very different but is the same person nonetheless. Margaret Maynard (2007) would point out the tactical aspect of Chloe's interview approach, how she uses clothes to present, communicate, define, and deceive (cited in Springgay & Freedman, p. 83). Maynard would also note that while clothes are central to identity, this is not in a deterministic way (p. 83). Chloe's interview clothes don't set her image in stone: she becomes the ideal job candidate for an hour spent in a sweater; the moment she's back in her own classroom, the sweater comes off and she becomes once again the tattooed version of herself – still a teacher, but in a different guise.

Chloe *performs* the role of the expected teacher body when she attends interviews, her sweater is a prop to support the act. Judith Butler (1999) speaks to this performative nature of the body's surface, noting how, "Just as bodily surfaces are enacted *as* the natural, so these surfaces can become the site of a dissonant and denaturalized performance that reveals the performative status of the natural itself" (p. 186; original emphasis). While Butler is speaking about male and female gender performance, her words ring just as true for teachers. *There is no natural teacher body*. Just as being a man or woman has no one natural state of being muscled or lithe, made-up or makeup-free, long or short-haired, there is no natural state of being for teachers, no right way to compose a teacher body out of the correct combination of glasses, tidy hair, conservative clothing, or plain or tattooed skin. There is only the performance of one, built from long sleeves, sweaters, Band-Aids and slacks that conceal the true surface from immediate view.

Vanessa also struggled with feeling disingenuous for performing the look of a teacher. Her clothes, she describes, became a barrier erected between herself and her students, a fabric division that all too effectively hid part of personality from view:

Vanessa dumps a bag full of assignments at her front door and trudges upstairs to change. She hangs her slacks and blouse in the closet beside a half dozen similar outfits. As she places the hanger neatly in its place, a wave of unhappiness rolls over her, causes her to sink dejectedly on the edge of her bed. She sits momentarily, rubbing her temples with her index fingers in slow, deliberate circles. It's the first week of her new job. She should be thrilled to be hired as a fulltime teacher. Instead, she's sitting here miserably unhappy with her clothes, dreading tomorrow morning when she has to get up and put them on again.

A patch of red catches her eye from the back corner of the closet. *My old cashier smock.* It's the closest she's ever come to dressing to please someone else, her store manager. But even then she got to wear her t-shirts and jeans under the smock. She still felt like herself, but with a smock on top. Now, she gets up every morning and makes herself over to accommodate the education system by putting on a teacher front.

She shakes her head at the array of collared shirts and blazers that sit starched on the rod in front of her. *What do I look like to my students? Those suits aren't me. I'm not like that. It's like I'm trying to trick people into thinking I'm something I'm not.* The thought pulls a dejected sigh through her body. It's not like she's lying to her students exactly... But how will they ever get to know her properly? Her love for graffiti and rap music? The stories behind her tattoos? The fact she even *has* tattoos? How can they see all this about her when she's hidden behind a collar-shirt-blazer getup? *All those explanations I give them about myself in class. It's like I need to justify myself with words to prove who I am, what I'm really like because they can't see for themselves.*

Vanessa smirks. *If this were a game of dress-up it would be the bad kind. Like 'Boo, business person dress-up' not 'Yay! Witches and princess dress-up.'* Actually, she admits, it's not like dress-up at all. It's more like becoming an unnatural, foreign-feeling person who's completely unlike herself.

Vanessa's description evokes feelings of falsity, of acting the imposter to herself and to her students. Shaping herself into a teacher image leaves her feeling foreign in her own skin. In their work on teacher identity, Weber & Mitchell (1995) ask, "Would dressing more like our 'true' selves while we teach be a way of reclaiming that part of our personal identity that becomes 'lost' in the process of incorporating professional identity?" (p. 62). While it is difficult to define

just what one's "true" self is, it's clear that Vanessa would feel more comfortable, more familiar to herself and more honest in front of her students without the blazers and blouses.

Adam grew similarly annoyed with his compulsion to hide his tattoos from his students and colleagues:

Adam reaches high up on the chalkboard to add a comma, which pulls his shirtsleeve up towards his elbow. The bottom of his tree tattoo pokes out, with a flash of red ink around it.

"Sir! You have ink?!" Adam hears the voice of a student call out.

Adam starts slightly, pulls the cuff abruptly back down and drops the chalk on the ledge. *"Yes. We'll talk about it later."* Rubbing the dust off his hands, he walks back to his desk and sits, wondering what he'll do to settle this before class ends. They've seen the tattoo now, so he can't pretend it doesn't exist. No amount of sleeves will erase the glimpse they just caught. But he hasn't even been evaluated as a new employee yet. What if the students start talking about it to other teachers? To the principal? Will that affect his standing?

As the final minutes tick by, Adam makes up his mind. He balances on the edge of his desk and says to his students in a matter-of-fact tone, *"Yes. I have tattoos. You saw that today. At the end of the year, I'll show them to you."* He falls silent, watches their mildly interested expressions quickly fade as the more important task of packing bags and heading home occupies their attention. They trickle out the room without further comment or even a glance towards his arm.

Why did I say that? Adam wonders to himself. *Why did I have to make my tattoos such a weird, hidden thing? You'd think it was taboo or something the way I made it all mysterious like that.* He hears the voice of a colleague across the hall boom out homework reminders, which reminds him of all the people on his floor he doesn't really know yet. *I'm still new here. I don't want to make the wrong impression. I didn't deny anything. Now we'll just put it off till the end of the year. I'll be off probation then, so it won't matter so much. No big deal.*

Later that evening, Adam's mind circles back to his reaction in class. He feels irritated with himself. Why is he trying to hide his tattoos, even on a temporary basis? What difference does the end of the year really make? Who's he fooling? It's not like his students didn't see the tree plain as day. And his colleagues; really, is it possible they've never caught a glimpse of his ink as he walks in from the parking lot? He rubs his arms briskly as the frustration mounts. *It's so dishonest, this need to hide from the people I see every day. You'd think I don't trust them or something.*

Why is it so important to me to hide my tattoos? Who really cares? It's like a habit I can't break.

He sits back on the sofa, scrutinizing his arm with its tree design. He feels like he's on a teeter-totter, vacillating between wanting to blend in at school and not wanting to. One the one hand, covering up gives the impression he's trying to hide something; like he's not an open book. Will that make parents or the school administration uncomfortable with him? On the other hand, if he lets everyone see his tattoos will they judge him? He pulls down at his cuff, pushes it back up, pulls it down again. The thought of going to school sleeveless leaves him feeling exposed. The fabric has become a protective barrier, a way to ensure he's accepted by colleagues and superiors. *If I'm honest with myself, I'd admit I'm just scared of how'd they'd react. Scared of what they'd think if I put myself out there completely.*

Scratchy shirts. Tight collars. Unyielding dress pants. Sweaty sweaters. Band-Aids. Yanking

My theory is that most teacher education students know they are supposed to 'dress up' when they engage in field experiences. What they don't know is how they can negotiate the divide they often feel between their bodies and material lives and the body and life of the teacher as it has been conveyed to them through books, movies, classes, and other cultural texts" (Alsup, p. 105).

down on cuffs. All to what result? Annoyance, frustration, exasperation and the introspective question: *Why do I even do this?* Why do Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam subject themselves to dressing in clothes that make them so uncomfortable, that leave them feeling dishonest in their own skin? Of course, they want to avoid being judged in their teaching roles for having tattoos. Their unique personal histories also feed beliefs that their ink might become problematic at work. But what else would prompt them to put up with this level of daily physical discomfort, especially given their growing self-questioning over the utility of bothering to "dress like a teacher" and cover their tattoos?

Michel Foucault (1979) would explain their actions in terms of the power of the norm, which has been present in the institution of schooling for decades (p. 260). With the emergence of standardized education and the establishment of teacher's training colleges, the norm, or "Normal" appeared in society as a principle of coercion (p. 260). This power reveals itself through disciplines, which are the actions people take to self-regulate themselves in order to

avoid being punished deviating from established norms (Foucault, 1979, p. 260). This power of the norm and the discomfort it can produce is not unique to Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe because they have tattoos. As Janet Alsup (2006) reminds us, all new educators “must learn how to physically embody the identity of teacher” (p. 88). Likewise, the urge to reject and resist teacher norms extends far beyond Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s personal experiences. A high proportion of teachers want to deny at least part of their professional identity; some even insist that “their ‘real’ lives and identities lay elsewhere,” in their leisure pursuits, religious beliefs, families, community work, or political affiliations (Maclure, cited in Hawkey, 1996, p. 8). What makes Vanessa, Adam and Chloe’s experiences unique is how their struggle with the teacher norm stems from highly visible marks of their past: tattoos acquired long before thoughts of becoming teachers ever entered their minds. None of them knew they wanted to be teachers at the time; could not have predicted the professional identity tensions their tattoos would produce.²⁹

During our second interview together, I tell Vanessa that the other teachers I’ve spoken to shared experiences of struggling with their clothing early in their careers. She accepts this in stride. Almost immediately, she jumps into an earnest insight on my comment:

I mean, if you’re talking about tattoos and how you’re being accepted by them, and you’re dealing at any point where you have to conceal them, the issue of clothing is inevitable. I guess you can’t really make a generalized statement about it – but for those of us who have been getting tattoos for a longer period of time, we were probably not thinking when we were teenagers that we would end up working for an establishment where we would be *required* to hide them. So, it’s a little bit different I think than if somebody starts getting tattoos later in their life, where they have a better understanding

²⁹ Chloe, Adam, and Vanessa all reported getting their first tattoo by the age of 16 or younger. None of them had plans to become teachers after high school. All had acquired multiple tattoos in visible locations before entering teacher’s college (Interview transcripts, 2010).

of who they are as an adult, what their career is, what their desired profession is, etcetera. So for them, it may not be a big deal at all. They may have two [tattoo] sleeves and wear a long-sleeved collared shirt everyday and it doesn't even cross their mind because they got those two sleeves when they were in their thirties. Whereas I think when you start getting tattoos when you're younger, sometimes it can be for very different reasons than when you start getting tattoos when you're a lot older and you really know who you are. You're figuring out who you are when you're young. So I mean, certainly if someone had said to me when I was sixteen years old, 'You're going to be a science teacher,' I would have been like, 'You are smoking crack. I don't know where you got that idea from, but that 'aint gonna be what I'm doing.' So, I think you then have to start talking about clothing and hiding because it's so often – you've wound up in a place that you didn't expect to wind up in, and all of a sudden, now you're being told, or there's an idea that you can't show these things. (Interview, May 25, 2011)

Vanessa's words serve as a reminder that we should "consider teachers as persons and professionals whose lives and work are influenced and made meaningful by factors inside and outside the classroom and school" (Goodson & Cole, 1994, p. 88). Long before completing their first teacher's college courses, long before their first practicum placements, and long before setting foot in classrooms of their own, Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe made meaningful, personal decisions to get tattooed. As Weber & Mitchell (1995) point out, "Perhaps we need to face more explicitly the probability that ambiguity, and multiple, even seemingly contradictory images are integral to the form and substance of our self-identities as teachers" (p. 30). A teacher doesn't abandon who he or she was a decade ago, or even last year, the moment they start teacher's college. They don't forget their values, forego personal convictions, or stop loving tattoos the

moment they have a Bachelor of Education degree in hand. Past experiences – including getting tattooed – aren't magically erased from a teacher's identity when he or she steps into their first classroom as a fulltime employee.

In sharing Vanessa, Adam and Chloe's experiences, we can trace the tightly interwoven fabric of their early teaching days, threaded through with identity struggles, tattoos, and clothing. It bears to remember what lies beneath the layers; why they feel frustrated and uncomfortable in clothes many of us would have no quarrel with. Surely most novice teachers struggle with at least one aspect of their professional identity: a stance against standardized testing, an outlook on special needs in the classroom, a viewpoint on parent participation, a school's philosophy of learning. For some of us, work clothes are incidental. For teachers with tattoos they can be a critical factor that determines how comfortable you feel in your own skin at school. Attempting to fit anything into the wrong-sized mold is a trying process at best. When a person is involved – a new teacher trying to reconcile the appearance of their skin with a teacher norm that looks little like themselves – it's as unpleasant as trying to cram yourself into jeans that are three sizes too small... with an ugly pattern no less. Now imagine having to wear those jeans every day single day, for the sole reason of fitting a social norm you don't feel comfortable with. That's what being a novice tattooed teacher is like.

Chapter 5: Mis-Fit: Feeling the Jolt of (Mis)Assumptions

A tattoo is never just what the appearance is... You can only *really* know about the tattoo by getting to know the person wearing it.
- Don Ed Hardy (Mifflin, 1997, p. 194)

A mis-fit. A fit that misses its mark. A misalignment, a misunderstanding. A misfit is something that fits badly (Miriam Webster, 2012). When we think of a misfit, we picture someone awkward, on the fringe, a person who does not fit his or her environment (Etymology Online, 2012). But what if the mis-fit is about perception? What happens when someone sees me differently from how I see myself? Eyes widen. Eyebrows jump skyward. Mouths gape and heads shake. The world stands still for half a heartbeat. Then, a jolt of realization as two disparate images collide: *You don't see me the way I see myself*. Like a funhouse mirror that distorts, another person's perception can be erroneous, a misinterpretation that can lead to laughter, anger, or exasperation. An assumption is made when the reality is something else entirely. That person looks too young for the job, but they're actually the director. That woman looks athletic but she's a champion klutz. That man looks single, but he's married with three children. That colourful individual looks like a tattooed person... *But he's a teacher*.

Adam lets the words hang in the air between them. *"I'm surprised you're in teaching."* His cooperating teacher, his first classroom mentor, has just dropped this lead weight of a comment. His skin flushes hotly at her implied criticism. Muddled thoughts run through his mind. *Does she mean I'm not suited for teaching? Is she telling me I shouldn't be here?* He chokes down her words, scrambles for other possible interpretations. *Or, does she mean she's surprised that someone like me wants to teach, because by outside appearances I don't look like a teacher?*

His thoughts churn. *Why is she so surprised I chose the teaching profession?* He runs down what she could possibly know about him after the few short weeks he's been at her school. Young. Male. Basic wardrobe, boring even. Good classroom management skills. Building a rapport with his class. Tattoos. His thoughts jump back to the teacher lounge, a tattoo possibly glimpsed, discussed with another teacher. *Is it the tattoos? Does she think I'm the wrong sort of person to be a teacher?*

Adam pays little attention as his mentor packs her bag, says goodbye. Hanging back in the empty classroom, her words linger. He internalizes them as a challenge to his legitimacy as a teacher. *She's wrong. Wrong about me.* Then with a jolt, his breath catches with realization.

What if she's not the only one who sees me this way?

Adam experiences a clash of opposing interpretations. Like blinders peeled off his eyes, he's abruptly confronted with a discomfiting possibility: others might look at him and fail to see a teacher. This view rocks him internally, leaves him agitated, worried by the possibility that others might question his career choice based on his appearance. Tone Savei (2002) writes about moments like these, instances when we suddenly become fully aware of how others see us. Drawing from Sartre, Savei notes how these moments feel of great consequence not because we are seen or visible, but because we are *noticed* (2002). Adam, Chloe and Vanessa all describe jarring moments like these, brief jolts when they, or the people around them, react at the revelation that things are not what they appear to be on the surface of tattooed skin. Stammered comments, "No! You can't be a teacher!" Jaw-dropping surprise. Startled realizations that the connections made between tattoos and personality traits don't add up. The catalyst for these moments: (mis)assumptions made about tattooed people, teachers, and combinations of the two.

In her exploration of interpersonal encounters, Luce Irigaray (2004) sagely reminds us there is more to an individual than meets the eye with physical details. She writes:

Beyond the colour of the eyes, the tone of the voice, the quality of the skin, things that are sensible to me, for me, there exists in the other a subjectivity which I cannot see, either with my senses or with my intellect. (p. 15)

She continues, "Seeing you, I must line your body with an interiority which evades my gaze, at least partially" (p. 74). When we fill others with this imagined, invisible interiority we shape it

based on physical cues: shape, smell, sound, movement – even the appearance or absence of tattoos. Yet these tangible observations may lead to a misaligned interpretation of how a person views his or her own subjectivity. When an interaction moves beyond visual observation and into conversation, we may discover our assumptions have missed the mark. Punctuated by a blurted comment, a surprised motion, a moment of wordless shock, we sometimes discover through discussion just how misaligned our original estimations of each other truly are.

For Chloe, a short conversation with her principal revealed a false assumption that she prefers teaching older students, a conclusion based on misreading her tattoos and overall sense of style:

“Madame³⁰! Madame! Sing us the Polly song. Please!”

Chloe smiles at her enthusiastic, bouncing second graders, all clapping and wiggling and begging for their favourite nursery rhyme tune. They wait eagerly to see if she’ll indulge them. Chloe glances at the clock on the wall. Just five minutes left until afternoon recess; perfect timing for some musical fun. She raises her wrists and waves them about, showing her students her Polly and Sukie tattoos, two stout characters peering out from a teapot and teacup. This sparks a cheer across the room. They know their cue. Madame Chloe will sing with them now!

*Polly put the kettle on, kettle on, kettle on
Polly put the kettle on, we’ll all have tea.
Sukie take it off again, off again, off again
Sukie take it off again, they’ve all gone
home.³¹*

After three rousing rounds, the bell chimes. Chloe hustles her class into the coatroom to oversee outdoor shoes, zippers, and Tupperware containers of goldfish crackers and apple wedges. Her colleague is on yard duty today – she stands in the doorway waiting for final Velcro straps to be secured. Then, in a flurry of chatter, footfalls, squeaking shoes and overspilling energy, she ushers the line of energetic children down the hall and out into the yard.



³⁰ Chloe teaches French, so her students often address her as “Madame,” the French equivalent of “Ms.” or “Mrs.”.

³¹ During our first interview, I asked Chloe to sing the “Polly and Sukie” song for me, as I had never heard the nursery rhyme before and wanted to learn the words in order to better understand the context for her tattoos – Polly in a teapot and Sukie in a teacup.

In the relative quiet left behind, Chloe gathers a few stray pencil crayons, places them back in a plastic bin on a shelf. She hears the clacking footfalls of adult feet approaching. Her principal walks in, stiff beige manila envelope in hand. Chloe feels a slight flutter of excitement. The envelope means class assignment time. Today she finds out what grade she'll be teaching next September. *Please be Grade 1*, she wishes.

She takes the envelope from her principal's outstretched hand. Rips open the top and pulls out the paper. Her face falls. Grade 5 and 6. She'd had her hopes set on Grade 1, or maybe Grade 2 again.

Not noticing Chloe's drooping expression, the principal warmly gives her a squeeze on the shoulder. *"I just knew you'd be great with the Grade 5s and 6s! You're so well suited to them. Your interests are similar, and I can just tell you'll have great rapport with them. They're not quite teenagers yet, but I can see your interests are along those lines. You know, your style and fashion – your outside interests. You have a lot in common with them. I knew you'd be perfect for it."*

Taking a breath to steady her voice, Chloe looks at her principal. *"Actually, I really like the young ones."*

Eyebrows shoot up in surprise. The principal looks at her quizzically, trying to make sense of this unexpected response.

Chloe presses on, *"I love the work I do with the young ones. I love singing songs with them and printing and being silly. I have fun with them and I love that."*

A ripple of confusion plays across the principal's face. She stammers, *"But I... I thought... you know..."* Her eyes range over Chloe's hair, half black, half fire engine red. She takes in Chloe's funky leggings, boots, bright t-shirt and silver jewelry. Then she gazes pointedly at her arms. *"I just thought that..."* she trails off, at a loss.

She thought that because I'm tattooed and dress funky that I'd want to work with older kids, Chloe thinks to herself.

An awkward silence hangs between them. Chloe watches the principal fumble with her hands, at a total loss for words.

She could have asked me, Chloe thinks. *I've worked with preschoolers and love the primary grades here. If only she'd asked instead of assumed.*

How do such false assumptions come about? We infer things based on what we see. This social classification starts with the body, which is generative of social relations and human knowledge (Shilling, 1993). As we interact with each other, we observe and read bodies as

surfaces that display identity (Pitts, 2003, p. 31). Physical minutiae are translated into personality traits. Rough, chapped hands tell a story of manual labour. Designer clothes and perfectly coiffed hair signal wealth. But who's to say these assumptions are accurate? Our powers of social interpretation, insofar as they apply to reading bodies, are far from perfect. What if the chapped hands belong to the wealthiest person? What if Adam – tattoos and all – is destined to become a university instructor in a faculty of education in a few years' time?³² What if that heavily tattooed woman hanging out at the concert hall on Friday night claims to be a Catholic elementary school teacher? Who would believe her?

Chloe leans against a wall, letting it relieve some of the strain on her tired feet. It's late Friday night at the end of a very long week. Any other day and she'd go home to relax and unwind. But tonight *A Whilem Scream*, her favourite hardcore rock band, is performing live. Even a full day with her sixth graders can't sap enough energy to keep her away from this rare opportunity.

A man about her age approaches through the crowd. He nods in her direction, gesturing with a plastic beer cup in his hand. Playfully he chides her, "*Oh, c'mon, you're not drinking?*"

Chloe shakes her head, replies in voice loud enough to carry over the music pounding from the ceiling-mounted speakers. "*No. It's been a long day. Long week.*" She rolls her shoulders and settles against the wall to emphasize her point.

He won't be dissuaded so easily. He steps a few paces closer, arches one skeptical eyebrow. "*Oh, ya. Sure. Long day? Whatever. What could you possibly do?*" He looks her up and down, utterly indiscreet. His tone implies he's caught her in a lie. A girl like her, covered in tattoos, what could she possibly be up to all day to make her so work-worn and weary? Starting a noon shift at the local tattoo shop?

Chloe looks at him squarely. "*I teach elementary school.*"

He gapes.

"*Nah, you're shitting me,*" he scoffs. His eyes rove her body up and down, as if to confirm the implausibility of Chloe's claim.

"*No, I teach elementary school. Catholic elementary school.*"

³² Adam currently works as part-time instructor at a university, in a faculty of education (Interview, November 14, 2010).

This is too much for the stranger to absorb. With an irritated scowl, he turns abruptly and marches away, peeved that Chloe would dare feed him such a transparent lie.

Chloe recalls this stranger's miffed reaction during our first interview together. It's the end of another busy school day for her, but we sit in the relaxed surroundings of a local pub rather than the raucous space of a concert hall. As she winds down this initial memory of mistaken identity, similar instances start to surface. She ticks off two, three, four other examples of times when strangers reacted with comparable shock at her professed profession. Even her future mother-in-law grappled with the claim, "Can a teacher really *have* all those tattoos?" (Interview, March 30, 2010). After a thinking pause, Chloe lets out a hearty laugh, recognizing the common thread weaving her examples together: "So I think that when I tell people I'm a schoolteacher, they might not believe me!" (Interview, March 30, 2010). Often, strangers assume she's a tattoo artist because of her own extensive tattooing.³³ The truth, Chloe confesses, is she can draw marvelous stick figures and triangles when her lessons demand visual support, but her artistic talents end there (Interview, March 30, 2010). Nevertheless, strangers are far more willing to accept her fictitious role as a tattoo artist than they are to digest her legitimate role as a Catholic elementary school teacher.

Even at school, amongst colleagues who fully accept her as a teacher, false assumptions arise in connection with her tattoos. With an incredulous look on her face, Chloe shakes her head in remembered disbelief as she describes her school's Halloween preparations a couple of years

³³ The belief that tattoo artists are all heavily tattooed is a common one, but is not always true. Some professional tattoo and piercing artists do have extremely heavy body modifications, often to display their skill or their colleagues' skills. Others choose to be heavily modified (i.e. neck, hand and face tattoos) because their workplace allows – encourages even – free reign in how they adorn their bodies, a freedom not found in many other workplaces (Sanders, 1989). However, not all professional tattoo and piercing artists apply their work to their own bodies. My first tattoo was done by an artist who has just one simple tattoo: a small Celtic "ring" around his right-hand middle finger, which he tattooed on himself as a teenager while learning his craft. He has won international tattooing awards and now owns and his own tattoo studio. I easily have ten times more tattoos than he does, and I am no more a tattoo artist than Chloe is. Likewise, the piercer who stretched my four earlobe piercings does not have a single piercing of his own despite having expertly pierced hundreds of clients.

ago. Despite knowing her well, one of Chloe's colleagues blindsided her with a false leap in logic, transmuting the art on Chloe's body into apparent artistic resources. Barring personal art skills, this teacher assumed, based purely on Chloe's appearance, the her social circle was full of artists ready to whip up wonderful creations for her, even if this meant cheating in a contest:

The table in the teachers' lounge is laden with fat, bright pumpkins ready for carving. Chloe appraises a particularly round one, running her hand over the broad ridged surface, picturing what design she might attempt. Entries for the school Halloween contest are due next week. If she starts planning now, she might just muster up a decent design. If triangles are still considered cool for pumpkins, that is. She's no whiz with a carving knife, that's for sure.

A colleague walks over, hefts the pumpkin beside Chloe's. Setting it on the ground at her feet, she looks at Chloe wistfully. *"Your pumpkin's going to be so much cooler than mine,"* she sighs. Confused, Chloe looks at her orange gourd, wonders if she should offer to trade because hers is somehow a better shape or size. Her colleague continues, *"I mean, you can just give yours to one of your friends to cut out. You know all those artists, all those tattoo artists."*

Chloe's eyes pop and she emits a small squeak of disbelief. It takes her a moment to surface from her incredulity. She blurts out a reply to this woman she's worked with for years. *"But I don't know any artists!"*

Her colleague looks at her skeptically. Chloe takes a quick mental inventory of her friends. The only one who even comes close is Sarah, her regular tattooist. *"Okay, I know one, but she's my tattoo artist. But you can't believe that carving a pumpkin is the same as giving a tattoo?! Tattooing is completely different. Working on skin is totally different from painting on canvas."* Let alone carving festive squash, Chloe thinks sarcastically.

A look in return that is far from convinced. Exasperated, Chloe tries again, *"Come on. She sure as heck wouldn't help me cheat in a school contest!"* Silently Chloe adds to herself, *I'm so glad you think I'd stoop to dishonesty over a pumpkin contest.*

In her own words, Chloe points out how misinformed any assumptions of her art associations are:

So I think there's just that misunderstanding that because I have art all over my body that I must hang out with that crowd, or that I'm artsy too. I can't draw even a stick man! You should see my drawings. We're doing First Nations studies – here's my idea of a teepee

[traces a triangle on the tabletop with her finger] – clearly three lines! I do stick men who have little stick *des lances*, ya, it’s really bad. I mean, there’s no art in me at all. But there’s this idea that I must be very artsy. But I’m like, ‘Nooooo, you are misinformed my friend! (Interview, March 30, 2010)

Chloe’s skin is irrefutably artistic. Her arms feature various recognizable styles, from the Alphonse Mucha³⁴ inspired Art Nouveau piece on her upper bicep, to the hyper-realistic swallow nestled just above her elbow, to traditional-style butterflies on one arm.



It takes significant skill to use ink and a motorized needle to draw these images on living, breathing, twitching skin. Equal skill, one might argue, to the formally trained brushstrokes of a master painter working on with oils on canvas. The artistry of her tattoos doesn’t escape Chloe – some she chose purely for their aesthetic merits, such as the boldly coloured butterflies that course up and down her right arm (Interview, March 30, 2010). Yet, unlike the faulty

³⁴ Alphonse Mucha was a Czech painter and decorative artist known for his flowing, idealized images of women executed in the Art Nouveau style, popular from 1890-1910 (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 2011).

associations made by her colleague, Chloe doesn't equate the art on her skin to personal talent. Her chalkboard sketches used to illustrate points from her lessons are miles away from the images on her arms, and she knows it.

The assumption that Chloe is artistic or that she runs with the artsy crowd might, in part, relate to tattooing's relatively recent foray into the Western fine art world – fine art being the culturally legitimized arts, or those found in museums (painting, sculpture, etc.) (Sanders, 1989). At one time, the only design options for tattoos came in the form of “flash,” the stock designs displayed on tattoo parlours' walls consisting of standard symbols depicting rudimentary hearts, roses, skulls, and anchors (Mifflin, 1997; DeMello, 2000; Caplan, 2000). It wasn't until the 1970s that clients began asking for custom-designed work that reflected a high level of artistic skill far beyond that required for flash. Formally trained artists began entering the tattooing field,



arguably raising it to the status of a recognized art (Sanders, 1989; Mifflin, 1997). While the tattoo's status as an accepted fine art form remains up for heated debate, tattoos are now being shown in galleries and at conventions as

works of art (DeMello, 2000; Sanders, 1989). Agree or not, the very term “body art” has become virtually synonymous for “tattoos” and is frequently used both colloquially and by scholars to refer to tattoos³⁵.

³⁵ Well-regarded scholars who study tattooing and tattoo culture often use the term “body art” – sometimes interchangeably with the term “tattoo(s)” – in their work. For examples, see: Victoria Pitts (2003) author of various articles about women and tattooing, and the text *In the flesh: The cultural politics of body modification*; Clinton Sanders (1989), author of *Customizing the body: the art and culture of tattooing*; Margo DeMello (2000), author of

Artistic inclination is just one of many assumptions that abound over tattooed people. When someone with tattoos walks down the street, what springs to mind? Punk teenagers or gang members? An impulsive nature that leads to regrets? A band member, a tattoo shop employee, an unemployed dropout? A “freak,” someone who has defiled their body with ink and needle? Is this person a hipster who’s hopped on the trend bandwagon for what looks cool? These are just some of the assumptions made about tattooed people. There are many others: Tattooed people are rebellious (Pitts, 2003). Their tattoos have deep, significant, symbolic meaning (Sweetman, 1999). They’re low class (Sanders, 1989). They like pain, or at the very least, they endure it well (Pitts, 2003, p. 13). They’ve done jail time, joined a gang, or served in the military (DeMello, 2000). They must regret their long-ago teenage impulses (Nicoletti, 2004). Clearly they work in the entertainment industry, a coffee shop, a hair salon. They clearly drink and take drugs, listen to loud music, live in a trailer park, or ride motorcycles (DeMello, 2000). Maybe they’re a hippie. They might have kinky sexual habits – perhaps they’re a lesbian or effeminate gay man (Mifflin, 2007; Pitts, 2003). Character judgments; assumptions of social class, income, education and intelligence; moral judgments made about bodies and lifestyles – people brew up all sorts of beliefs about tattooed individuals. Sometimes, these assumptions end up being true. Tattoo culture is not all butterflies and roses and fine artwork (although they are common enough). Some gang members absolutely do have tattoos; many have served jail time or even acquired their tattoos in prison (DeMello, 2000, pp. 67-70). Tattoos do carry intensely personal meaning for some, being a form of catharsis, a healing after trauma or loss, a commemoration of a treasured memory, or the representation of a life philosophy or a rite of passage (Wolhrab, Stahl, & Kappeler, 2007). Some teenagers do impulsively get tattooed,

many articles and texts about modern tattoo society, including *Bodies of inscription: A cultural history of the modern tattoo community*; and Mike Featherstone (2000), editor of *Body modification* (2000).

forging ID or grabbing a convenient “consenting” adult from the food court at the mall as a cover story. Enduring pain is proof to certain people that they are strong, that they can master their bodies and their suffering on their own terms (Sanders, 1989). But for every assumption that ends up true, there is another that is false. Some tattoos are just plain pretty and have no symbolic meaning whatsoever (Sweetman, 1999, p. 55). Rebellion is the farthest thing from the person’s mind who gets tattooed to express cultural or religious affiliations (Sanders, 1989; DeMello, 2000; Pitts, 2003). Teenage impulse is not a factor for the woman who gets tattooed on her fortieth birthday, or the man on his seventieth. Some assumptions amount to outright misconceptions.

These assumptions all tie back to how we read bodies. Our bodies, after all, are the essential medium through which social norms are transmitted and inscribed (Shusterman, 2006, p.6). The social norms associated with teachers, however, and those inferred of tattooed people have arrived at very different places. So different, in fact, that when Vanessa walks into her classroom of inner-city high school students, her appearance captivates them. Tattoos are commonplace for these teens; they have them, their parents have them, their friends and cousins do too. But their teacher? This takes them by surprise, jabs at their assumptions of both teachers and tattooed adults. At our first interview together, I ask Vanessa why she thinks her tattoos grab her students’ attention to this degree. She takes a long, introspective breath, thinks for a few moments, and then slowly, carefully describes what she feels shakes up their expectations:

I think it’s a mix of, ‘Okay, so the adults in my life outside of school who have tattoos maybe are not the most desirable people.’ So for some of these students, particularly with the group of students that I work with in an inner city school, they are like, “Okay, this person is smart, and went to university, and has a really good job *and* has tattoos...

Particularly students of mine who live in [social service housing developments and poor, violent neighbourhoods]. Sure they have family members with tattoos, but their family members are also criminals and in and out of jail. These are not the people you're going to go to for life advice. You know what I'm saying? So I think it's that combination of I have the tattoos, but they also recognize, 'But she has her shit together.' Sorry to use that expression. But I'm a functioning person in society who has a responsible job and is educated and is smart *and* I have tattoos. That's the combination that throws them off, you know? It's that idea of the teacher with tattoos as opposed to an adult with tattoos. (Interview, May 25, 2010)

Just as Vanessa's students carry ingrained notions of what tattooed adults are like, many of us possess strong associations of what teachers are like. We carry these notions with us from our childhood school experiences, which are then perpetuated by the images we absorb from the books, comics, TV shows, and movies we encounter as we grow older (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Whether we remember them accurately, or whether we have unknowingly edited the details over the years, much of what we remember loosely relates to what we see popular media (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). We recall orthopedic shoes, pop-bottle glasses, hair pulled back in a severe bun, a joyless woman, a stern authoritarian, shapeless dresses, tender smiling eyes (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). What most of us don't remember are tattoos; they haven't made primetime TV or big screen movie appearances – yet. So, tattooed teachers can surprise inner city teens. They can also evince quite a reaction from high school science department Curriculum Leaders:

He's staring directly at her. Eyes wide, mouth hanging open. He radiates astonishment. Vanessa reads his expression as a clear broadcast of his thoughts: *Holy crap I can't believe this is my chemistry teacher. Look at her!* She barely catches a snort from escaping, holds her breath. By redirecting her energy into an enormous smile, she corks the laughter threatening to burst free. Her eyes water from the effort of containing her amusement. She places her hands squarely on the table, palms down and stares at her

knuckles to hide her laughing eyes. She breathes very deliberately through her nose. She will not laugh. It wouldn't be polite. The man sitting across from her is her new Curriculum Leader. Come September, he'll be her supervisor in the high school science department.

Long seconds drag by. In the interval, she pictures what he's seeing: young woman, pierced nose, tattooed arm, tattooed wrists, shoes that look an awful lot like his son's... She lets her eyes lift slowly, subtly scans his face for any change. Her eyebrows lift high and her forehead furrows as she suppresses another laugh. He still looks thoroughly shocked. She watches his eyes linger on her arm, taking in the flowers tattooed on her bicep. His gaze travel to her wrists, scanning the brown ink designs. Vanessa muses to herself: *Does he know how obvious his expression is?* She smiles even wider. *He sure didn't expect his chem teacher to look like me!*

Two years after this first meeting with her Curriculum Leader, and it still makes Vanessa laugh out loud. As we sit in the science teacher lounge at her high school, she chuckles and shakes her head with lingering good humour, remembering how plainly taken aback he was:

Beyond describing shock – surprise. Like I was the first chem teacher he had ever seen who was a young female with tattoos. The closest thing I could use to describe it is going to sound really conceited. But I don't mean it in that way. But it's kind of like if somebody was on a blind date and Person A – I'm horrible at this kind of stuff because I don't do it – but, like say Person A is like a four on a scale of ten, and the blind date walks in and the blind date is a ten. It's that look on the four's face, of not expecting someone like that to walk through the door. That total shock, and like, 'Holy crap, who is this person?!' kind of look. I'm not at all saying that I'm the ten by the way [laughs]. But that's the only way that I can really describe it. It was very funny. (Interview, April 9, 2010)

When we are disillusioned of our assumptions, the surprise can be quite pronounced. Vanessa's Curriculum Leader stepped into the room prepared to meet his senior chemistry teacher. He expected her to be a bit older, perhaps, and a lot less tattooed. In other words, he assumed she

would look like most other veteran chemistry teachers he's known. She doesn't match the standard image of a conservative, middle-aged woman, the "teacher" so often culturally defined in the Western world (Alsup, 2006, p. 9). Neal Eastman (2006) points out that teachers' physical bodies are tied to an institutional body – Education – and that "only a narrow set of possible readings of the teacher's body are institutionally legitimate" (p. 300). By extension, different *types* of teachers seem to have legitimate readings specific to their subject areas. For instance, the English professor is known for his battered briefcase, Tweed coat, and cap (Eastman, 2006). Vanessa recognizes that to most people, she simply doesn't look like a science teacher. She counts off on her fingers the various (incorrect) interpretations she's encountered based on her appearance: she's an art teacher, a drama teacher, an English teacher (Interview, April 9, 2010). This all goes to show how bodies, even those tattooed with personally significant symbols like Vanessa's flowers, simply cannot express everything about an individual. As Luce Irigaray (2004) notes:

What I can say about the other does not correspond to what the other may say about himself or herself. A difference separates my external perception from their internal perception of themselves. My judgments on them will most often be only *my* evaluations... (p. 74; original emphasis)

Vanessa's passion for science and her ability to teach complex theories to advanced students are invisible behind her tattooed skin and her basketball shoes. Her body doesn't portray a typical science nerd, but inside she adores molecules and covalent bonding and the glow of phosphorous powder exposed to oxygen. The same is likely true for her Curriculum Leader. While Vanessa looks back at her middle-aged supervisor, trying not to laugh at his astonished expression, what invisible quality is not revealed by his crisp buttoned shirt and tie? Maybe he loves line dancing

on Wednesday nights or takes gourmet cooking classes on Sunday mornings. Perhaps he writes beautiful poetry in the spare period between early and mid-afternoon classes.

Alicia Milo, 25-year-old professional swing dancer and receptionist: 'I have an education and come from a good family, but people think I'm stupid until they talk to me,' says Milo, who has a spider web on one elbow, a band of fairies circling one arm, and a plaid sleeve sprinkled with ladybugs on the other. 'They think because you look different you have no respect for society'... (Mifflin, 1997, p. 131)

Just as Vanessa's body belies the science nerd within, Chloe's tattoos don't broadcast her religious beliefs to the world. During our second interview, I ask her how often strangers act stunned that she's a teacher. She tells me this occurs nearly every time she talks about her career. Laughing, she admits she often goads people on by tossing in the detail she works for the Catholic school board. If they were shocked to begin with, this inevitably dials up their disbelief another few notches. Chloe feels this goes hand-in-hand with some of stereotypes and assumptions people make about tattoos, piercings, and Catholicism in general:

I mean, I don't think that when you look at someone who is tattooed that you necessarily believe that they can believe in a God, a Spirit, a Creator, or whatnot. The stereotype is that they're lowlifes, and they don't know any better, and they go out and party and drink. So I feel with the Catholic board, I am a person who is tattooed, but who does have beliefs. You know, I want good in this world and I think we need to work towards it, and to instill those traits of, you know, respect and whatnot in my students. I think that for some that might be surprising. So when I do say, 'Oh, I'm a Catholic school teacher,' they're like, 'Ya, okay. Sure.' Also because it's the Catholic board where you would assume, in my opinion, that they're more reserved than some of the public schools. So I often do that just to add an extra little bit of '*Really?*'. You know, it's one thing to say

I'm a grade six teacher, I'm an elementary school teacher. I like to throw that in just for entertainment's sake, in all honesty. (Interview, October 23, 2010)

This takes us back to Luce Irigaray's (2004) reminder that what we say about others does not always correspond to what they would say about themselves. While bodies are instrumental to our experiences in the world and how we make meaning from them (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), they cannot possibly disclose all aspects of a person's subjectivity. Peggy Phelan (2003) warns about the dangers of such "visibility politics," reminds us how the meanings of visible representations of identity depend as much on the seer as the person or body being seen (cited in Pitts, p. 46).

Phelan also expresses concern over how much the "silent spectator" dominates or controls the exchange (cited in Pitts, 2003, p. 46). But as Chloe, Vanessa, and Adam's experiences

demonstrate, sometimes all it takes is a brief (if awkward or startling) moment of conversation to shake silent spectators from their misconceptions.

The exchange of a few incredulous words can shift the balance until assumptions are exposed for the falsities they are. If we can take just one thing away from sharing in Adam, Chloe and Vanessa's

experiences with (mis)assumptions, let it be to pause

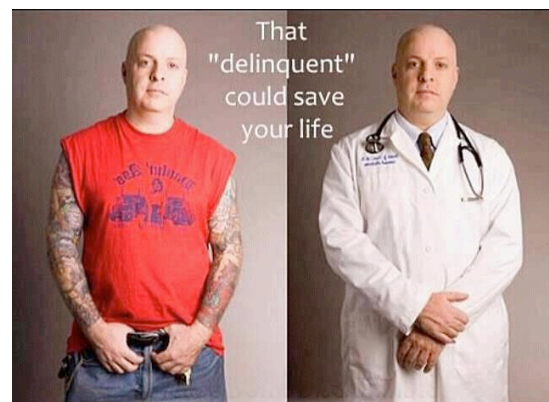
and think about how we read others when in "silent

spectator" mode. The next time a heavily tattooed

woman walks by, why not ponder the possibility that she is a doctor, a lawyer, even a teacher

instead of a tattoo artist, a painter, or a delinquent? The next time a teacher crosses your path on

a field trip with his students, instead of assuming an unwavering devotion to attendance lists, red



Only a moron would assume that just because I have tats all over me, I am a loser, or drug user, a devil worshipper or that I lack morals. I work hard every day, and play just as hard at night. I pay my taxes, love God, obey the law, and hug my loved ones the same way you do. The only difference between us? I don't look down on you for NOT having tats.

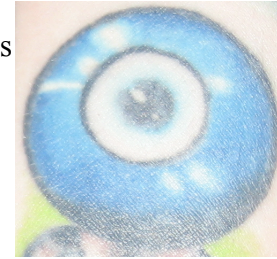
Figure 5: Delinquent/Doctor. Retrieved online:

<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10151097431544134&set=o.18431868162642>

pens, lesson plans and detentions, why not entertain the notion he likes skateboarding, body piercing and rock music? As Merleau-Ponty (1968) says, “our body commands the visible for us, but it does not explain it, does not clarify it” (p. 136). Our eyes gather details about the people who surround us, but they can only achieve imperfect interpretations of their meaning. Let us keep our minds and eyes open to the possibility that things are not always as they appear to be. For, as Luce Irigaray (2004) sagely reminds us, “My truth will never be yours, and the judgments I make about you express my reality more than yours” (p. 75). Let us open ourselves to others’ reality. It may shock or surprise us, but it will also teach us, and may even correct our mis(assumptions).

Chapter 6: Fit. You? Fit You!: Feeling the Weight and Pressing Back at Judgmental Eyes

Eyes. What are eyes but small, nearly weightless jelly-filled orbs? How much impact can they possibly have? They flutter with the brush of soft lashes. They enlighten us about our surroundings, flitting from one visual tidbit to the next, collecting curious details. This does not sound so very heavy. But in certain circumstances, these tiny optical organs can pack a punch. It's all in the look. Looks come in countless varieties: loving, hostile, friendly, intimate to name just a few (van Manen, 2002, p. 49). When the looks are judgmental, they can land a hefty wallop on the person being observed. Many of us have felt this sensation in some form or another. It's the crushing blow in your gut when someone admired scowls in disgust. It's the paralyzing force of trying to perform a task while pinned under the suffocating stare of someone who doubts your competency. This is how eyes, those little spherical collectors of visual information, can take on mass enough to leave a lasting impression, like a bruise on the memory.



The objectification of each by the other's gaze is felt as unbearable only because it takes the place of possible communication. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 361)

Even Chloe, with her self-professed thick skin and entrenched self-confidence, is not entirely immune to the pummeling of judging eyes. As she reflects on her teaching experiences, her memory circles back multiple times to a night two years into her career: the school board banquet. Wearing a party-appropriate tank top that shows off her arms and back, she feels the press of a judgmental gaze from across the room:

Dance music thumps away; Chloe moves to the beat, smiles and lets the rhythm move her. Dozens of employees from her school board mingle about with glasses in hand. The lights strobe colorfully around the festive room, over the tables where napkins lay discarded in favour of an active dance floor. Chloe's bracelets jangle merrily as she

swings to a fast song. She feels fabulous. Yes, her job has become surplus and she'll need to find a new school to teach at. But a spot is guaranteed for her somewhere, so she really has nothing to worry about. Besides, she had an excellent job interview earlier that afternoon. For tonight she's going to enjoy the banquet. A cute tank top, upbeat tunes, and plenty of good company. No need to let a little change of classroom get her down. She's determined to dance up a storm.

Out of the corner of her eye, she spots two teaching friends approaching. Their eyes reflect concern. "*What's up?*" Chloe asks, still dancing away.

"*You wouldn't believe what that principal over there just said about you!*" She raises her eyebrows, inviting an explanation. "*He said he'd never hire you because he could never get past all your tattoos.*"

Chloe's steps falter slightly. "*Really, he said that to you? Wow, that guy's ballsy!*"

She tosses a glance over her shoulder, capturing the gaze of the principal in question. He looks directly back at her, hard eyes landing squarely on her bare arms. Chloe's dance steps dwindle momentarily under the press of his look. She watches the disdainful curve of his lip as he continues to observe her colorful arms and back. She reads his face: *There's no job for you at my school. Just look at you. Just look at those things on your body.*

Chloe watches him for half a beat longer. Her feet forget to move under the weight of his loathing in his eyes. The skin on the back of her arms tingles for a fraction of an instant. Then, refusing to let him dampen her good time, she shrugs off the feeling and laughs to her friends, "*His loss! He's missing out on a great thing. That's his prerogative. He doesn't even know me.*"

From the circus freaks of the early 1900s, to the bad-boy biker gangs and loose, sexually deviant women of the 1970s; to the ex-cons and punks of the 1980s and impulsive, judgment-impaired teenage party-goers of the 1990s, tattooed individuals have garnered plenty of judgments and looks to go with them over the years (Sanders, 1989; DeMello, 2000). When the tattooed body belongs to a teacher, the judgment takes on another facet. In addition to judging the person's individual character, critical eyes also question his or her suitability to the pedagogical profession. As Weber & Mitchell (1995) point out in their work on teacher image, "Teachers are not supposed to look attractive or sexy or 'different'. They are not supposed to look aristocratic. They are supposed to reflect prevailing social standards of middle class

respectability” (pp. 59-60). While tattoos have become far more prevalent on middle-class bodies since the 1970s, they by no means symbolize prevailing middle-class respectability in today’s Western world (DeMello, 2000; Mifflin, 1997). Given current expectations for how teachers should look, layered atop more than a century’s worth of character judgments directed at tattooed individuals, it’s not surprising that Chloe, Adam, and Vanessa each recall experiences of feeling judgmental looks at some point during their career. And while they feel affected in personal ways – varying degrees of flippant, amused, hurt or misunderstood – they all remember the heavy sensation of feeling pinned beneath critical eyes. The weight they feel rests not in judgment alone, but in how these eyes fail to perceive the professional abilities that shape who they are as teachers within, beneath and beyond their tattoos.

In large part, judgmental looks take on substance because they fail to recognize subjectivity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) speaks to this aspect of perceptual experience, noting that being seen does not always equate to being understood. He explains, “Saying that I have a body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen as an object and that I try to be seen as a subject” (p. 193). To look at a body and see only tattoos – such as Chloe’s body on the dance floor at the banquet – is to look at an object. To be seen as a subject, Chloe would be perceived as skilled educator, a person capable of filling a job vacancy in need of an elementary school teacher. This means viewing her beyond her body and its tattooed skin.

For Adam, the sensation of judging eyes was felt in teacher’s college rather than in his own high school or university classrooms:

The day is warm. Without much thought, Adam dons a t-shirt and heads to class. He enters the lecture room, takes a seat. In a long, drawn-out moment, he feels a hush as the eyes of his fellow teacher candidates fall on his arms. Their chatter momentarily ceases. These people have known Adam all fall, all winter, all spring. But this is his first summer course; his first short-sleeved shirt worn to school. It’s the first time they’ve seen his tattoos.

He sits perfectly still as the sensation of their looks lock onto his forearm. To his left, an acquaintance softly utters, *Oh!* This makes him momentarily hyper-aware of his red and black ink; colours feel more intense and obvious. He shifts in his chair, jiggles a foot. As he folds his arms over his chest, the press of eyes lingers. *They're sizing up my tattoos.*

His mind darts back to his first week of teachers' college. He remembers the program director delivering a speech to his cohort of soon-to-be educators: *You will be moral. You will be ethical. You will present yourself in the teaching world professionally.* Adam thought he'd forgotten this talk, so many months later. But he's internalized those stern words more than he realized. They echo in his mind as he feels his friends' eyes probe and prod his arms as they consider how the ink fits into their image of him.

Then, as quickly as it descended, the weight lifts. His peers have had their look, widened their eyes to his decorated skin, and have now returned to their pre-lecture chatter. Adam shrugs the sensation off, feeling it roll away as the tension dissipates from his shoulders.

As Adam recalls this moment to me, we are sitting outside a university library, where other teacher education students mill about on their own business. I ask him to describe what he felt the consequences might have been when his classmates, practicum teachers, professors, or principals saw his tattoos. He tells me the worry he felt in those first revealing moments lay in having his legitimacy as a teacher questioned:

I don't know, maybe just ask you the terrifying question of, 'Why are you here? Why are you a teacher?'

I don't know. Imposter. You know, fake. Not a real teacher... I just kinda wanted to blend in, right? I didn't want people to question me on why I was here, what I was doing, what my motivations were. I rather just wanted to focus on my day-to-day thing. And so, perhaps [my tattoos] in some way would set me apart, and then I would be focused on ...

(Interview, April 2, 2010).

Adam worried his tattoos would cloud the teacher part of himself from view, leaving his very presence in teacher's college open for interrogation. Part of this weight, he believes, carried over

from a long ago conversation with his mother, who strongly opposes his tattoos. When Adam was 16, his mother told him a story about a friend who wanted to be a bridesmaid in her wedding. This friend happened to have an ankle tattoo. His mother said no, denied her a place in because of her ink. As he reflects, Adam muses that the story was probably meant to tell him he was “all of a sudden an outcast” for having been tattooed (Interview, April 2, 2010). And while he never fully believed he’d be denied a job simply because of his tattoos, he does feel this maternal tale affected him, and recognizes how strongly he’s internalized the notion he could be judged in various contexts for being tattooed (Interview, April 2, 2010).

Feeling judged is a self-conscious feeling. It makes us question whether the things we value about ourselves are valued or respected by others. Like other self-conscious feelings, or “affects” to use Daniel Stern’s (1993) term, this relates directly to being in the eyesight of others. Feeling shame, guilt, embarrassment, sadness, or anger, for instance, requires both self-reflection and an element of being in the real or imagined “eyesight or attention of others,” whether the other is physically present or exists as a subconscious, internalized memory (p. 209). Adam’s internalized memories follow him into the classroom when he shows his tattoos in teacher’s college for the first time. When his classmates’ eyes lock onto his forearm, they reflect back his director’s stern reminder to look professional. The softly gasped *Oh!* from his peer echoes the cautionary tale his mother told him. These past moments layer present looks with additional weight, as if his director and mother loom over him in the classroom.

Adam recalls a second instant of encountering a judging look, but this time he pushes back. Four years have passed since he sat in a teachers’ college classroom as a student. Since then, he has taught high school full-time, worked as a substitute teacher part-time, and is now walking onto campus to sign his first contract as a university instructor:

Adam steps into the faculty administration office and approaches the woman seated behind the desk. He's just arrived from across the country, having completed his job interview by phone. He looks appreciably around the room, taking in the professor's mailboxes, one of which will soon be his. He hasn't met his colleagues yet, or the person who hired him, but the long distance conversation went so well he feels buoyed by confidence.

He approaches the administrator, lets her know he has an appointment to sign his work contract. Her eyes lift from her computer screen and widen noticeably. She gasps, "*You're not teaching today, are you?!*" Adam feels her gaze range over his t-shirt, the slight sheen of sweat on his arms from biking into campus, and then stop lingeringly on his tattoos. He balks ever so slightly, then smiles inwardly. *I've already got the job. It doesn't matter what she thinks of my tattoos.*

When Adam describes the administrator's reaction, he smiles. Like a shield that lets her look bounce right off him, Adam is bolstered by the knowledge he's already been judged (favourably) based on his CV and phone interview. It feels good, he explains, to be assessed for his teaching accomplishments rather than anything else, including his tattoos (Interview, November 14, 2010). Adam and Chloe have both been pinned by judgmental eyes in the past, but neither were defenseless to press back against these heavy looks. Both used their self-confidence as teachers as counterweights against the burden of judgment, used it like a wedge to toss negative looks aside. Their resistant, resilient responses remind us how "teachers are not merely victims of society's cultural imagery. Although they are born into powerful socializing metaphors, some of them manage to break and recreate images while making sense of their roles and forging their self-identities" (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 26).

But even the most confident, experienced teachers are not fully immune to the blow that can be dealt by harshly judging eyes. Even after pressing back, stinging memories sometimes linger. Vanessa recalls an especially weighty experience, walking into a roomful of science teachers at a professional development conference to be met with an onslaught of heavy looks. As she recounts this experience I watch her relaxed frame, moments before reclined comfortably

in her chair with her arms folded over her stomach, gradually curl up to meet the table edge. Her feet plant on the floor; her elbows on the tabletop. Her fingertips pick restlessly at the corner of a file folder. Her irritation is palpable, as if the eyes from that conference room have time traveled and pounced on her again, leaving her forehead creased in consternation as she describes the experience to me:

In the muggy heat of late October, the conference room in the hotel has reached sweltering levels. The space is full of science teachers who fidget quietly in their seats, waiting for yet another presentation to start. A spattering of middle-aged men and women occupy the rows, one with a bona fide pocket protector and more than a few sporting thick glasses over myopic eyes. In walks Vanessa. She is youthful, with a fresh face, long black hair spilling over her shoulders and a nose stud nestled in her nostril. In the sticky warmth of the stuffy space, heads nod with half-open eyes as they droop over paper programs. As Vanessa enters, eyes refocus. Who is this curiosity newly seated among them? A silent mental inventorying commences, capturing her overt femininity, her trendy style, her *jeans*. These unorthodox details send ripples across an otherwise uniform sea of similarities.

The room begins to feel uncomfortably warm for Vanessa, so she slips off her sweater and drapes the long-sleeved garment over her chair back. Her arms are now on display, wrists showing a matching pair of russet brown hand tattoos, her right bicep decorated with black Arabic script and a permanent spray of flowers. In the act of removing her sleeves, she has produced an audience effect similar to that created when an artist whips the sheet off a transgressive item of statuary in public. Gazes snap uni-directionally towards her bared arms, sending a roomful of wide-eyed and slightly stunned judgment her way. Vanessa feels the many eyes pin her down, trapping her in a sensation of being the odd one out in a roomful of peers.

Vanessa feels the looks slam at her with full force. *They're making judgments about my intellect right now, I can feel it. They're questioning my ability to teach science content. I don't like this at all. Could they be any more disapproving? I can tell they don't want me here.* She can imagine what they must be thinking: what cockamamie university gave her a B.Sc.? How can she possibly be a senior chemistry teacher? Vanessa feels crushed by what she reads into these looks. *They're looking at me like I'm some artsy radical, like I'm totally incapable of teaching kids about VSEPR³⁶. This feels awful. I'm being simultaneously judged for being a bad teacher, being too stupid to teach science, and being questioned as a person to top it all off.* Her shoulders droop from the weight. *What a heavy stare...*

³⁶ As Vanessa explains, VSPER is a mnemonic acronym for “valence shell electron repulsion theory,” a fundamental concept taught in high school chemistry. To imply that a chemistry teacher cannot teach VSPER to his or her students is professionally insulting (Interview, April 9, 2010).

Many months later, this experience continues to produce a simmering resentment in Vanessa. As she reflects on this uncomfortable conference, she gently tilts her head back to look at the ceiling for the briefest of moments – not quite rolling her eyes – but making a frustrated gesture that says, ‘This really does still get on my nerves.’ Even now, as she sits in the familiar science teachers’ office at her high school, surrounded by comfortable books and binders, clad in her favourite Air Jordan sneakers, and with a supportive colleague quietly working on the computer behind her, she can still feel the force of those judgmental looks. Perhaps what Vanessa recounts is more precisely about gazes than looks. As Madeline Grumet (1988) might point out, a gaze is objectifying and impersonal, whereas a look expresses subjectivity and specificity in a relationship. Vanessa’s subjectivity includes her self-confidence as an educator, her ability to instruct difficult high school science content, and her self-image as a successful, intellectual woman. But these specificities are stripped away by the gazes in the conference room that jump directly to an objectifying, impersonal observation of her body.

If judgment is what infused the science teachers’ *heavy stares* with ability to weigh down on Vanessa, what in this particular experience brings their judgment so forcefully to bear on her? What about her tattooed wrists and arms, combined with her jeans and her youthful feminine appearance, draws the pummeling rain of eyes? Simply put, she displays unexpected difference. In the world of schools, identity is bred by mimesis and convention not differentiation – a setup reinforced by the surveillance of peer culture that punishes nonconformity (Grumet, 1988, p. 112). Placed in a room full of science teachers, Vanessa looks distinctly the odd one out. She recognizes this difference in herself, knows she falls outside of the ‘science teacher stereotype’.

I think it has something to do with, unfortunately, being a young female who’s a science teacher. Especially when you’re a young female, sorry [sighs]. I never know how to say

this without sounding really horrible – but a young female teacher that’s not a spinster, for lack of a better term. Like, someone who looks like they have twelve cats at home...

This is still a really real stereotype I think for women in science teaching... (Interview, April 9, 2010)

Indeed, tattoos don’t tend to call to mind a nerdy spinster³⁷ woman sitting at home with her 12 cats reading about molecules while the phone sits silent on her hall table. Rock music, maybe, teenagers, possibly, but a lifetime supply of single-serve tea bags and a pantry stuffed with cans of wet cat food? Probably not. Vanessa distances herself from this image (and for those who are wondering, no, she does not own a cat, and yes, she is married [Interview, April 9, 2010]).

Spinsters and their cats aside for a moment, Vanessa continues to sift through her recollections of what happened in the seconds after she draped her sweater over her chair back at the conference.

Bruising as the judgmental looks may be, she takes solace knowing – no matter what others think of her tattoos – that she’s a good teacher whose students love her:

“I’m a real friendly, gentle soul, before people meet me and even see me they think I’m this wild woman and I must be really hard to talk to and maybe I’m not very intelligent and maybe I’m a biker babe. I’ve lost the ability to communicate with people without being judged before I have a chance to open my mouth”

- Krystnye Kolorful, Guinness Record holder for “world’s most decorated woman,” whose body is 95% covered in tattoos: (Mifflin, 1997, p. 121).

Vanessa sits silent, pressing her mouth shut. Every fiber of her being is aware of the eyes sweeping over her arms and wrists. She draws in a long, exasperated breath and says... nothing. No words. She exhales fully, then turns her energies inwards. She pictures her students who return from university to thank her for being a great ‘chem teacher’. The weight lifts slightly. She replays the sound of her students’ voices in her mind, hearing them tell her she’s ‘cool’. Her mood lifts lighter again. Mentally, she scans the contents of her office, where stacks of graded assignments indicate successfully completed curriculum units and her students’ accumulated accomplishments. With each A grade she visualizes, with each carefully composed paragraph of student feedback pictured, she discards the burden of another pair of judgmental eyes.

³⁷ For a discussion of the spinster image in teaching, see Blount (2000) and Cavanagh (2006).

Vanessa feels no compulsion to interact or commence conversation with the teachers in the conference room. She is not driven to march down the rows and counter their critical eyes with a few hefty words of her own. She stays put. If someone has a question, she'll gladly answer (Interview, April 9, 2010). Let them follow the path of their own stares and reach out with their own efforts to speak. But in the moment their eyes find her tattoos speech falls silent between them. This is the "mute and awed" result of readmitting a body consciousness into educational discourse that Madeleine Grumet (2007) speaks of (p. xv). In Western schools, we have become accustomed to forgetting about the body, acting as if it does not exist (2007). So when the teacher's body suddenly becomes the centre of attention, it can leave us awed, like the science teachers who stare at Vanessa's tattooed arms, all thoughts of professional development presentations forgotten in the shadow of her unexpected, noticeable flesh.

Look Beneath the Surface

Judith Butler (1999) asks, "How does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?" (p. 171). She might easily have put this question to Chloe, Adam, and Vanessa, whose tattooed bodies are a unique mix of visible surface decoration and invisible traits that define their teaching ability. In her study on tattoo communities, Margo DeMello (2000) remarks on the inner-outer nature of tattooing, saying, "Ironically, tattooing is a practice that modifies the outermost aspect of a person's body – the skin – yet ... tattoos are seen as representing the wearer's innermost self" (p. 151). The challenge with tattoos is that despite their obvious visibility on the body, their personal significance and meaning is not always communicated as clearly. Tattoos are bodyart (Morris, 2008). And, just as looking at any work of art is a subjective experience, with images speaking different ways to different people (*I love that fuzzy blue sky and yellow flowers ... Ugh, that's a messy scene*), so too can tattoos be interpreted

in various manners. A boldly coloured skull tattoo, for instance, may appear morbid to some while it celebrates the joy of life to its wearer.³⁸ A disembodied eyeball embedded in the palm of a hand can look disturbingly strange; to its wearer it's a good-luck charm to ward off evil influences in life.³⁹ It takes more than a scan of the eyes, a glance that judges based on a superficial scan of the skin, to know what's being looked at when observing someone else's tattoos. "A tattoo is more than a painting on the skin; its meaning and reverberations cannot be comprehended without a knowledge of the history and mythology of its bearer. Thus it is a true poetic creation, and is always more than meets the eye" (Vale & Juno, cited in DeMello, 2000, p. 1).

Tattoos reveal and conceal simultaneously. Some spell out messages plain as words on a page: *I Love Mom*. It's even possible for tattoos to broadcast a person of pedagogical persuasion. Look at Chloe's scholastic skin, her sexy teacher-librarian and Death Before Detention apple. But in this Chloe is rather unique. Would an observer recognize Adams' Walt Whitman tattoo as devotion to literature, or is it just a quirky tree design? Vanessa's Arabic script hints loudly at her cultural heritage, but does a glance also explain it's a memorial to her deceased son?



³⁸ Mexican "sugar skull" tattoos are a traditional design based on The Day of the Dead festivities (Zhnag, Whenli, 2009).

³⁹ An open palm with an eye in the middle is called a "Hamsa". The design appears across Middle Eastern, Jewish, Muslim and Christian cultures. It symbolizes protection from "the evil eye" (misfortune, evil, temptation), and is generally viewed as a good luck charm (Nocke, A, 2009). *The place of the Mediterranean in modern Israeli identity*. Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV.

In this Vale & Juno (1989) are right. There often *is* more than meets the eye, especially the judgmental one. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) tells us that, “in the gaze we have at our disposal a natural instrument analogous to the blind man’s stick. The gaze gets more or less from things according to the way in which it questions them, ranges over or dwells on them” (p. 177). When judgmental eyes range superficially over a tattooed teacher’s skin, they gather just part of who this person is. They are blind to the stories contained within the inked images, fail to consider the teaching identity that is masked by surface adornment. But when eyes range deeper, when they make attempts to uncover the skills and abilities that dwell beneath the obvious, they might be surprised by what they find. Just one possible discovery: skilled, smart, tattooed teachers.

Chapter 7: Fitting In: Skin Relief Cracks, the Personal Seeps Through the Professional

‘Know thyself.’ It is difficult to argue against this advice, for surely we in education understand that our naked subjectivity is the only means we have to relate to others (Britzman, 2006, p. xii)

When brand new, a tattoo brings discomfort. The skin swells from being punctured hundreds of times by tiny needle pricks. The area becomes red and inflamed, oozes sticky lymph fluid mixed with blood and excess ink. Next, the skin becomes tight and itchy to the point of distraction as it slowly works through the healing process. Scratching would bring relief, but would also damage the tattoo, pulling the ink back out of the pores and spoiling the image. So for days, the itch is endured. Finally, with an enormous sense of relief and release, a layer of dry skin peels away, revealing freshly healed and newly coloured skin beneath. The tattoo is now a physically comfortable presence on the body, integrated seamlessly with the smooth surface of the skin.⁴⁰

In many ways, Vanessa, Adam, and Chloe’s experiences of becoming more comfortable with their professional identities as tattooed teachers mirror the process of healing a tattoo. First, they struggle with the early discomforts of stepping into new teacher identities shaped by loathed clothes, covering tactics, sweaty days, and sometimes feeling false in their own skin. With a resolve akin to not scratching an infuriatingly itchy new tattoo, they endure these discomforts in order to preserve their professional appearances as newcomers to careers in education. Yet, just as the discomfort of a new tattoo fades, so too did the discomforts of their emerging teacher identities abate with time. Moments of relief came

The word comfort is derived from the Latin *confortare*, which means to strengthen. The root word is *fort*, from the Latin *fortis* (strong). (Siefert, 2002, p. 17)

⁴⁰ Description of how it feels to heal a new tattoo based on the author’s personal experiences of being tattooed numerous times. Details of this process are also often outlined in “aftercare” pamphlets provided by tattoo artists to their clients.

when cracks in their “teacher shells” fissured along the surface, allowing glimpses of their personal selves – in the form of their tattoos – to well up into visibility. The catalysts for these cracks were interactions with colleagues or students, moments when their tattoos were seen or when they observed tattoos on others in the workplace. The discomfort of the rigid teacher mold lessened, soothed by the balm of tattoos finding a space to exist as a visible part of a professional identity. The release begins. Uncomfortable clothes are shed like dry scabby skin, bringing physical relief. Tattoos are openly displayed at work with no ill effects. Positive reactions from colleagues – or a lack of reaction altogether – instill a growing self-assurance. In small increments, fragments of Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s uncomfortable novice teacher identities fall away, bringing the more comfortable tattooed teacher to the surface.

For Vanessa, the first crack emerges at her inaugural staff meeting as a new hire at her high school. She steps into the room and looks around at her colleagues, some of whom she’s never met before. What she sees tells her everything is going to be just fine. More than fine, it’s going to be great:

Vanessa steps into the meeting room, which is abuzz with the friendly chatter of teachers. She feels young. New. She’s been on the job a scant four days. She doesn’t even know everyone’s name yet. Absent-mindedly, she tugs at the tight cuff of her blouse, fiddling with the buttons that chafe against her wrist. Grabbing an empty seat, she reaches down and adjusts the drape of her dress pants, trying to discreetly avoid creasing her new outfit before the meeting even starts. *Stop fidgeting*, she chides herself. *Try not to look like you’re going to jump out of your own skin.*

Vanessa starts with a sudden realization. *Oh my god. I can’t believe it!*

A smile claims her entire body. Her eyes shine, her lips part in a huge grin, her shoulders relax, and her feet jiggle in uncontained pleasure. With every detail she absorbs her grin widens even more. Tattoos! Some of her colleagues have tattoos! Unlike her own flowers and Arabic script, which are hidden away beneath her blouse and long pants, she can readily see tattoos on other teachers’ arms, wrists, ankles, upper backs. More than just tattoos, her eyes rove over piercings, jeans, and hooded sweatshirts. Mixed in amongst skirts and dress shoes she makes out sneakers and t-shirts. The variety surprises her, floods her with a sense of ease and comfort she hasn’t felt since before starting this job.

Her smile broadens even further. *This is awesome!* She settles into an instant, soothing conclusion about her job: *It's not going to matter if I show my tattoos or not. I chose the right school. I really chose the right school.*

Vanessa feels lighter than she's felt in days. Her dress clothes no longer stifle and constrain; they suddenly feel ridiculous. She shakes her head in bemusement. *Why am I wearing this crap?!* She laughs quietly to herself, allowing her eyes to wander the room once again, drinking in the comforting presence of tattoos and jeans and sneakers that adorn her fellow teachers. *Alright. Damn! If they can wear that, I'm pretty good to go!* A wave of contentment washes over her. *I'm in the right place here.* She takes a deep breath and slowly lets it out, feeling every muscle in her body relax. It's like the teacher mould, the ill-fitting shape she's forced herself into the past few days, has just dissolved.

The meeting marches on. Vanessa revels at one, two, several teachers who stand up to talk to the assembled staff with their tattoos exposed. Then a school administrator addresses the group. Vanessa observes her sharp skirt suit and heels, then notes a very noticeable tattoo wrapped around her ankle. In that instant, Vanessa feels confident her tattoos won't be a problem at work. *I can show my tattoos and no-one's going to care.*

The turning-point Vanessa experiences at this staff meeting demonstrates how “professional identity is not fixed or unitary. It is not a stable entity that people have, but a way to make sense of themselves in relation to other people and contexts (Coldron & Smith, 1999). Prior to this meeting, Vanessa's professional identity held no room for her tattoos, jeans, or sneakers. But when she observes her colleagues freely displaying their tattoos, her perspective shifts and her professional image starts to re-shape in response to the people who surround her. The image that weighed her down with dress pants and blouses softens in the familiar presence of ink on skin and sneakers on feet. In her exploration of teacher identity, Janet Alsup (2006) notes how the ease or difficulty of embodying a teacher identity is dependant on how similar a teacher's body is to the preferred discourse of the community of teachers around them (p. 90). When Vanessa discovers just how closely her school's discourse matches her own, she finds herself relieved and comforted:

Vanessa leaves the staff meeting with a warm sense of security. *I made the right choice. This is where I want to be.* With a beaming smile, she slowly makes her way back

towards her classroom. All lingering vestiges of doubt she's been feeling over accepting this job fall away, leaving her satisfied and content. She watches her colleagues saunter out of the meeting room, pausing to chat with students clustered in front of lockers and un-self-consciously moving down the hallways showing their tattoos and worn jeans. She shakes her head, wondering how she ever could have worried whether this was the right school for her.

The day before her job offer came in, a different high school had offered her a contract at its wealthy, prestigious campus. She can still hear her friends and family urging her to take the position, emphasizing the school's excellent reputation and well-equipped facilities. But she stood firm, holding onto the hope the technical high school, where she'd also interviewed, would hire her. Deep down she had a hunch their more hands-on learning environment and relaxed attitude would suit her better. Fighting off worry she might be losing out on being hired at all, she turned down the prestigious school's contract. The next day, the tech school's offer came in and she accepted. After seeing her colleagues at the staff meeting just now, she knows just how right her instinct was. She fits in. She can't imagine feeling the same surrounded by rich students and coworkers void of tattoos or even sneakers.

Continuing down the hall, Vanessa catches sight of three middle-aged tech teachers headed back to their workshops on the first floor. All three men have faded tattoos on their arms, time-worn and weathered to a gray-green hue. During the staff meeting introductions, one told her he used to work in construction. His colleagues had worked in welding and plumbing before coming to work at the school. Vanessa thinks how different it would have been at the other high school, where the tech teachers might have been former engineers or mathematicians rather than tradesmen.

Vanessa arrives at the door to her classroom. As she grabs the knob, her eyes linger on the skin of her wrist. Another smile, one of many to brighten her expression that morning, comes to her lips. *Maybe this summer I'll get those wrist tattoos I've been thinking about. I know nobody here would mind.*

Vanessa's staff meeting experience is the spark that kindles a warm glow of community she begins to feel at work. Goodson & Cole (1994) point out a teacher's "sense of their new professional identity depends on their notions of professional community" (1994). Vanessa's community starts at this meeting, which unequivocally shows her she's entered a workplace of people like herself, who value dressing comfortably and showing tattoos openly. The result is a release, a bursting free of a restrictive teacher mold that's no longer required given the school community she's been hired into. During our second interview together, Vanessa and I sit in her

science teachers' lounge, laughing at the growing list of tattoos she's considering for the future. With each item she adds to the list, the size and bodily location gets larger and more prominent, such as text written across the back of her neck (Interview, April 9, 2012). As her list winds gradually winds down, Vanessa takes a moment to reflect how happy she feels in her career today, knowing she can unabashedly plan new tattoos in visible places without worrying over professional repercussions:

Another early April day. It's t-shirt weather at last after a long, damp winter. Vanessa enters the school building, ducking out of the sun into the school lobby. The door to the administration offices is propped open, teachers and curriculum leaders wander in and out, picking up attendance folders for the day or checking their messages before class.

A math teacher Vanessa recognizes saunters by, pausing briefly as he passes her.

"Wow! You didn't have that before!" He exclaims, pointing to the flowers tattooed on her upper arm.

Vanessa glances down at her tattoo, acquired for her birthday in January. During the cold winter months she'd come to work covered up against the chill weather. The school's old stone buildings are nice to look at, but they do let in a draft that calls for sweaters to stay comfortable. Naturally, her colleagues haven't seen her new tattoo yet. Today, with spring in the air, is the first time she's been in short sleeves since the new design was inked on her arm.

She smiles and lifts her arm to acknowledge the flowers. *"Nope,"* she smiles, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

The math teacher raises his eyebrows, gives her an indulgent look and says, *"I guess you're going to keep on getting tattoos, then?"* His question free of judgment, tinged only by the slightest hint of amusement at his younger colleague.

Vanessa smiles back easily, recognizing his tone like that of a kindly older uncle or grandfather. He's not chastising her for getting more tattoos, just teasing her in a good-natured way.

"Oh ya! I'm going to keep on getting them. Probably 'till I die," she replies. They both laugh.

Vanessa feels a sense of belonging settle over her. Here she is, standing in her school's lobby ready for a day of work as senior chemistry teacher, laughing with a math teacher at least a decade older than her over her tattoos. She can hardly believe that just a year

ago she felt so nervous, worried so much about the impression she was making. Back then, showing up for work with a brand new, rather large arm tattoo on display wasn't in the picture. But in the months that have gone by since her first day it's become pretty clear her tattoos are a non-issue. Administration has never brought them up; neither have any of her curriculum leaders.

Taking a moment to drink in the feeling, she thinks, *I'm in a good place here.*

With a nod and a wave, she parts ways from the math teacher, marching up the side stairwell to her science classroom. With each step she takes, a warmth of contentment spreads through her. *I love this. I don't have to worry about getting new tattoos. I don't even have to think about where to put them so I can hide them with a shirt. All I have to do is decide what I want and get it.*

Vanessa's memory should serve as a reminder that professional identity goes beyond what a teacher should know and do in the classroom; it's also about what he or she finds important in life based on personal background and experiences in practice (Beijaard et al., 2003, p. 108). From the time Vanessa was 14 years old, her background has included being a tattooed person who feels strong emotional ties to her tattoos, with a particularly strong value placed on being able to wear them in visible places on her body (Interview, May 25, 2010). When Vanessa's tattoos are brought out from under formerly concealing sleeves and given space to dwell alongside her pedagogical knowledge and classroom practices, her professional identity becomes less like a shell hiding parts of who she is and more an open portrayal of how she wishes to be viewed by others.

A community of inked colleagues and the worry-free acquisition of new tattoos during the school year aren't the only sparks that can generate the warmth of feeling accepted as a tattooed teacher. Chloe experiences similar comfortable relief found by Vanessa at her staff meeting when a hiring principal encounters her at a volunteer event clad in a tattoo-reveling tank top and sporting a fire-engine-red "fauxhawk"⁴¹ hairdo. Despite Chloe's unconventional

⁴¹ A faux hawk is a hairstyle similar to a Mohawk, except with shorter spikes and the hair on the sides cut very short rather than fully shaved.

appearance, the principal accepts her as a viable employee candidate. This experience opens a crack of doubt in Chloe's mind: maybe the tattoo-covering jean jacket she's worn so diligently throughout her practicum needn't be worn so routinely after all. Maybe being tattooed and being viewed as a good teacher don't have to be mutually exclusive:

It's one of Chloe's first Saturday mornings since teachers' college ended, and it's a sunny day that promises to be a scorcher. As she gets ready for today's elementary school fun fair, the last thing on her mind is professional obligations. She's set for a day of relaxed outdoor volunteering, some laughs with the kids, and social time with teachers she met on practicum. To combat the heat, she dresses the same way she would for any other summer weekend outing: breezy tank top, hair gelled into spikes, shorts, and sandals.

When Chloe arrives, the fun fair is in full swing. Children run in giggling groups, chasing balls and balloons. She recognizes a few teachers and starts to make her way over to say hello, waving to a cluster of students who are busily applying rainbow colored chalk to a patch of sidewalk.

As she crosses the field, Chloe catches a glimpse of a familiar form: the principal from her practicum school. A glimmer of recognition passes between them. The principal starts walking towards her. With each step that closes the distance between them, a realization sinks deeper into Chloe's mind. *She's never seen me without my jean jacket before.* Now, standing sleeveless in the open field, Chloe's bright pink cherry blossom tattoo is prominently on display on her upper bicep. *I wasn't even thinking when I got dressed today! Now the principal's going to see my tattoos.*

Hand outstretched, the principal welcomes Chloe to the fair with a warm handshake. She asks how the summer has been so far and whether any job offers have opened up for the fall. Relaxing into the friendly discussion, Chloe feels her shoulders un-tense. Clearly, the principal isn't here to gawk at her tattoos. *Or my crazy hair, either,* she muses, knowing she's the only adult in attendance with her hair gelled into short, crayon-red spikes.



“*You know,*” the principal says to Chloe, “*I have a primary French vacancy to fill in September. Would you be interested in applying?*” Chloe’s face bursts into a grin. She loved her practicum school and would be more than happy to take a job with the same teachers and students she got to know a few months ago.

“*Absolutely! I would be very interested in applying. Thank you so much for letting me know about the position,*” Chloe beams. The principal returns Chloe’s enthusiasm with a genuine smile of her own. They talk for a few more minutes until the principal excuses herself to go speak with a group of parents who’ve just arrived to the fair.

A few weeks later, Chloe eagerly pursues the job application, only to discover she hasn’t passed the written component of her French language test. With a heavy heart, she calls the principal to let her know. The response she receives leaves her stunned. The principal’s words are so hopeful they feel surreal in Chloe’s ears: “*I’ll call the board and tell them to give you another chance on the test. I’d really like you to come fill this position at my school.*”

Chloe’s mind somersaults with a mixture of excitement, relief, and gratitude. *This woman, this principal who’s seen my tattoos, is going out of her way to get me the job! She could have had any teacher she wanted in these competitive times, but she still chose me!* As Chloe puts down her phone, she feels incredible, accepted and, while somewhat surprised, extremely comfortable knowing she’ll be able to go to work with or without her jean jacket. Thanks to her future boss’ acceptance, the choice is now entirely hers whether to wear long sleeves or not.

As the rush of excitement wears off, Chloe pauses to appreciate just how much this principal has done for her. *Let this be a lesson to me,* she thinks. *I shouldn’t just assume principals are going to judge my tattoos. The reality is that there are people who can see through my tattoos and recognize I’m the same qualified, nice person whether I have them or not.*

Tattoos don’t have to be impenetrable visual barriers that prevent the depth of their wearer from being seen; not everyone will jump to conclusions that tattoos preclude a person from being a good teacher. In a memorable moment of reversal, Chloe learns that she too has been judgmental of others by assuming hiring principals would take issue with her alternative appearance, moving on to more conventional qualified candidates as a result. With a great sense of relief, she proves her own assumptions wrong. It is as Janet Alsup (2006) says in her exploration of teacher identity:

By examining one's own various and particular subjectivities, a person might recognize that he or she does not define 'normalcy' and that there are variety of types of people in the world with whom he or she will be asked to interact. (p. 97)

Chloe discovers that misconceptions flow both ways, and they won't always be about her. Sometimes the false assumptions will be about the non-tattooed educators in her life. Just as teachers come in all varieties of body modified, conservative, and everything in-between, there's no ultimate principal type, no all-powerful authority figure whose primary goal it is to expel everything unfamiliar, unusual, or unexpected from their teacher roster.

In her work on difference, Luce Irigaray (2004) notes that, "in most cases, criticizing remains in sameness ... It does not take into account the difference which necessitates another behavior, another way of thinking and acting" (p. viii). While not deliberately critical, Chloe's initial worry over her tattoos being seen at the summer fun fair is grounded in this perspective of sameness. Based on previous judgments and reactions, Chloe assumes the principal will act the same way. She does not assume, in her moment of angst, that the principal may think and act differently from others, accepting her tattoos and punk hairstyle in stride. Some teachers are different: they have visible tattoos. Likewise, some principals are different: they *hire* visibly tattooed teachers. Recognizing this refreshing variance brings Chloe a sense of comfortable belonging she didn't feel during practicum placement at the same principal's school, when she took care to cover her tattoos with her jean jacket every single day. Leaving the fun fair with a job opportunity in hand, Chloe realizes some principals can and do view her teaching skills first, and that her denim covering routine isn't as necessary as she originally thought.

More than three years after this encounter, Chloe still thinks fondly of this principal who taught her judgment doesn't have to be the status quo. As we sit leaning over a café table during

our second interview together, she nods sagely to me as she describes the lesson she learned on this memorable weekend:

I'm going to take it as a positive that she was simply able to see who [I am]. She may not have realized that I was going to *continue* getting tattooed! But needless to say, it didn't make a difference. I just take it as a positive experience and think, you know, she was just that one guardian angel that I had who got my foot in the door. And here I am, x amount of years later. (Interview, October 23, 2010).

As we converse about her experience, Chloe pauses mid-sentence with a bemused expression on her face. She reminds me how she can't remember having any teachers with tattoos growing up – but, given this reflection on the circumstances of her own hiring – wonders aloud whether some were covertly tattooed and she just didn't know it. “Maybe they were wearing *their* jean jackets all the time!” she laughs (Interview, Oct. 23, 2010). Today, Chloe continues to experience an expanding continuum of comfort at school, standing up for her personal convictions even when it means countering her principal's plans for the hottest summer months:

Stepping out of her apartment, Chloe is hit with a thick wall of air. *Whew! It's way too hot for a coat and sleeves today.* Hurriedly, she dashes back inside, tosses her jean jacket on the sofa and strips off her long-sleeved top. Running into the bedroom, she hastily selects a t-shirt. A quick glimpse in the hall mirror reflects a riot of colour on her arms, wrists, and chest, her tattoos standing out in sharp contrast against the plain white cotton. She glances at her coat lying on the sofa cushion. *Two years ago I never would have left home without you!* A lot has changed. *To think, I used to feel disrespectful showing my tattoos at work,* she muses, surveying the increasingly large collection of images on her arms. *Well, that feeling sure has fizzled.* She darts back outside and hops on her bike for her morning commute.

Arriving at school, Chloe feels liberated not having to put on an extra layer. No jean jacket, no sweater. Just a plain t-shirt perfect for a sweaty day of running around during yard duty with her second graders. As she enters the front lobby, Chloe runs into her principal. It's the first truly hot day of spring, and the first time she's been seen in short sleeves since acquiring half a dozen new tattoos on her arms.

“Morning Chloe,” the principal says, eyes darting momentarily over her bare arms. *“Feels like summer came early today, doesn’t it? Speaking of summer, what’re your plans? I guess you could wear a linen blouse or something?”*

Chloe starts. *Linen! Oh, this girl doesn’t do linen, lady!*

Out loud, she replies, *“Well, I don’t know. Nothing, I guess. Just regular short sleeves probably. I don’t really like linen.”* She watches the principal consider this reply, her eyes quietly absorbing the colours on her skin.

“Well, alright then.”

Chloe nods, pleased her principal hasn’t tried to push the issue of stuffy summer wear on her. She knows her tattoos have multiplied considerably since September. But if two or three are okay, why not six or eight? Or twelve? Chloe watches her principal’s smile return, possibly because she’s just reached the same conclusion herself.

“You sure had the right idea today. Wish I hadn’t worn this heavy thing,” her principal jokes, tugging at her thick blazer.

The reply breaks all hints of possible tension from forming. Chloe laughs understandingly, and falls into step beside her principal as they walk towards the primary grade classrooms, a comfortable silence between them. *I’ve become a lot more lax with myself,* Chloe reflects. *It feels pretty good right now.*



Comfort out of Nothing

Vanessa and Chloe’s growing sense of comfort and belonging as tattooed teachers germinated out of positive interactions with their colleagues. Adam’s sense of comfort at work emerged differently, borne from an absence of encounters or strong reactions as opposed to the presence of notably positive ones. During our two interview sessions together, Adam reflects on

experiences from his various teaching positions, from student teacher, to first-year permanent employee, to substitute teacher, to university lecturer. None of these roles, he tells me, came with peers who evinced displeasure or acted strangely towards his tattoos (Interview, November 14, 2010; April 2, 2010). As a student teacher, he remembers being shocked when his supervising teacher told a staffroom of colleagues about his tattoos; he thought nobody knew since he wore long sleeves all the time (Interview, November 14, 2010). It was to no effect. None of the teachers reacted. Adam also recalls how his high school teacher colleagues saw his tattoos during after-hours social outings; again, no reaction. He's never once had a supervisor or principal remark on his appearance. Even his own university students haven't commented on his tattoos. Overall, Adam's teaching experiences point to a noticeable void of negative responses resulting from his tattoos being seen at work. The most memorable of these non-reactions: his grade ten students' less-than-awed response at finally seeing his tattoos after he made them wait an entire year for their unveiling:



It's the last day of the school year. All pretenses for doing work have been abandoned in favour of discussing summer plans and contemplating final grades on report cards. In the lazy haze of the last hour of his Grade 10 class, Adam breaks the din of teenage conversation and calls for his students' attention.

"Well guys, this is it. End of the year. You want to see your teacher's tattoos now? Come on over, I'll show you."

Chair legs screech across the worn linoleum floor as Adam's students get up and saunter to the front of the room, where he sits perched on the edge of his desk. He works at the stiff buttons on his dress sleeve cuffs until they pop free. Not bothering to roll the fabric slowly, he simply pushes the sleeves up past his elbows and his biceps, revealing black and red ink. The



familiar tree, the panther head depicted in profile. In fairness to his promise, he also shifts his watchband up to show the black spade-shaped moth underneath.

His students fail to be moved. If anything, they look bored, waiting for their teacher to get on with things so they can go back to planning their weekend. Adam waits another few seconds to see if anyone will wager a comment or show evidence of interest, but after their first glimpse they all seem satisfied to forget all about it.

Well, that was anti-climactic. Adam smirks inwardly, but isn't really surprised. *A whole year of hiding them and making such a big mystery out of things, and this is it. No crazy outbursts. No overexcitement. No running around the room out of control.* He shrugs and pulls his sleeves back down, the cue for the teens to disperse back to their seats. *Well, what the heck did I expect? They're teenagers. It's not like my tattoos are risqué or shocking. Pretty standard stuff.* Adam breathes a half-sigh, half self-deprecating chuckle. *Clearly I didn't have to worry about showing them. The teacher will never be cool, even with ink.*

Adam surveys his students, who've languidly draped themselves back at their desks to resume their social discussions. He doesn't hear a single remark about his tattoos. Clearly, the big unveiling has left little impression on them. Next time, he won't make such a big deal out of what's turned out to be basically nothing at all.

A year's worth of buildup, months of wearing uncomfortable dress shirts, and in a swift, flat moment is all comes to an uneventful end. Like ripping off a Band-Aid, Adam realizes the anticipation of his big reveal was far more dramatic than the actual event. In his work on tattoo sociology, Clinton Sanders (1989) notes how reactions to tattoos affect interactions and relationships and shape a person's decision whether to reveal tattoos to others. Positive reactions tend to reinforce social connections and increase the likelihood that tattooees will "expand the universe of situations in which they choose to reveal their unconventional body decorations" (Sanders, 1989, p. 57). While Adam's students' reactions were not specifically positive, they certainly weren't negative, and the experience works to relieve of the worry he might have felt showing his tattoos to future classes. The following year, Adam returns to the same high school as a supply teacher, having decided to move away from fulltime teaching⁴². This time, when a

⁴² Adam's decision to leave fulltime teaching for supply teaching was a personal one and did not directly relate to his being a tattooed teacher. In interview discussions, he described feeling too restricted by the "career" of teaching

student asks about his ink, Adam feels no need to make the class wait until the end of the year for an answer:

“You have a tattoo, right sir?”

Adam looks up from the English text he has propped on the desk in front of him. Most of the students are reading the same novel at their desks; a few lift their eyes, waiting to see how their substitute teacher will respond to the question. Adam’s not surprised to be asked. He is, after all, wearing a t-shirt today. He no longer feels the pressure to wear long sleeves unless he wants to. Even if these students had never seen him in a t-shirt, it was just last year that he was a fulltime teacher at this same school. His former students might have passed along the gossip he has tattoos. Either way, he’s not bothered. As a regular substitute, he’s gotten to know this group of students well enough over the semester. He’s comfortable spending a few minutes on a conversation outside of the lesson plan, even if the topic is his tattoos.

“Yes, I do have tattoos,” Adam responds in an even tone, flipping the book over and giving his attention to the conversation. A few more eyes raise around the room, curious about the unfolding dialogue.

“Oh.” The student says. *“Why did you get that?”* He asks, peering at the *Thundercats* tattoo on Adam’s forearm.

Adam turns his arm slightly, giving a clearer view of the red and black ink. *“I got this when I was a teenager. It’s from a show I really liked when I was a kid, Thundercats,”* he answers matter-of-factly, not enthusiastically promoting his tattoos, but not shying away from the question either. The title doesn’t generate any reaction; these students are too young to be familiar with a late 1980s cartoon series. But they do take a moment to survey the panther design, some might be reading the text around it. Nobody calls out inappropriate comments or pries with overly personal questions. It’s no different than the first time Adam showed his class: moderate interest edging on boredom.

Adam waits a few moments to see if anyone has questions. Nobody does. He flips his copy of the novel they’re studying back over, and resumes reviewing the notes in the margins. A quick look around the room shows him some of the keener students have already gone back to their assigned chapters, eager to avoid homework. *This feels pretty good,* he thinks. *I can show them and it doesn’t matter. Nothing is going to get back to me.* He rests back in his chair, just enjoying the simple feeling of wearing a t-shirt and not caring about it.

but enjoying the “job” of teaching. He also said he would likely feel the same way about any permanent, long-term career path, teaching or otherwise (Interview, November 14, 2010).

In some ways, Adam's growing comfortable showing his tattoos to his students parallels how some teachers feel coming out.⁴³ Of course, coming out as tattooed and coming out as homosexual are distinct experiences with their own implications and impacts; this is not to say they can be directly compared.⁴⁴ Yet both experiences do contain a moment of revelation, the instant when the private becomes public and the resulting reaction from others can shape a teacher's path forward with students and even his or her career (Rasmussen, 2004; Turner, 2010). A person is typically viewed as "closeted" if they choose to keep their sexual orientation private, and would be considered to have "come out of the closet" when they disclose their sexual orientation publicly (Rasmussen, 2004, p.144). In this sense, Adam spends the first year of his teaching career in the 'tattoo closet'. He firmly commits to keeping his tattoos covered and private, feeling the same worry over retaliation (school administration questioning his suitability and legitimacy as a teacher, or judging him as a bad one) that leads some homosexual teachers to question whether coming out is the best thing to do (Turner, 2010). At the end of his first year, Adam 'comes out of the tattooed teacher closet' when he shows his students an open, honest, unobstructed view of the ink on his arms. And in the same way that finally coming out to their class can bring a sense of relief for homosexual teachers who no longer feel that have to hide who they are, Adam's tattoo outing likewise brings him relief (Turner, 2010). Beyond relief, it gives him confidence to continue showing his tattoos to students the following year.

⁴³ The notion of coming out and tattoos has also been noted by Margo DeMello (2000) in her research on tattoo communities. She collected narratives from tattooees, some of whom shared experiences of "coming out as a tattooed person" (p. 153).

⁴⁴ A critical difference between coming out as homosexual and coming out as a tattooed person that must not be overlooked is the factor of choice. In almost all circumstances, an individual chooses to become tattooed, with a few uncommon exceptions such as prisoners in Nazi concentration camps or slaves (Caplan, 2000). Individuals who are homosexual, however, do not choose their sexual orientation. As stated in the Human Rights Campaign, "Sexuality and gender identity are not choices any more than being left-handed or having brown eyes or being heterosexual are choices" (cited in Ramussen, 2004, p. 146).

Two years later, sitting in a trendy café talking over coffee during our second interview together, Adam reflects the instant when his students uneventfully accepted his tattoos, the reveal without fanfare that unfolded on the last day of his first year as a teacher. Gathering his thoughts in small bursts, interspersed with pauses as he searches for words to describe the complicated feeling, Adam explains how the resulting relief grew from no longer feeling he had to hide, that the choice was now his to make:

It's not so much a conscious issue where I feel sort of bad, not guilty, but bad about the fact I have to hide myself... Now, I can *own* that decision and feel like it's not being enforced on me, you know what I mean? You know, I feel like I could not do that [wear long sleeves] and things would be okay. (Interview, Nov. 14, 2010)

Owning the decision of when to cover and when to reveal his tattoos gives Adam the power to shape his teacher image how he wants to be seen, rather than striving to suit the ideals of others. As Margo DeMello (2000) says of the stories she collected from tattooees, "I saw the primary source of tattoo power in terms of the literal ability to 'write oneself' and subsequently be 'read' by others" (p. 12). The growing comfort Adam feels in wearing t-shirts to school and talking to his students about his tattoos relates to this power. He's arrived at a place where he can write his teacher image to include tattoos, and to be read outwardly as a tattooed teacher.

Adam's words resonate beyond his personal experiences; they reflect Vanessa's and Chloe's as well. All three start their careers inhabiting a version of a professional identity that doesn't reflect who they want to be. After a time of working within the uncomfortable constraints of these teacher "costumes," each finds a thread to pull, resulting an unraveling and re-shaping of their teacher image into something personal rather than proscribed, welcomed instead of endured. Vanessa follows her thread back to a school community of tattooed

colleagues. Chloe unravels a lesson from an accepting principal who shows her tattoos and professionalism need not exclude each other. Adam tugs at a strand of non-reaction that lends him confidence to talk openly about his tattoos at school. Out come the rigid, stiff seams that held together Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's early notions of how a teacher should look. They begin to re-stitch their teacher identities into personal best fits that allow their tattoos to rise to the surface as integral parts of their professional identity rather than hidden parts of their personal selves.

As teachers, as colleagues, as supervisors, as former or current students, we should try to remember that the teachers in our lives are people as well as professionals, people whose lives are influenced and made meaningful by factors inside and outside the classroom (Goodson & Cole 1994, p. 88). As educators, we won't all work with colleagues who look like we do or value the same things. Some of us will or do struggle with the expectations of our profession, whether on a physical, emotional, or philosophic level. What we can take away from Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences is that finding yourself in an uncomfortable place at work does not mean it will always feel this way. Some beginning teachers do resist the pressures to conform and locate ways to bring aspects of their personal selves into their professional lives. "Rather than accommodate, these teachers seek to recreate the situation" (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 31). Judith Butler (1999) offers an approach for this recreation, a way to re-define an identity formerly constrained by social norms. She urges us to repeatedly present an alternative, to show over and over again what is possible outside a norm (Butler, 1999, p. 188). For tattooed teachers, this may take shape by allowing their tattoos to be seen daily at school. It may also look like trusting

The task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility *qua* possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that *already* exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible (Butler, 1999, p. 189).

colleagues, giving them space to react to tattoos in their own way before assuming they will judge. For non-tattooed teachers, principals, and administrators this could look like working beside inked colleagues and not sending them sideways glances even if body art isn't a favourite thing. It could mean showing the school community over and over again, through repeated acts of accepting tattooed colleagues, that teacher identities can and *do* include the possibility of tattoos.

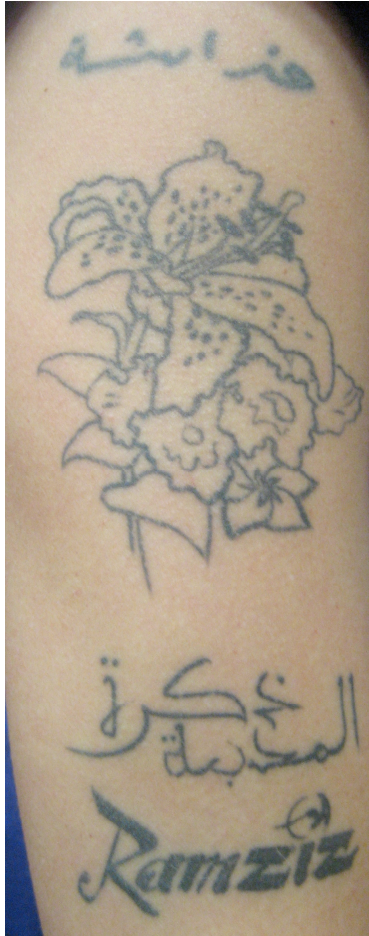
Chapter 8: One Size Does Not Fit All: Embracing the Chiasm of Universal and Unique

Bodies. Through our bodies we experience the world. The touch of a hand. A moment when eyes connect. A nod. A smile. The soothing timbre of a voice. An extended handshake. An invitation to sit. The shy duck of the head. The scent of soap, or cologne. The taste of tears. The curve of the back. The slope of the shoulders. A lifted chin. The pace of the feet. The quietness of breath. Loud exuberant shouts. Pounding hearts. The chill of gooseflesh rising on the skin. The metal tang of anxiety on the back of the tongue. The pleasure of softness. The wonder of colour. The slickness of ink on skin. Sometimes a silent body; sometimes a speaking body. But always, it is through our bodies that we learn ourselves, each other, and the world.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1968) viewed our very experience of existing in terms of embodiment. For him, the body is not an obstacle that separates us from the world, from things, or from one other. Rather, it is “the thickness of flesh” that is our “means of communication” with the world (1968, p.135). The idea of flesh is so vital to his conception of existence that he did not consider it mind, matter, or substance, but an “element” as fundamental as water, air, earth and fire; he designates it “an element of Being” (p. 139). This conception of flesh as embodied existence, as the space where the material body and the world of experience intertwine and enmesh, has interesting insights to offer when considering the experiences of tattooed teachers. Merleau-Ponty (1968) called this intertwining the *chiasm*, a folding over of the flesh of the world with the flesh of the body, a space wherein the meanings of experiences and perception are found within the folds.

An example of how this *chiasm* might work is how Vanessa’s visibly tattooed skin folds her students and colleagues into her experience of losing her infant son, and learning from the resulting intersection what it means to place so private a memorial tattoo on so public a space as

her bicep. Vanessa returns to the topic of her memorial tattoo numerous times during our two interviews together, re-visiting the bittersweet exchanges this particular tattoo has produced for her at school:



Vanessa returns to work. Her body has slimmed, signaling the logical presence of a baby. But there is no baby. Instead, her arm bears a beautiful new design. The flowing Arabic script fits like a perfectly matched puzzle piece into her other tattoos. Instinct and feeling formed this tattoo. She felt it click into place as the stencil was oriented, accepted it into her flesh as a natural physical manifestation of her huge, deep love for her lost son. The *Ramziz* text rests below the bouquet of grayscale flowers, mirroring word *Farasha* above the blooms, the Lebanese word for butterfly and Vanessa's family nickname. The seamless layout appears premeditated, the flowers a gentle offering to boy's name memorialized underneath. Cobbled together out of family ties, aesthetic preferences and unpredicted tragedy – each experienced at different stages in her life – her arm tattoos form a cohesive whole despite their staggered application.

The seasons have marched on. Fall weather has settled in and a new school year has commenced. If life had happened differently, Vanessa would be at home right now watching her son take his first wobbly steps, gurgling his first words. Instead, she's walking the hallway of her high school, lugging an armful of file folders stuffed with lab reports into the teachers' lounge. She pushes her shoulder against the door, lets herself into the space that smells of coffee and the ever-present aroma of photocopy ink and warm paper. Dropping her files on the table, she flops into a well-worn armchair, prepared for half hour of marking before the students start arriving for the day.

She recognizes the man sitting across from her as a teacher from down the hall. Biology. He smiles; she nods a greeting back.

"How's the baby?" he asks.

Vanessa swallows. *"Well, I had a stillborn."*

A thick silence settles between them. Vanessa gestures to her arm, turning sideways so he can see, *"His name was Ramziz. This tattoo is his name."* She watches his face turn sad, eyes downcast as he pulls on a hangnail. The tension in the air becomes enormous. She leans back in her chair, gives him as much personal space to work through his thoughts as possible. She listens to his breath catch in irregular, pained jerks.

“My first son was a stillborn,” he replies, voice barely audible, *“and I went on to have two daughters.”* He stands abruptly to leave the room, out of words and endurance for the painful topic.

Fifteen minutes later, Vanessa rises from her chair and heads to her classroom. It’s still early. The hallways are empty except for the odd scrap of paper and a pen that’s rolled beneath a locker door. With only the soft tap of her sneakered footfalls to accompany her, she lets her mind return to the encounter with the bereaved biology teacher. A familiar stinging warmth prickles at the corner of her eyes, sympathy rising for her colleague. She knows how painful the memories can be. It’s been over a year since she lost Ramziz and she’s comfortable talking about it now. But she knows how hard it can be. Her hand rises to her arm, rubbing over the black ink that etches the memory forever on her body. *I never really thought what it would mean, putting his name on my arm this way,* she thinks, tracing her fingertips over the ornate lettering. *Of course people are going to ask what it means. I was prepared for that. But how they feel when I answer, how it bothers them and opens them to their own sadness, I didn’t realize...*

Students start trickling into the room. Tired-looking teenage bodies still adjusting to September schedules sink into creaky plastic chairs placed in front of scratched wooden desks. Backpacks and purses clunk to the floor. Grade nine science class has commenced. She introduces herself to her new class, *“Hi everyone. I’m Ms. Asiz. Welcome to grade nine science.”*

“Hey Miss! You’ve got some ink there. What’s it all mean?”

Vanessa smiles. She half expected to be asked. The grade nines are still young, compulsive. Some lack developed social filters and blurt whatever’s on their mind. No matter if they’re in class. If they’re interested enough to want to know, they’re going to ask. It’s the first day of school and they’ve just seen their science teacher is a young female with more than a couple tattoos. Odds are, someone would bring it up.

“Well, I can start with this one. It’s my nickname in Lebanese,” Vanessa opens the door to her first conversation with her class. She sees a few students nodding; they can read the lettering because they’ve learned the language at home. *“And these here on my wrists, they’re symbols for good luck. Then the flowers. Well, they’re just nice to look at.”* That gets a few laughs.

“What about that one? Who’s Ramziz? That your husband?”

Vanessa shakes her head ‘no’. *“Actually, that’s my son’s name. Unfortunately, he passed away. He was stillborn. So this tattoo is to remember him by.”* She sees no reason to lie about it. She’s going to be these teens’ teacher for at least a year, more if some have to repeat the course. And some will. She’ll see others if they pursue senior chemistry. Either way, she wants to get to know them and feels they deserve to know her too. This is a technical school. The students here are no strangers to the messy side of life. Vanessa

knows that for at least half of them, just getting up and making it to school this morning was an accomplishment. She sees a lot of disengaged, disinterested youth pass through her door every year. So when something piques their curiosity to engage with her, she jumps on the opportunity. If they want to talk about her tattoos, she's going to talk about them.

"Aw, Miss. I'm so sorry. That's so sad," replies the student who posed the question.

"I had a sister who was stillborn," from a boy in the second row, who scribbles inside the cover of his science book as he shares this.

"Ya, that happened to a friend of mine. It's awful," a girl with round, rapt eyes tells Vanessa, looking directly at her as she speaks. *"I'm really sorry it happened to you too,"* she says earnestly.

"That's okay guys. It was really sad. But I'm okay, and I don't mind telling you about it. I'm cool to talk about things. I want you to know that. And you can talk to me about things too, if you feel you need to."

Her students sit and look at her quietly, considering this young tattooed science teacher at the front of the room. Vanessa sees furrowed brows and thoughtful expressions. The boy who lost a sister rubs his hand brusquely back and forth through his hair. One girl sits tracing her finger up and down the edge of her binder, lost in her own thoughts. Vanessa feels like she's being looked at like a person. Not just a teacher. Not just the giver of grades or detentions. But a person, one who's gone through tough times, just like they've gone through tough times.

This is what teaching is about, Vanessa muses as she looks back at her students. *It's a lot more than getting up here and talking about atomic structure. A whole lot more.*

Building on Merleau-Ponty's (1968) understanding of flesh and the chiasm, Vanessa's experience is also one of intersubjectivity. Madeline Grumet (1988) writes about intersubjectivity in education, describes it as sharing between self and others. This does not detract from Merleau-Ponty's views but extends them, emphasizing how bodies are touched when they experience each other, how they open to the experiences each has to offer (Springgay & Freedman, 2007, p. xxi). Often, we understand touch as physical contact, the caress of a hand, a pat on the back. But touching here is more about the contact made between the flesh of the body and the flesh of experience, and the meaning made in the resulting folds. What makes

Vanessa's experience unique is how the point of intersection is her tattooed teacher flesh, how it opens her to intersubjective experiences with others at school and provides a special space where meaning, understanding and moments of rapport occur.

Educational theorist Ted Aoki (2000) reminds us, "What matters deeply in the situated world of the classroom is how the teachers 'doings' flow from who they are... Teaching is fundamentally a mode of being" (cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, p. 428). He also stresses that embodied thoughtfulness is what makes it possible for us to live as human beings. Vanessa, Chloe and Adam's experiences demonstrate how tattoos can help students better understand their teachers as people, and how inked flesh can be a gateway into moments of embodied learning that go beyond planned classroom lessons. A traditional concept of teachers paints them "as super-human role models who exist in a separate dimension from the everyday world," people who live in their classrooms and never do ordinary things like go to bathroom, buy groceries, or show emotion (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 3). Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences reveal how tattoos can show students teachers do not, in fact, come from some alien dimension, but that they are feeling people with lives not so different from their own.

During both our interview discussions together, I watch Vanessa's eyes light up with pleasure as she explains how her tattoos help her connect with her students. She leans forward on the edge of the table, words spilling forth quickly in her eagerness to describe how her tattoos break down barriers and let her students see her for the human being she is, one that's not so disconnected from what they think and feel. Often, all it takes to bring them into this fold of understanding is to tell the truth when they ask questions:

Science class is in full swing. Vanessa wanders up and down the aisles between her students' desks, watching groups of grade nines work their way through problem sets and compare answers. Lab books, pencils and erasers lay scattered about, and the chalkboard

at the front of the room has been heavily marked, erased and marked again with formulas and calculations.

“Miss Asiz, I can’t get this to work. Can you please help me?” Vanessa walks over to a desk where one of her female students, Miriam, is stuck on a question. The girl is one of Vanessa’s many Muslim students. She’s a polite, quiet, and hardworking with a fierce determination to get top grades. Vanessa knows her father pushes her very hard to succeed, which means she never abandons something she can’t solve on her own.

“How can I help?” Miriam points to a line on her page where multiple eraser marks and smudges indicate her frustrated attempts. Vanessa scans the work and spots a misplaced



number. She reaches across the page and taps the paper, *“Why don’t you take a closer look at this value?”*

Miriam’s eyes follow the line of Vanessa’s arm down to where her finger touches the page. She notices the tattoo on her teacher’s wrist. *“That’s really pretty, that design on your wrist,”* she says. Vanessa smiles, lifts her finger from the chemistry work and turns her arm over give Miriam a better view.

“Thank you Miriam. Do you know what this design means?” The girl shakes her head. *“They’re meant to be good luck, to ward off bad influences,”* Vanessa explains. Miriam continues to gaze at the soft brown ink, the geometric patterns filling in the outline of the hand-shaped design.

“My Dad would never let me get a tattoo, even if it was really nice like yours” Miriam says softly. Vanessa nods. In traditional Muslim households like Miriam’s, she knows that tattoos are not always culturally accepted.

“Did you know my Dad got really mad at me when I got my first tattoo?” Miriam’s eyes widen and she giggles, shaking her head no. Vanessa can tell from her shocked expression she never thought of her own teacher getting in trouble with her father.

“Ooh! Miss Asiz caught it from her Dad!” One of her male students, Mark, teases her from a couple rows over, having overheard her exchange with Miriam. The class hears this and laughs. *“Uh oh, Miss Asiz got in trouble,”* another student calls out. More laughs. *“Tell us what happened. How’d you get it? What’d you do?”*

Taking a seat atop a vacant desk near the middle of the room, Vanessa looks around at her students, who are all staring at her expectantly waiting for her story. She knows why they’re so intrigued. She’s their teacher. She’s the one who’s supposed to get people in

trouble or dole out discipline. Teachers don't catch it from their parents... do they? Taking another look around, Vanessa can't help feel a tug of empathy for these teens. A lot of them have tough lives and even tougher families. Some are repeating the course for the second or third time, having failed due to parents going to jail or siblings dying young from street violence. One student watched his mom end up in the hospital from domestic abuse. Another took a bad personal turn with drugs. One of her students was beat up so badly by a nasty stepparent she missed the second half of the school year. The boy at the back of the room spent a few months in juvenile detention for helping his cousin rob a corner store. These are kids who know about getting in trouble. They understand what angry parents are like. But do they know teachers aren't perfect? That they sometimes do things that get them in trouble? Vanessa sees an opportunity here to show her students she's not a perfect human being with a perfect life that only takes place inside the classroom.

"Oh ya, I got it for lying. For lying about my first tattoo to my parents."

She has their full attention. The very idea captivates them. They lean forward eagerly, hungry to hear what happened. Even their iPods and cell phones can't compete with this personal drama.



"Well, you see this tattoo here," she points to the Celtic knot on her chest. *"I was only fourteen when I got it, and I didn't ask my parents first. I went behind their back and got it."* A few sniggers from a two of her male students who have their own under-age tattoos.

"Ain't that illegal, Miss?" a student asks. Vanessa nods and replies frankly, *"Oh ya. It sure is. It still is today. It's illegal to get tattooed without your parents' permission when you're fourteen."* The sniggers stop.

She continues, *"So, I get this tattoo and I can't exactly hide it from my parents. It's right here."* She points at the very visible spot on her chest. More laughs. *"So I tell my parents it's pen. I tell them I draw it on everyday."* Even more laughs. *"Then one day my parents take my sister, brother and me swimming at the public pool. You know the one beside the community centre? So, for some reason my sister decides to rat me out. I'm standing right there in the water and she says to my Dad, 'Hey Dad, isn't it strange that Vanessa's pen isn't coming off in the water?'"*

At this, Vanessa hears a variety of reactions. A lot of the guys laugh again, amused by the shallow cover story their teacher used to hide her first tattoo in plain sight. Some of the girls gasp, horrified that a sister could be so backstabbing.

"I was so mad at her. I mean, she had a tattoo too, and I didn't rat her out." At this, she sees a few nods of appreciation. Siblings should stick together, some of her students'

expressions are telling her. *“Anyhow, my Dad is not impressed. He grabs us all, marches us straight back to the house right that minute and sits me down on the sofa still in my bathing suit. And he yelled. And yelled and yelled and yelled. He must have yelled for over an hour and I’m sure all the neighbors heard him. My Dad’s real strict. He’s a very strict Arabic man who expects his children to behave and tell the truth. Then he finds out I’ve been lying to his face all these weeks over a tattoo. He hates tattoos. So he just loses it. He totally snaps.”* Her students are silent now, no laughs or jokes. They want to know what her father did to her, how he punished her. *“I was grounded for weeks. I couldn’t even go to my job at the grocery store. And every night at the dinner table he brought it up again in front of my Mom and brother and sister. Talked about the importance of honesty and not defiling your body. It drove me crazy.”*

Vanessa’s students sit in their seats quietly, absorbing what they’ve just heard and thinking their private thoughts. Some look at her with curiosity still on their face. A couple of students have their mouths slightly open, as if they can’t picture Miss Asiz doing something like that. Others look down at their hands, remembering encounters with their own angry fathers. One student rubs at a tattoo on his own arm, possibly re-living his own family’s explosive reaction.

“If I lied like that to my Dad and got a tattoo, he’d take a belt to me,” the student named Mark says. Vanessa knows his father is also a very strict Arabic man, but one who follows far more traditional views of discipline at home than her own father. Vanessa doesn’t agree with the situation, knows the school’s social workers have files on these things.

Only ten minutes have gone by, but Vanessa feels the dynamic in her classroom shift. The way her students are looking at her, the reactions and responses to her story, she can see it made an impression. *They’re looking at me like a human being,* she thinks. *They see I have a life. I’m not a teacher ‘thing,’ I’m a person, just like they are. I have a world of experience outside this building. I was young like them once. I dealt with parents like they deal with theirs. I did things like get tattoos and got in trouble.*

In the pensive silence that now permeates the room, Vanessa feels like a divide has dissolved. She is no longer a stranger to her students, but part of their world. She will always be different, always be their teacher. She has to be, to maintain reasonable order and make sure they learn. But now she’s human with a life outside the classroom too, a life they can see it not so very distant from their own. She turns her wrists over and takes a long, thoughtful look at the brown ink. *What a way to connect. My tattoos.*

More than meaning-making intersection that shows Vanessa in a human light with common experiences to her students, this moment brings embodied learning to Vanessa’s classroom. Science learning happens in students’ lab books and on the chalkboard. Intellectual learning takes place as Miriam works through her equation. But it’s the tattoos on Vanessa wrists

that open a space for embodied learning, which captures a sense of the body's immersion in spaces, and views bodies as spaces for interaction and transformation (Grosz, cited in Springgay & Freedman, 2007, p. xxi). This happens when Vanessa points at Miriam's page and her wrist tattoo creates an interaction between them. It happens as Vanessa sits on the desk surrounded by her students and they release together through laughter or think silently together how it feels to be yelled at by your father. Vanessa doesn't quote local bylaws about the legal age for getting tattooed. She doesn't pull out a cultural text and make her students read a page explaining how some religions do not accept the practice of tattooing. She immerses her students in her lived experience, allows them to reflect with her, feel with her, and in the end, transform the way they see her.

Chloe also finds her tattoos help her grade threes and grade sixes understand her better as a person who is more than just "Madame," the woman who guides them through lessons and assigns their homework. During our second interview together, Chloe looks down at her arms resting on the café table and smiles, explaining how her tattoos have helped break down barriers in the classroom. Her most recent group of grade six students has been especially interested in her tattoos, which Chloe feels has helped them build a stronger, better rapport with each other:

Chloe has just gathered her students in the large open space at the back of her classroom for some read-aloud time. A French storybook in hand, she settles cross-legged on the floor and opens the book to where the class left off yesterday afternoon. Her grade sixes shuffle and find comfortable spaces, some pulling off their shoes, others finding desks to lean on or shelves to rest against. Sarah, one of her shier students, scoots closer to Chloe until she's just inches away.

"Madame, I really like that pretty lady," Sarah says softly, pointing to one of Chloe's lower arm tattoos, a woman coloured in turquoise and red ink.

Chloe smiles, *"Thank you Sarah, I think she's really pretty too."*

Not to be left out of choosing the prettiest picture on Madame's arms, a girl named Emily chimes in, *"I like the mermaid. The mermaid is my favourite."* Chloe smiles again, *"Yes, the mermaid is pretty too Emily. Thank you."*



Over-hearing this exchange, a boy named Brad raises his hand and wiggles it in the air to get Chloe's attention. *"Brad, you have question?"*

"Madame, how many tattoos do you have?"

Looking at the clock, Chloe notes she has ten minutes longer for read-aloud time today than she had yesterday. Given the few extra minutes, she can't see any harm in answering Brad's question. The students have their ears perked, curious to hear what the number might be. A couple of children appear to be taking mental inventory, trying to count her tattoos as they wait for her reply. It's not like Chloe's going to 'talk shop' with the kids. She won't explain what it's like to get tattooed or how they got on her skin. That's not really her job, and it wouldn't be appropriate. But all Brad wants to

know is how many different pictures she has. Given the class looks at her skin every day it's only natural they'd be curious.

"Hmm. I don't know Brad. Lots!" Her students giggle in agreement. Madame does have a lot of colourful pictures on her arms.

"What does that one mean, Madame?" her student Abigail asks, leaning towards her to point at the cartoon image of a girl with a pink cat.

"That's a cartoon of me with my pet cat. He's a bit silly and so am I sometimes, so I had it drawn this way," Chloe answers. That gets another giggle from most of the girls, and a few of the boys who like the ways the eyes on the cartoon are designed. Chloe hears a student pipe up, *"My cat is so weird too. He fell in the toilet last week,"* and another, *"My brother has a cat who's really fat. He sleeps all day on the sofa."* From somewhere at the back of the group Chloe hears a boy grumble, *"I wish I could have a cat. My mom is allergic so I'm not allowed."*



"Madame, you're really different from the other teachers. You have all these tattoos, and they don't," Brad comments again.

He's right, Chloe thinks. She is different from the other teachers. And this is a great opportunity to show her class that being different is okay, not something to be scared of or worried about.

"You know everyone," she says, getting the students' collective attention, *"Brad is right. I do look different from the other teachers. And you know what? It's okay to look different, to be different. Do you all remember what our religion theme is this year?"*

"We are Unique!" The class choruses together, eager to show their teacher they've remembered their lessons.

"That's right. And you can think of me as an example of someone who is unique. My tattoos are unique. Just like everyone one of you is unique in your own way. Do you remember what our giraffe poster means?" Chloe asks, pointing to a poster on the wall behind her. It shows a sea of zebras in a field, with one tall giraffe's neck poking out from the herd. The French text across the bottom reads, *'Être fier d'être différent'*. Together, she leads the class in reading the French words. A boy named Edward raises his hand and says, *"That means 'Be proud to be different' in English."*

"That's right Edward. Be proud to be different. Être fier d'être différent. I'm proud to be different in my own way. I hope you all are too." Chloe watches her students look around at each other, considering their differences. Some have freckles, some are tall and others tiny. Some students have Asian heritage and a few are from African families. One student has a leg brace from a childhood accident. Two have glasses, one has a retainer, and another wears a hearing aid. Three boys have crew cuts, one has shoulder length hair and two girls have coloured clip-in highlights. Yes, they're all unique and different from each other in their own ways. It might not be religion class now, but Chloe's happy she took the chance to have this discussion with her students. Sometimes the most important lessons happen when you least expect them. It can be hard to talk to grade sixes about something this serious, but she can see the very real, very concrete, and very visible example of her tattoos has let the discussion unfold naturally, making it less artificial than if she'd tried to use the religion lesson book to start this conversation.

Chloe's thoughts are interrupted by a soft tap on her wrist. *"Madame, can you sing us the song again?"* A girl named Claire asks, tapping Chloe's wrist to show she means the Polly and Sukie song. This gets more than half the class involved, pleading with Chloe to sing the song they love. They might be in grade six, but they still enjoy a good song with their teacher every so often. Chloe is happy to oblige.

Sitting on the floor, French storybook still in hand, singing a song with a group of enthusiastic grade sixes, Chloe feels the invisible bubble that sometimes separates her as a teacher figure burst. Right here, right now, she feels like her students can see her as a human being. Today, they've shared about their pets and artistic preferences. They've discussed how being different is something to be proud of, and that it's okay to be unique. Chloe sighs happily, content with feeling like part of her class, rather than being up on a pedestal, away from them, bigger than them. She loves this rapport with her

students, and can't help feeling pleased that it was her tattoos that opened the door to these exchanges today.

Whether we realize it or not, students notice the nuances of their teacher's bodies; even a simple change in nail polish colour may be remarked on (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 58). It's not surprising, then, that Chloe's students feel compelled to explore the curiosity of their teacher's skin, covered with colourful tattoos unlike anything they've seen elsewhere in the school. Chloe's response to her student's comment about her red and turquoise lady tattoo also highlights the importance of how we negotiate the look in education, especially when it is directed at the teacher's body. Madeleine Grumet (2000) offers the look as a way to emphasize the intersubjectivity of the human world, a direct passage between persons (cited in Pinar et al.) By responding to her student's interest in her tattoo, Chloe nurtures this direct passage, allows it to grow into an honest conversation. Had she denied the look, insisted instead on getting back to business reading the French story as planned, the passage would have broken, leaving her at a distance from the children surrounding her. A second look requests a response to her Polly and Sukie tattoos, and again, she nurtures the connection by singing with her class. Some might question Chloe's decision to discuss tattoos rather than read from the French book. To this, we must remember not all school learning comes from texts or lesson plans or curriculum documents. Informal lessons, such as the discussion Chloe leads about difference in relation to her tattoos, extend over official curriculum to teach about life, and can be truly meaningful experiences for students (Uitto, 2012, p. 296). True, there is no lesson plan that instructs her to talk about her tattoos with her students. Just as true, tattoos don't show up anywhere in her textbooks or curriculum documents. But the value of this honest conversation is seen in her students' comfort in approaching her with questions, and her comfort in answering them openly. It also lies in Chloe's feeling her students now recognize her better as a person instead of some

“teacher thing” who stands up on a pedestal, separate from them and their lives (Interview, October 23, 2010).

Adam, too, has found that honestly answering his student’s questions has made his role as teacher feel more authentic and meaningful. During our second interview together, he takes a few minutes to think back over his years of teaching. Chin resting thoughtfully in one hand, he explains how the less taboo and hidden his tattoos feel at work, the easier it is to pass on other life lessons about difficult topics to the teens in his classes:

Class has just ended. Adam is subbing as grade ten English teacher today. As he gathers a pile of completed assignments off his desk to drop off at the office, a student approaches him at the front of the now-empty classroom. *“Hi Sir,”* he says by way of greeting.

Adam walks around the desk and replies, *“Hey Colin, how’s it going?”* The teen shuffles in his sneakers, looking uncomfortable. Adam looks down at his nervously-moving feet and catches sight of an Italian flag tattoo on Colin’s calf. It’s not the first time he’s noticed it, but he’s never asked about it. Maybe he can break the ice by saying something now, diffuse some of what’s bothering him.

“How about that flag tattoo? When’d you get that?” Colin momentarily forgets his nerves as pride in his tattoo takes over. He lifts his chin and answers his teacher in a voice full of conviction.

“I’ve had this since October. See, my family’s Italian, right back to my great-great-grandfather. I got this to show my culture. My Italian roots. Plus, the Italian soccer team is just wicked.” Adam nods his acknowledgment, waiting to see what else Colin might have on his mind. The student shuffles some more and motions to Adam’s arm with his eyes. *“When did you get that?”* he asks of the tattoo on his forearm.

Adam answers directly, *“I got this when I was sixteen. Around the same age you must be now, I guess? It’s about a cartoon show my buddy and I watched together as kids.”*

Colin nods, but still has something else distracting him. Adam can tell by the way he’s pulling at thread on his knapsack and won’t look up to meet his eyes. He takes a breath as if to speak, then thinks better of it. Adam gives him some space, continues to stack the assignments he’ll need to walk down to the office. Colin takes another breath, this time quickly blurting out words that are barely audible, *“Sir, have you um. Have you ever done drugs?”*

Ah. Now Adam sees why Colin is so distracted. It’s tough to talk to an adult about drugs, let alone to your teacher. He also suspects that with such strong Italian heritage, Colin’s

family might be very religious and not too keen to talk about drugs at home. Either way, Adam doesn't mind giving him an honest answer. Better his info come from a trusted teacher than getting false facts or rumours from friends or the Internet.

"You know what Colin, ya. I have done drugs. I used to smoke weed when I was younger. But I don't anymore. Do you want to talk about why?" Adam watches the nervous tension deflate out of Colin's frame as he expels a tightly held breath and lets his shoulders drop. He nods yes, silently asking his teacher to say more. Adam sits down beside him, glad to see he can share something to help. If he can dispel the unknown about drugs for his student, make them less off-limits as a discussion topic, maybe he can help Colin tackle his worries head-on.

Adam starts relating the choices he made when he was a teen and how things are different now that he's older. As he talks, he can't help think how this reminds him of when he started feeling comfortable showing his tattoos at work. *This isn't any different than when I made my tattoos less taboo with my class by talking about them directly. Things changed when I stopped trying to hide them. When you get things out in the open, they aren't so mysterious or exciting anymore.*

These are risky stories: Adam talking about his past drug use to a student. Chloe talking about tattoos to elementary school children. Vanessa honestly answering that her Ramziz tattoo is a memorial for a stillborn son. They're personal, not always easy to share. For some teachers, stories like these might pose too great a professional risk to tell in the classroom. They might say their students have no business knowing about their private lives, or that tattoos are too far a departure from the curriculum to discuss in class. Allowing sixth-graders to pick which tattoos they like best on their teacher's body; that's risky. What if they go home and tell mom or dad they want a tattoo? Talking about death isn't nice. Revealing that a teacher did drugs or got an illegal underage tattoo might not seem suitable. But sometimes, risky stories are more than worth it. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) writes extensively about risky stories in education. She argues that it's often productive to take risks in class, "including linking confessional stories to academic discussion to illuminate the learning experience" (p. 289).

Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's confessional classroom tales spring from their tattoos: when they got them, what they mean, the stories of their circumstances. A tattooed professor herself, Marla

Morris (2008) even encourages telling the not-so-nice stories in order to teach, saying, “the aim of education might be about telling stories that aren’t very nice” (p. 101). Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s stories aren’t all “not nice,” but they do take a swerve off the path of typical classroom discussion. Regardless of the specific storyline shared, by taking the risk and telling the tales embedded within their tattoos, they seize moments to teach beyond the curriculum.

Tattooed Teachable Moments

The value of strong teacher-student relationships should not be dismissed. In each of the experiences explored in this chapter thus far, Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s tattoos have acted as entry points for building rapport, finding a common point of interest upon which to build meaningful classroom discussion and sharing of ideas with their students. In part, this type of rapport determines students’ interest and performance levels; to maximize learning, it may even be essential that teachers foster good relationships with their students (Morgan, 2001, p. 21). How individual teachers start and build this relationship will vary. For some, it might be interest in a particular kind of music, involvement in sports, or possibly a cultural connection. Of course, not all teachers have tattoos, and even those who do may not wish to discuss them with their students. But for Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam, their tattoos have become doorways into “teachable moments,” the informal lessons and opportunities for spontaneous learning that unfold outside of planned curriculum and require no preparation beyond a willingness to seize the moment (Avery, 2008).

During our second interview together, Chloe sits across the café table from me, holding a large mug in one hand while she uses her other to gesture at the numerous designs on her arms and chest. She explains that her tattoos, which I can easily see are as vibrant as they are varied,

have helped her direct her students' use of colour in art class, becoming a sort of embodied example for creativity:

The classroom is full of the sounds of art: pencil crayons scratching across paper, the squeak of markers, the squeeck of chalk pastels rubbing across thick card stock. Fingers are getting messy, the desktops even messier. Chloe roams the room, peeking at the work her students are busily creating. She pauses at one student's desk, where a boy is fervently drawing thick black lines across his crisp white paper. A full box of pencil crayons lays untouched on the corner of his desk as he layers more and more black ink onto the page. Chloe bends down to the level of his desktop and asks, *"Hey Paul, what's that you've got there?"*

He raises his eyes just long enough to answer, *"A bear,"* then he's back to adding more black lines.

The theme for today's drawing is "Unique". Chloe has asked her students to draw something different or special. It fits with the grade six religion theme for her curriculum, but she also thought it would be a great opportunity for the students to flex their creativity muscles and produce anything their young imaginations could drum up.

"How about some colour there, buddy? Try out that new pack of pencil crayons?" Chloe urges. Paul shrugs noncommittally. *"Oh, c'mon,"* She tries again. *"Look at how colourful Madame is!"* She spreads both arms wide, showing off the pinks, greens,



purples, reds, yellows, and turquoises that course from her shoulders to wrist. *"You can see I love to be colourful. I'd like you to be just as colourful in your art for me, ok?"*

Paul cracks a smile and finally pulls pencil crayons towards him, considering the orange and red. Chloe takes an opportunity to remind the whole class to use colour in their artwork. *"Okay everyone, just a reminder to use all those materials you have on your desk,"* she calls out so everyone in the room can hear her. *"You know the theme is 'Unique,' so I don't care how you use your colours, just show me some creativity. If you want to make a purple bear, great! Or blue trees or pink lakes, no problem. How you use your colours is irrelevant, just make sure you spiff those pictures up for me."* A few students giggle and she laughs with them at the silly images. *"Just look at me,"* Chloe says, *"You can tell I don't like to be bland. I'm covered in colours. Show me some outgoing colours in your artwork too."*

With renewed vigor, her students sift through their markers and pastels and pencil crayons, looking for the next bright hue to add to their pages.

Chloe's request for colourful artwork is illustrated authentically and concretely for her class when she uses her arms as a living example. Rather than falling back on her verbal or written instructions, she seizes the opportunity to depart from the official assignment and uses her tattoos as a teaching tool. In the spirit of the best teachable moments, she didn't plan or prepare for this exchange to occur. She just jumped on the chance to let her arms become educational.

Interestingly, even Merleau-Ponty (1962) discusses the body's relationship to the process of learning to see colours, which he calls "a certain style of seeing, a new use of one's own body" that enriches and recasts that body schema (p. 177). True to this vision of the body, Chloe demonstrates a colourful schema for her students through her flesh, producing a spontaneous and truly unique teachable moment about creative artwork.

Vanessa's tattoos also open windows onto unplanned learning opportunities in her classroom. During our interview sessions together, she shares multiple examples, ranging from tattoo planning advice and infection troubleshooting, to linking tattoos to biology principles. When questions are asked during (or after) class time, she never shuts out the chance to pass on truthful information to her teenage pupils, many of whom don't have other reliable adults in their lives to talk to. Voice tinged with the warmth of affection she feels for her students, she tells me one of her favourite things about being a tattooed teacher at the alternative school where she works are the days when a student bursts through her classroom door, eager to share a new tattoo with her, and the candid discussion that ensues:

Vanessa is at the chalkboard, diagramming a cell for her grade nine students. In the back of her mind, she hears heavy footfalls thumping down the hallway outside her classroom, steadily getting louder and closer. Then she hears her door whoosh open, and feels the breeze of a large student body whisk down the rows towards her. Looking over her shoulder, she recognizes the teen approaching, takes in the beaming face of her former student Chris, an athletic basketball player she taught two years ago.

“Miss, miss! I had to come show you. You have to see. Look! Look! I just got this sick new tattoo. What do you think? I just had to show you.”

Vanessa turns away from the board, laughing to herself at this over-enthusiastic young man who’s just busted through her door like the school’s on fire. She watches him bouncing on the balls of his feet with anticipation, can tell that to him, showing off his new tattoo is as urgent as any emergency. By way of introduction, she says loud enough for her class to hear, *“Well hello Chris, one of my successful grade nine science graduates. Let’s take a look at this new tattoo of yours!”*

Chris lifts his muscled arm in the air, giving a full view of the half sleeve tattoo that covers the skin from the top of his shoulder to his elbow. His basketball jersey is the perfect garment for showing it off, and he radiates pride as his former teacher and her students have a good long look.

“Now that you’re here Chris, why don’t you have a seat? We can explain to everyone how you take care of a new tattoo, what you do to prevent infections.”

Chairs shift as Vanessa’s students pull in closer to be part of the impromptu conversation. It’s not everyday something like this happens. She can see their eyes glinting with genuine interest, wanting to hear what this large, tattooed teen has to tell them.

“Okay, so I take this design in that my buddy drew. He’s great with the street art, just like Ms. Asiz’s husband is, you know? And the tattoo guy, he makes it into this stencil he puts on my arm, like a temporary outline. Just sticks it right on there with this thin paper and a wet cloth.”

One of Vanessa’s students speaks up, *“Wait. You mean they don’t just tattoo it right on your arm? They use a stencil first, like a colouring book or something?!”* Vanessa can hear to incredulity in the girl’s voice. Clearly she thought a tattoo went on the skin directly, no in-between steps involved.

“Actually Alyssa, the stencil is one of the most important parts,” Vanessa explains. *“They did the same with mine. In fact, you see these flowers here?”* She points to her upper arm. Alyssa and a few other students nod. *“When my tattoo artist first put my stencil on, it was way down here, and I didn’t like it so I asked him to wash it off and move it up to where it is now. I’m happy I did because I think it turned out a lot better.”*

Chris nods his agreement. *“Ya, like Ms. Asiz says, they moved mine too, to make sure it didn’t get too close to my armpit.”*

Vanessa lets Chris continue with the macho details of how he sat through the hours of tattooing, what the needles felt like, and how much he bled. When he gets to the part where they bandaged him up and sent him on his way, she jumps back in, not wanting to miss an important connection to the biology her class has been learning this term.

“So they rub this disinfectant gel stuff on it, which burned a bit, then put a piece of gauze over it and that was it,” Chris is finishing his story. *“Now I gotta clean it twice a day to make sure no germs get in, and keep it good looking.”*

“Do you guys know why it’s so important for the tattoo and tattoo equipment to stay clean?” Vanessa scans the room, but nobody offers an answer. *“Remember when we talked about blood-borne diseases like HIV and hepatitis? How did those get into some peoples’ bodies?”*

A few voices respond, *“Needles.”*

“That’s right. Needles. No different than the needles used to apply a tattoo. It’s sort of like sewing the picture into your skin.”

She watches her students’ faces as they draw the connection, realizing what it could mean to get tattooed into a dirty shop with infected needles, with consequences as serious as sharing drug syringes or getting a tainted blood transfusion.

“So Miss, is that why tattoos get infected? The needle puts germs inside your skin when you get tattooed?”

Vanessa nods, pleased her class is taking some practical science knowledge away from Chris’ unplanned visit. *“That can happen, if the tattoo artist doesn’t wear clean gloves. Just like we talked about when we learned universal precautions. You don’t touch body fluids when someone is hurt. It keeps their germs out of you, and your germs out of them. A tattoo’s not an accident, but it opens up the skin like an injury. You also have to keep a new tattoo really clean until it heals, just like you keep a bad cut clean to stop infection.”*

More nods around the room. Then she sees a timid hand go up. *“I heard that you can’t get tattoos wet for the first week or the ink washes off.”*

Vanessa hears a few students groan, grossed out by the thought of not washing for a week. *“Actually, that’s not true. You can get a bad infection that spreads into your blood if you don’t use soap and water to keep a tattoo clean, especially the first week. Isn’t that right Chris?”* Vanessa turns to her former student for confirmation, which she knows her class will respect coming from a peer.

“Oh ya. My artist told me to wash it twice a day, more if it got oozy or slimy. He even said it could scab real bad and ruin the whole picture if I didn’t take really good care of it. I spent a few hundred bucks on this thing. You better believe I did what he said. He did tell me not to soak in a hot tub or anything like that – maybe that’s where you heard that water thing from.”

Vanessa steps into the conversation again, *“So Chris, you started talking about getting this tattoo when you were fifteen. You’re eighteen now. Do you want to tell me why you waited?”*

Chris flushes, slightly embarrassed. *“Actually, it was you Miss Asiz. Remember you told me about your guy friend who got an arm tattoo when he was young? Then his arms got bigger and the tattoo got all stretched out and ugly looking? I didn’t want my arms getting that much bigger and ruining my tattoo. I knew I wanted to play basketball and that’d make my arms big, so I waited till these big babies were developed!”* Chris jokes, smacking his flexed bicep. A few students roll their eyes, but a couple also look interested, check out the size of their younger arms against his.

A genuine laugh rises from Vanessa when she hears this. *“Well I’m glad you waited. Something that good is worth the wait, isn’t it?”* Chris nods emphatically and can’t help giving another show-off flex of his muscle.

Vanessa lets Chris chat with her class a few minutes longer, certain it’s time well spent. As she wanders back to front of the room to drop the chalk she’s been holding on her desk, she overhears one of her students tell his buddy, *“I was gonna take that fake permission letter from my mom and get that flame tattoo on my leg this weekend. I dunno man. What if being on the soccer team makes my leg stretch? I’ll waste all my money and it’ll look like crap.”* She watches the boys shake their heads gravely, considering the possibility seriously. Glancing up at the board, Vanessa realizes she never finished drawing her cell structure. Then she looks back at the two boys deep in thought over the decision of whether to wait on the tattoo or not, and she knows at least one valuable lesson has been learned today. Sometimes, you can’t script what type of biology you’re going to learn on a given day, especially when a surprise visitor drops by. But she wouldn’t trade today’s life lesson for anything. If she prevented even one teen from regretting a tattoo, the diversion was well worth it.

Like Vanessa, Chloe doesn’t hesitate to use her tattoos as vehicles for life lessons passed on in her classroom. During our second interview together, her usually bubbly mood becomes more subdued, her voice dropping lower in volume as her tone turns serious to recount one of these on-the-spot lessons to me. To drill home a point she feels her students must internalize, she has no qualms using her tattooed body as a tangible example of why making fun of other people is never okay, and that accepting peoples’ differences is something she expects from her class:

Entering her classroom after a yard duty shift, Chloe hears young voices giggling in the coatroom. A group of her students huddle together, whispering loudly about some piece of gossip they must have picked up during recess. She cocks an ear in their direction, trying to hear what they’re being so secretive about. A few audible phrases trickle her way. Slowly she pieces together the inspiration for their clandestine coatroom conversation.

“Did you see Miss Hall? She has a mustache like a man!” ... “That’s so gross. Eww” ... “Looks like a black hairy bug or something on her lip.” ... “What boy is going to kiss a girl with hair on her lip. Disgusting.”

As the words register in Chloe’s mind, she feels her fists clench. A hot wave of anger flushes her face and chest and her heart starts to hammer loudly, causing the blood to echo and pound in her ears. She doesn’t feel this way very often at school. But right now Madame Chloe is *mad*. Really mad. This secret conversation is going to stop, and it’s going to stop right now.

With firm, deliberate steps she marches into the coatroom. She stops just two paces away from the huddled group. Hands crushed against her hips to stop them from trembling in frustration, she poses a direct question, *“Are you talking about Miss Hall and hair on her lip?”*

Thirteen mouths clamp shut and thirteen pairs of eyes lock on Chloe’s stern expression, her lips pressed into a line, brows drawn inward, and disappointment radiating clearly from her eyes. Her students stand stunned, caught red-handed making fun of another teacher. Nobody answers. They all let their heads droop as they bashfully stare at their feet. They are unable to deny the accusation but are unwilling to own up to it. Madame Chloe never gets angry, but she sure looks mad right now.

Taking three deep breaths to steady her voice, not wanting to shout despite her evident anger, Chloe collects herself. She waits a few beats, lets her students think about what they’ve just said. On her fourth breath, calmer now, Chloe says, *“Everyone to your desks. We need to have a talk.”* The guilty group shuffles to their seats.

“Ok everyone, here’s the thing. What you just said in the coatroom about Miss Hall, the way you made fun of her because she looks different, that’s not okay. It’s not allowed in this classroom and I shouldn’t hear you making fun of anyone that way, ever. Talking badly about people is not acceptable. I don’t care if it’s another teacher or another student. No matter who it is, it is never acceptable to make fun of someone because they look different.” Chloe takes another deep breath, giving herself and her students a moment to think. Some look embarrassed and others look chastised. But nobody’s smiling, which is good because Chloe doesn’t find the situation very funny. She never takes it lightly when a person is getting made fun of for their appearance.

“Look at me guys. I look different, don’t I? I look different from a lot of the teachers you’re ever going to meet. And you know what? Sometimes people judge me because I look different. And it’s not fair to judge. I know you’ve heard the expression ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover.’ The same thing applies to people. You shouldn’t judge them based on how they look on the outside. I want you to know I’m very happy about being different, but I also want you to understand that I’ve had to put up a fight and work really hard to be the person I am today. Most people look at me and just assume I can’t be a teacher, because my skin looks so different from other teachers.”

So when I hear the way you're talking about Miss Hall, I need you to know it has to stop. If she knew you were talking about her like that, it would hurt her feelings. The same way it hurts my feelings when people say I can't be a teacher because I look different.

It's not just about Miss Hall, but anyone who's different. Someone who has a learning difficulty. Or even how you might feel sometimes, not being in the immersion class like a lot of the other groups. The point is, you should never judge people based on what you can see when you don't know the full story.

So that's the end of it. I will not accept name-calling. I've put up with my fair share of being called names and it hurts. So it's going to stop and I don't want to hear it again in my classroom."

A few seconds of silence tick by. Then, one by one, her students lift their heads and look her in the eye for the first time since she sat them down. "I'm sorry, Madame," a brave boy offers first. "Me too, I'm sorry Madame," a girl offers. Then a chorus of small voices follow with their own apologies.

"Thank you for the apologies everyone. Go ahead and finish putting your things away in the coatroom now."

Chloe watches them shuffle back to the coatroom, this time without any talk of hairy lips. A smile turns up the corner of her mouth, her anger having drained away. *I jumped on that moment, and it worked, she thinks. They realize now why name-calling is so hurtful. I'm happy I had that talk with them.* Chloe looks down and her arms, the same arms she just used to make an example to her students. *I'm glad I had such a real life example to help them understand...*

As Neal Eastman (2006) so descriptively explains, the teacher's body "is not just a pile of organs and meat in a skin corset" (p. 307). The tattooed body, likewise, is also far more than a particularly decorated skin corset. Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's bodies are flesh, and are also an instrument of their students' comprehension, with lessons embedded in their colorful skin. While the specific lessons vary, the effect is the same: their tattooed flesh brings them into conversation and educational, if personal communication with their students. Their tattoos might set them apart visually, but when it comes to shared experiences and spontaneous life lessons, their tattoos bring them closer to the people they interact with at school. The tattooed teacher body stands out because it is different, and this difference makes in an important and generative presence in the

classroom. It contains potential to become a site for an embodied understanding of difference, which is of significant value in today's society. Luce Irigaray (2004) points out how we are entering an age of generalized mixing and self-identity that's based on what is similar or equal to ourselves (p. 6). This leaves us unable to resolve the differences we have to face in daily encounters with others who are unlike us (p. 6). How do we resolve when our classmates look different? How do we feel about the teacher with hair on her lip or tattoos on her arm? To combat this difficulty, Irigaray argues that, "We have to discover a new way of differing as human by entering into communication as two different subjectivities (p. xii). This is precisely what Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's tattooed bodies have helped achieve in their classrooms, showing their students a truly unique subjectivity expressed through teachable moments and embodied examples.

We can learn from teachers' bodies – including tattooed ones – if only we resist the urge to disappear them from notice in the classroom (Springgay & Freedman, 2007). This means letting go of anxiety when a lesson plan goes astray to explore personal questions and curiosities that lay outside the realm of curriculum documents. It means, as teachers, feeling unafraid to draw from our history of lived experiences to make lessons more relatable and understandable to the young people who turn to us for insight. It means being honest, even when this entails telling an unpleasant truth or admitting something that's not so nice. It takes an effort to build rapport with students and a willingness to share your unique story with others. When tattooed teachers' bodies are no longer considered taboo in the classroom, in the way Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam make them not taboo, look at the possibilities that can unfold from within the storied layers of their flesh as it intertwines with the lives of the students and colleagues who interact with them.

Chapter 9: Self Portrait in Ink

This study has brought me through many shared experiences with Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam. I have learned from their stories, gained new perspectives, been shaken from assumptions I once held about what being a tattooed teacher is like. I began journaling⁴⁵ when my study proposal was just taking shape and continued long after I conducted interviews and wrote my analysis. These entries became a space to tease out my gut reactions towards my participants' experiences and the interviews we had together, a place to note the moments when they surprised me or changed my understandings. This chapter contains some of these personal reflections, indications of perspectives I worked from and the evolution of my thoughts as I delved into the lifeworld of tattooed teachers. The intent is not to air out narcissistic writing, but to provide a glimpse into my own experiences as a tattooed teacher, personal lived moments that layered upon and shaped how I considered Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's stories (van Manen, 1997). Arranged to mirror the themes in the preceding analysis chapters, this is my self-portrait in ink – a snapshot depicting my tattooed teacher world.

Trying to Fit

My participants' struggles to look like teachers sound terribly familiar to me. I feel the same irritating chafe of the "teacher clothes" they describe, sense their words on my skin as if they're talking about my frustrations rather than their own wardrobe woes. I resent alongside their resentment, this feeling of having to pretend to be something I'm not, putting on a phony front in order to appease mentor teachers and principals while I'm on practicum. Buying a whole new wardrobe has rubbed me the wrong way and echoes their discomforts. I buy long-cut shirts that will cover the bottom part of my rib cage and lower back tattoos. Dress pants instead of

⁴⁵ Personal journaling is a phenomenological way to capture reflections and reactions while conducting a study, and is also an important step in staying strongly oriented while researching (van Manen, 1997).

black jeans. Plain slip-on shoes instead of my favourite pair of Converse hightops. When Chloe tells me about the day her principal saw her tattoos because she wore a tank top, I empathize. The tattoos at the top of my back and just below my armpit are visible when I wear a tank top, too. When I lift my arms to complete any number of teacherly actions, from writing on the chalkboard, to stretching for a dropped pencil, to leaning across a desk to pass a paper, these simple motions pull fabric just far enough askew to bring my tattoos into view. During teacher's college, every familiar item of attire I have come to love gets pushed to the back of my closet, forlornly relegated to weekend excursions and holidays.

A scant few months into my Bachelor of Education degree, and I'm confounded with myself. I'm making adjustments I'm not comfortable with. My morning routine has changed – and not for the better. Just months ago, my day used to start by pulling on my beloved Doc Martin boots, black jeans, skull-patterned t-shirts. Black nail polish if I felt like it. Matching titanium body jewelry in all 11 of my ear piercing holes and a black stud in my left nostril. Now, with practicum placement in full swing, I find myself waging a losing battle with my closet; pulling open the doors to gaze for agonizing minutes at my hooded sweatshirts and band t-shirts that are suddenly off limits. I do the unthinkable. I flat iron my hair. Why? To make sure it falls over my ear piercings, keeps them discreetly tucked away. As much as I hate doing this, I have internalized what my professors tell me: *Principals may not be comfortable with your piercings, you'd better take them out for practicum.* I cannot, just *cannot* force myself to remove them altogether, so I make myself a deal: no ponytails at school; let your hair be a temporary cover-up.

I wore a dress to school. This is a significant statement. I don't wear dresses. I especially don't wear cream-coloured dresses with butterfly and flower patterns on them. But today, I did, with leggings no less. What is happening to me? When did I leave myself behind in this whole

teacher's college process? This dress has been an awful experience, and not just because I'm not overly fond of the colour or pattern. Ever tried to work with grade five kids wearing a dress? Go ahead and try. If you succeed, I salute your superior skill. The compliments on how nice I looked were appreciated throughout my day, and I'm fairly sure the friendly nod sent my way by the principal was a first, but that's not enough to stop me from cursing under my breath every three minutes for ever arriving at school dressed this way. I can't properly sit on the floor to help my students complete their model houses. Hovering, bending daintily from the waist, it's not as useful as getting down on their level, working with them instead of over them. On yard duty, the breeze becomes my bane, and I spend more time holding down my hem than chasing after balls and joining in skipping rope games like I did yesterday. One thing's for sure: I'd rather be walking around in black jeans and a sleeveless shirt right now, tattoos be damned, than dealing with this dress. At least I'd be able to *do my job* instead of distracting myself from potential wardrobe malfunctions.

Why do I do it? Simple: I want a job. I can't bear the thought of the person sitting next to me in teacher's college getting hired over me because he or she doesn't dress like me, or have tattoos and body piercings like I do. Our grades might be equal, but I know appearances work fast at leveling the playing field between candidates in an interview. Yes, I want the job. But I don't have to like the hoops I'm jumping through to get it.

It surprises me sometimes how similar my participants' stories are to my own. They've been teaching for years; I'm still holding out for my first job offer. They have arm tattoos, which I want but don't yet have. Even so, as they share their experiences, echoes of my own life reverberate through. As I listen to Chloe tell me about what I now think of as her "Sweater Incident," I find myself re-living a seven-year-old memory of being called for a last-minute

interview of my own. Not with a principal, but with the owner and president of a private school for distance education. Chloe's words bring me right back into that flustered morning:

This is going to be a problem. My potential employer wants to interview me in less than two hours. I need at least an hour to get to the office by bus. I look at the phone I've just placed back in its cradle, and the hum of excitement starts to wear off. This is a possible job on the very near horizon. At a school, no less. A few seconds tick by. Then the full-fledged panic sets in. *What am I going to wear?*

I dive into my closet, greeted by familiar favourite 'weekend' and 'student' clothes. The only dress shirt I own has a mock private school crest embroidered on the front featuring a skull with a bow perched on its smooth, hairless head. *I'm sure the owner of a real private school will really appreciate my showing up wearing that.* My only suit jacket has silver grommets attached to nearly every inch of surface area, with a skull accent firmly affixed to the lapel. *When the skull is smiling, is that professional?* If anything will put into perspective just how many skulls are housed in your closet, a surprise job interview will certainly do the trick. My one pair of dress pants is perfectly respectable pinstripe, but I lack an equally respectable shirt to complete the look.

Time to call in the cavalry. Hands shaking with pre-interview jitters, I call a friend from school and practically scream into the phone. This is fashion emergency after all, and there's a job on the line. My volume is justified. *"Can I borrow your gray skirt suit and a blouse?"* I shout. *"I need them now. As in right now. Can you please drive them over? Quickly!"*

As I wait for the borrowed suit to arrive, I whip the elastic out of my ponytail and dig out my flat iron to begin the process of taming my hair over my ears and their multiple piercings. Standing in front of the mirror, raise my arm over my head to wield my hairbrush. Purple and yellow ink reflects back at me, peeking out from under my armpit, where my flaming rose and skull tattoo is placed. I can just picture it: *As you can see, I scored a near-perfect GPA, and I'm certain my references will attest to my professionalism. Hmm? What's that? Oh yes, that is a skull in my armpit, thank you for noticing. Do you like it? I'm quite fond of it myself. That's why I left my blazer at home today.*" Clearly, the nervous pressure is getting to me.



What I remember most about that day was the sense of wanting. I wanted – painfully so – to make a good impression and get the job offer. In this, I am not alone. Chloe went to an interview on one of the hottest days of the year wearing a wool sweater. How's that for wanting to get the

job? Adam bought a whole new wardrobe he promptly tossed the moment he realized he didn't have to wear it to keep his fulltime teaching job. Vanessa endured a shopping trip that was about as fun as water torture, purchasing her first-ever pair of dress pants and forcing herself to wear them to work. The things we do to teach... The things we *wear* to get hired in education.

Mis-Fit

Somewhere along the way, as I listened Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam describe trying so hard to fit in and be seen as teachers, it dawned on me there's a flip side to this situation. One I personally felt during my graduate classes. With all this effort to look like a teacher, what happens to the other half, the tattooed half? Are there ever moments when the tattooed side of your identity starts to slip away, dragged under and buried by the heaps of energy devoted to trying to establish yourself as a professional teacher? Chloe talks about how great it feels to be recognized as a teacher despite her tattoos. But what about being recognized as a tattoo enthusiast despite being a teacher? The more I think about the principal who accepts Chloe tattoos, faux-hawk and all, the more I feel a memory itching to surface at the back of my mind. And then I have it, an experience that taught me this: just as surely as there are principals who can look past tattoos to accept the teacher, there are tattoo professionals who can look past academic accoutrements and see a tattooed person, whether you have a backpack full of library books and a stack of journal articles in tow or not:

After a day of graduate classes in the Faculty of Education, I walk downtown to the tattoo studio I've been visiting for years. I have a consultation appointment, which involves working with my tattoo artist to plan the design and placement of a new tattoo. I'm still wearing my "school clothes," black dress pants and a plain long-sleeved shirt. I have my backpack and a pile of freshly printed journal articles in hand. Usually, when I drop by the tattoo studio for a consultation, I wear slouchy hip-rider pants and a loose, short tank top under a hoodie that make it easier for my artist to consider stencil placements on my body. It would mortify me to wear anything like that to class. I would feel sloppy, not to mention exposed. One of the only public places my bellybutton is ever viewed is when I'm being tattooed at the studio.

It's quiet. None of the artists have clients to occupy them. Midday on a Monday is not a busy time for the tattoo business, which tends to do much brisker trade in the evening and weekend hours. I watch the artists pass by sketching, searching for artwork online, rearranging a display case of body jewelry, and reading tattoo magazines on the sofa in the reception area. Combined, they form a living riot of vibrantly decorated flesh, tattoos and piercings covering hands, fingers, necks, faces, feet. My artist isn't among them, likely because she's in her office preparing for our appointment.

I place my backpack on the floor and set my stack of journal articles on the counter. I look up at the front desk employee and suddenly suffer an acute bout of awareness over what I must look like. *Oh my god. I look like a teacher.* My clothes, my pile of research about educational issues, even my backpack, scream "scholar!" I've logged nearly 20 hours of tattooing just a few feet away from where I'm currently standing, but I feel horribly, awkwardly out of place. *She must think I've never been here before. Next, she'll probably tell me where to find the artist portfolios and ask if I have any questions about getting a tattoo.* I feel a ridiculous urge to pull up my top, show her the work my tattoo artist had done and point at the blank space she'd be filling in next – proof I belong here and know what I'm doing.

The employee smiles, takes a quick glance at the stack of papers I've rested on her counter and politely says, "*You must be the six o'clock consult?*" Yes! That's right! I'm your consult customer! "*She'll be right with you, she's just finishing up with some stencils right now.*" I relax. I haven't been mistaken for a tattoo "newbie" after all, someone who's never seen the inside of studio before.

I suspect Jean Paul Sartre (1956) would have something to say about this experience and my reaction. I only began to feel self-conscious in the instant I imagined myself through the eyes of the front desk employee. Sartre writes, "By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (p.189). Up to this point, I hadn't really considered what I looked like entering the tattoo studio after spending a day on campus. But when the employee's eyes met mine, I startled myself with a picture of how she must see me. I didn't particularly like what I/she saw. I thought about my clothes and books, and my outward lack of heavy tattooing. I started make a mental wish list of things that would edit my appearance into a more palatable image of a tattoo client. *If only I had a ring instead of a stud in my nose today; too bad I don't have a full sleeve tattoo yet;*

replace that backpack with my shoulder bag; what I'd give for my black hoodie right now. For all the time I spend fretting over whether I look the part of a teacher or whether I fit into a professional work setting, I also clearly suffer angst over being mistaken for a teacher in a tattoo studio. Chloe was pleasantly surprised that a principal saw past her punk hair and cherry blossoms to see a qualified young teacher. I was just as pleased that the front desk employee at the tattoo studio saw past my academic accessories to see a savvy tattooee.

Maybe my next tattoo should read "*Catch 22*".

Fit. You? Fit You!

Vanessa told me a story today. She described walking into a room full of science teachers at a conference and feeling pinned beneath their heavy stares, sensing their judgment thrust upon her because she has tattoos. Listening to her experience dredges up one of my most vivid memories from teacher's college, also an instant of feeling pinned beneath judgmental eyes. For me, it is the simple joy of sunshine warming my face as I step outside for yard duty one morning on practicum that coaxes hidden parts of myself into view. My mood, infused as it is with lightness, brings my hands to sweep through a carefree gesture of pulling my hair into a ponytail. Then, jarringly, it feels like a covered blot of ink has embarrassingly, unexpectedly, bled through my meticulously crafted "teacher image" to be caught by hyper-observant supervisory eyes. In one instant I'm at home in my skin; in the next I feel piercingly exposed.

My stomach sinks in a sudden plummeting dive. I feel caught red-handed, as if cornered while performing a despicable act, a schoolyard transgression worthy of significant personal shame. The principal walks by silently, her eyes narrowed and her body posture suggesting firm disapproval. No words pass between us. Yet the message is clear: the conversation I was having with the grade five students about nine simple fragments of metal I wear in my ears was inappropriate.

As the shock of being "caught" slowly fades, I feel a hot flicker of anger and resentment flare up inside. This forces me to cast my eyes to the pavement and clench my teeth. I do not want the students to see my anger. I want to be professional. After all, I am just a

student teacher, struggling to forge a firm footing during my practicum placement. I breathe in sharply and try to shake myself out of the moment. A heavy awkward silence has seeped into what, until moments before, was an animated group discussion between some girls from my class and myself.

Despite my wardrobe and hair precautions, when I step outside for yard duty that particular morning, I forget my self-imposed covering and absent-mindedly sweep my hair into a ponytail. About six girls flock to me and excitedly ask questions: did they hurt, how old were you, did your parents let you have them? I happily answer: yes they hurt, I was sixteen for my first cartilage earring, and yes, my parents knew.

Then the principal's gaze halts me in my tracks. My mouth snaps shut. I feel prematurely robbed of a genuine moment of connection with the students.

The internal whisper of my professional conscience interrupts my resentment. I do not want the students to see my anger. With a sharp exhaling of a tension-held breath, I regain my composure. I want to be professional. After all, I am just a student teacher, struggling to forge a firm footing during my practicum placement.

Still, I find myself pondering a persistent question - *Why is talking about my piercing off-limits?* Are they so different from the pearls or gold hoops worn by other teachers on staff? If the principal reacted so strongly to this recess moment, what would happen if my shirt slid up a little too far, and one of my tattoos was seen?

This experience leaves me with a lingering worry that bores its way into the sinews of my memory, shadowing me for years with a heavy question: *How will I ever fit in as a teacher, with my piercings and tattoos?* I was not caught naked on the schoolyard that morning, but rest assured I felt just as awkward, shamed, vulnerable, and put on display for the principal's judging eyes as if I had been cornered frisking behind the tetherball stand in my birthday suit. My body was clearly the catalyst for this moment of malaise. More than a three years later, after the initial sting has somewhat subsided, listening to Vanessa talk about her conference experience brings the memory flooding back with acutely uncomfortable clarity.

Fitting In

During both our interviews, Chloe described in great detail how wonderful it felt for a hiring principal to see her tattoos and her faux-hawk hairstyle and still accept her as a desirable

candidate for an elementary school job. Her experience left me heartened. For once, I hear a story about a tattooed teacher getting hired *not* because she put up a good front with strategically concealing clothes, but by a principal who knows full well the true colours (pun possibly intended) of the situation. This strikes me as immensely different from being hired with your tattoos covered, slipped secretly away beneath sleeves, cuffs, pant legs, or in the case of a neck tattoo, long hair. It means no surprises the second week on the job when, *Bam!* off come the sleeves, out come the tattoos, and down drops the principal's jaw – in astonishment. It feels so much more authentic, being hired without any pretenses. Not to mention courageous and admirable. I've wondered many times what I would do in a job interview situation.

Today I don't have the sleeve tattoo I so fervently crave. Why? Many reasons. Finances. A tattoo like this can cost thousands of dollars. Time. With a life crammed to bursting with graduate studies and a fulltime job, I'm not sure where I'd find the many hours required to apply a tattoo of this size and complexity. Distance. My tattoo artist lives an 11-hour train ride away since recently moving to open her own studio. And of course, my career. Today, I work for the provincial government. I know it would be perfectly fine if I had a full sleeve tattoo in my current job. All my colleagues know I have tattoos under my shirt and they've all seen my piercings. That's more than I can say about the teachers in the schools where I did my teacher's college practicum placements. Everyone in the public service is very, very careful to be accepting of differences, even if only on the surface so as to comply with workplace regulations. If someone doesn't like something about a colleague's personal appearance but it doesn't violate their employee rights in any way, they keep their opinion to themselves. This applies equally during job interviews as it does during a routine workday. It's the culture ingrained in my office. While it might be somewhat artificial, allowing people to "accept" without accepting, I

appreciate the cushion of confidence it lends. To be honest, I've yet to encounter a fellow public servant who'd have any issue if I walked in inked from elbow to wrist. Which feels pretty great, because one day, that's going to happen. Maybe not in this specific office with the same manager and coworkers. But sometime in the next five years, I swear it will happen.

At the end of the day, though, the reality is I don't feel at home in the government. I took the job to pay off debts and establish the start of a career. I harbour no illusions that this is my "forever job," and I do aspire to someday work elsewhere. Maybe, just maybe, a teaching position will open up in the next few years and I will be called for an interview. And when this happens, if I've found the time and money to get my sleeve tattoo, I will have a pretty big decision to make. Will I let my tattoo be seen, or will I cover it up? Will I be true enough to myself to walk in with a significant part of who I am on display? Or will I succumb to the pressure to make the "right impression," to "play the teacher," so the principal and hiring panel will be more likely to hire me? Will I take the risk to be visibly inked or not? Honestly, I don't know. I want to say, *Yes, of course! I'll march straight into the interview room and act as if being tattooed is the most natural thing in the world.* But when the job I've wanted for so long is finally dangled in front of me, will I have the confidence to shirk the expected teacher image? At the very least, I'd like to remind myself of Chloe's hiring; circumstances. All it takes is one open-minded principal. It happened for her, and it could happen for me.

One Size Does Not Fit All

I look around at the people in my teacher's college classes and think: *We don't judge them for their pasts.* Teenage parents. Single parents. IT sector employees looking for a second chance at a stable job. Nurses fed up with blood and tiresome shift schedules. Adults who have learning disabilities the same as some of their students: attention deficit disorders, dyslexia.

Teacher candidates who are mostly deaf, or who limp, or lisp, or use a crutch because of a past car accident. All these people are encouraged throughout my program to be who they are in the classroom, to talk to their students about what it means to be differently-abled or overcome a personal challenge. But tattooed teachers. That's different. We're different. Vanessa and Adam told me they both remember hearing speeches made by Faculty of Education leaders to cover their tattoos. I was told much the same. While gently worded and well-intentioned, the perfectly clear advice given by my subject-area instructor was: Some schools and teachers won't be comfortable with tattoos and body piercings at school. Neither will a lot of principals. You're best to cover them up or take them out to look professional.

Why is ink in a teacher's past not okay, but all sorts of other things are? This double standard bothers me a lot, especially when I hear teacher's college professors talking about inclusion in the classroom in one breath and asking me to remove my piercings for practicum in the next. And it can't just be a matter of visibility. If it were, then teachers with noticeable physical differences would be singled out too, asked to downplay the presence of a knee brace, or burn scars, or hearing aids, or to pretend they don't limp while they're in the classroom. So it must be cultural, and a lack of understanding about what tattoos are and mean. It's like the tension you hear about related to Muslim women wearing hijabs to express their faith. People don't understand why they wear them, so it makes certain individuals uncomfortable. The same might be true about tattoos, I guess. Do people understand that tattoos don't always mean low class, lowlife, or an impulsive personality? If we talked about tattoos more openly, explained to our teacher's college professors why we got them and what they mean to us, would they become less taboo and more on par with things like hearing aids? This is certainly something to think about, and something I truly regret not trying myself while in teacher's college.

Vanessa and Chloe's stories make me regret not being more courageous and confident during my own practicum placement, leave me wishing I'd shared more with my grade five, seven, and eight students. The teachable moments they describe make me wonder what



opportunities I denied by keeping my mouth firmly shut about my tattoos. We could have learned two words in Spanish together, had they seen my lower back tattoo. If I'd worn a tank top and the horse and rider tattoo had been seen, maybe a conversation about alternative sports or

even the upcoming summer Olympic Games might have unfolded. Most of all, I wonder if my students would have looked at me differently, understood me better as a person. If I'd discussed my tattoos in class, would this have imprinted me on their memories, make me more than just a temporary blip in their young lives, the non-descript student teacher who came, taught a few lessons, and slipped away into anonymity? Could I have taught them teachers can be different, teachers can be tattooed?



Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam paint the picture of type of teacher I want to become. Open. Honest. Unafraid to be comfortable with who they are in the classroom. Strong enough occupy a space in education with ink displayed for all to see. They make me want to pull the first sketch planned for my sleeve tattoo out of my drawer, march it

down to my tattoo artist and say: *Do it. I'm reader to be visibly tattooed teacher.*

Chapter 10: The Tattooed Teacher, (Re)Written, (Re)Figured

A body artist who is no good messes up the skin with ink blobs. Let us not teach in ink blobs, let us not write in ink blobs” (Morris, 2008, p. 100).

In the pages of this study, we have walked together in Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam’s tattooed teacher skin and gained a sense of what it is like live their experiences. We have felt their moments of frustration and acceptance, of worry and comfort, of being looked at judgmentally and pressing back at these looks. We have felt the jolt of shock or amusement when perceptions misalign. We have sensed the difference of tattooed flesh, and also the possibilities for connection and learning it contains when interacting with others. And so I ask again: *What are the lived experiences of visibly tattooed teachers? What is it like for teachers to live in and sense their tattooed flesh when they are at school? and, What is it like to be seen by others at school, specifically how do their visible tattoos shape their interactions with colleagues, students, and other members of the school community?*

It feels like a struggle of trying to fit; of encountering a professional identity in the wrong size and shape, an image that will not slip on easily without pinching and pressing and restricting and restraining and supplanting what feels comfortable and familiar. It is a self-reflective turning inward, a deciding/resigning oneself to the fact: I will endure this; I will dress like a teacher, try to look how others expect me to look in this job so I appear professional. It feels like sweaty armpits, overheated on hot summer days. Chafing dress shirts and uncomfortable dress shoes. Muffling decorated skin beneath a concealing, inauthentic, costumed layer of falsity: *This is not me*. Living as a tattooed teacher is also a mis-fit, a perceptual dynamic of viewing yourself one way while being perceived by others in dissonant, often incorrect ways. Confusion, disbelief, shock is produced when others try to resolve tattooed skin with stated profession: *No way!*

You're not a teacher! It's the feeling of being misunderstood internally reminding yourself: *I am not unintelligent, a low-life, uneducated, or even unsuited to teaching because I am tattooed!*

Living as a tattooed teacher is being looked at, the object of other people's gazes, pressed by the weight of judgmental eyes that fall upon the skin to bruise feelings and leave hurtful dents in memories. It is the trapped sensation of being pinned by a roomful judgmental stares cast by colleagues, all simultaneously pummeling down upon you for being a bad person and a bad teacher, too, because they see your tattoos. It is the sting of a principal who says he won't hire you when he sees 'things' all over your body. It feels like walking in on your first day of the job and having an employee startle, certain you must not be working today, because 'aren't those tattoos I see?' But this is not an insurmountable pressure, or inevitable looks. It also feels like pressing back. Heavy stares and judging glares can be resisted, turned back at their senders with the hurt diminished, if not fully defused, drawing from inner strength born of personal confidence as a teacher, as a professional, and as a person: *Look at me however you want; I know I'm a good teacher no matter what you think of me.*

For all these tensions, there is also a sense of comfort to be found in living as a tattooed teacher. Fitting in, locating a comfortable niche within the world of education is possible. Sparked by moments of acceptance, the presence of tattooed professional peers, or a lack of negative reaction from those around you, the warm glow of comfort can flame into being. It grows until it wells up to the surface, forming cracks in the 'shell' that was once a restrictive teacher identity. Through these cracks seep elements of the personal: feeling at ease displaying tattoos at work, talking about them to students if desired. It feels like taking ownership of this mould called "teacher identity," shucking the ill-fitting elements so they are no longer forced necessities dictated by professional expectations. It's the relief felt in discarding unwanted long-

sleeved shirts and too-warm sweaters, once used as a tattoo-hiding layer, now donned only when weather or personal preference demand it. It is the flood of release triggered by tattooed colleagues who freely display their tattoos at school without repercussion. It's the warm, affirming sensation of being accepted as a competent educator no matter how inked. It is the slowly dawning realization that a year has slipped by confrontation and question free, marked by the anti-climactic flatness of students who barely bat an eyelash of interest at revealed tattoos. It's arriving at the soothing, settling conclusion: *I can be tattooed and a professional teacher at the same time.*

Once this comforting conclusion has been arrived at, it opens the door for wondrous exchanges between tattooed teachers and their students. Inked flesh becomes a living example, a generative space where informal learning takes place and teachable moments are born. Tattooed skin talked about in class demonstrates how one size does not fit all, not for teachers and not for others. We are all different in our own human ways, and teachers are no exception, a fact brought to light by the very presence of ink on skin, which offers an alternative possibility of what a teacher can look like. It's exploring 'universal uniqueness' with students, welcoming their questions and pursuing embodied teachable moments. It's an open, honest feeling, the satisfaction of having tough conversations about life choices and consequences, and watching students come to realize that *teachers are people too, and they're not so different from me after all.*

This is what being a tattooed teacher is like. These are the comforts, discomforts and moments of connection contained within tattooed teacher flesh. Teacher or not, tattooed or not, these are scenarios and sensations many of have felt: struggling to fit in, the frustration of being misunderstood, the hurt of being judged, pushing back against judgment, the relief acceptance,

the comfort of confident self-expression, and the pleasure that comes from connecting meaningfully with others.

Sketching the Stencil For Others

What lessons might we take away from this study now that we better understand what Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences as tattooed teachers are like? Firstly, let us consider the five themes revealed: 1) Trying to Fit; 2) Mis-fit; 3) Fit. You? Fit You!; 4) Fitting In; and 5) One Size Does Not Fit All. Within these themes, we can view the steps new professionals might be expected to go through, and a possible way to be more considerate of and sensitive towards the people we work with. All new teachers – all new employees starting a career for that matter – can be expected to undergo a period of uncertainty, orientation, and adjustment. Stepping into a new job, many of us bring with us a desire to fit in, to make a good first impression through how we look and act. We want to instill the fact we are competent at what we do, suitable for the work we've been hired for. What Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences lend is a reminder: slipping into a new professional identity is not easy for everyone. If one already looks "like a teacher" (or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a banker, or a government employee, or any other professional) based on the prevailing social norms of the workplace community, this process may be a smooth transition. But for those who look different, the process can be a significant struggle.

Early on in a career, there are bound to be mis-fits. Times when actions or appearances stand out as strange. Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam show us that when these mis-fits occur, there's often more than meets the eye. Many of us have experienced moments when we look at a person and wonder: *What are you doing here? You don't fit in!* Maybe the person is too old, too young, too dull, too trendy, too loud, too lazy, too energetic, too fat, too thin. Maybe they have strange

habits or incomprehensible ways of approaching tasks. Maybe they have tattoos or other body modifications that make their colleagues. Take a page from Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences: personalities and professional abilities are more than skin deep. Venture beyond the surface and there are layers of possibilities to be discovered.

After the stressful and often uncomfortable time of trying to fit into a new job passes by, there are small things we can do to help each other feel at home as we go about our days. Accept the black sheep of the group, value them for their uniqueness and the variety they bring to the workplace. Give people space to be who they are most comfortable being, which may be something entirely unfamiliar. This is fine. Acceptance is not the same as endorsement. A smile, a friendly nod, a compliment on colours; these small gestures can demonstrate acceptance of a tattooed coworker even if their method of bodily adornment isn't agreeable on a personal level. show you accept a tattooed coworker even if you don't see eye to eye with the way they've chosen to adorn their body. In Luce Irigaray's (2004) words, remember that another person is a "you" who will "never be me or mine," a mystery we can encounter with social grace if we put extra effort into it (2004).

Lastly, let's not forget the time when we find ourselves "at home," on the job, in a comfortable place where we enjoy being with others and learning from them. Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences show what can unfold when we take cues from the curiosities bodies present us with. Invite questioning looks and explore the answers. We might shy away from the crude materiality bodies remind us of: we sweat, we sneeze, we drool, we itch. But bodies are our element of experiencing and understanding the world around us, and are our sole means for our comprehension (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Our bodies are our life story, our curriculum vitae

(Morris, 2008). Try not to dismiss the tale because the cover doesn't appeal; take the plunge and explore a page or two first: what lies deeper may be pleasantly surprising.

Considerations for Teachers and Teacher Educators

As teachers, what can we take from Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences? To start, there is comfort in knowing you are not alone if you ever feel at odds with your teacher identity. While we may carry with us mental images of what a teacher 'should be,' or is expected to be, we also know that this ideal does not always transfer realistically into our lived world. If you are a tattooed teacher, perhaps you will find confidence in the pages of this study, an assurance that somewhere (if not where you are today), there is a school with peers and a principal who will accept you for how you look, tattoos and all. Maybe you will find a kernel of motivation to roll up your sleeves, wear a t-shirt, put on shorts, or try a tank top on a hot day. If you have avoided talking about your tattoos to your students, perhaps Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's experiences will inspire you to give it a try, to explore what lessons they can learn – formal and informal – by opening up a previously taboo topic. If you are a teacher who is thinking about getting visibly tattooed but have been holding off because you're worried about career repercussions, perhaps you can draw reassurance from this study that you will find a workplace that accepts your ink.

If you are not tattooed, perhaps you have a different unique quality that sets you apart from your peers, be it physical or a belief. From this study, glean the possibility that allowing differences *to be different* can be okay; principals and colleagues can and do welcome such things, even if we are not used to seeing them in our daily lives as the status quo. Know too that bringing who you are into your classroom, your personal outlook and history, does not have to be a distraction or a deviation from learning. Opening yourself to teachable moments that start with a student's curiosity can blossom into valuable exchanges that don't appear on your lesson plan.

For tattooed and non-tattooed teachers alike, this study also shows the immense benefits that come when topics like tattoos are removed from the list of ‘taboo topics.’ In today’s world, teachers (in particular at the intermediate and senior level) and other school staff such as guidance counselors are expected to have at least a basic ability to advise students about issues such as drug and alcohol use, safe sex practices, anti-bullying, mental health, eating disorders, and bereavement. If teachers or counselors cannot (or choose not to) personally inform students about these tough topics, they should be able to direct their students to someone who can, or have materials that will inform them. Along with pamphlets about drug use and safe sex, the videos about bullying and suicide, there could be support materials about tattoos. As with other taboo topics, students might not feel comfortable talking to their own parents or relatives about tattoos. Or, the adults in their lives who know about tattoos might not always be the best role models. As with any other behavior that contains an element of risk, seeking information about getting tattooed on the Internet or from peers might lead students astray or arm them with dangerously incorrect facts. Materials made available in the safe space of schools could address this. These materials would provide the basic facts about smart and safe tattoo practices: how to tell if a tattoo studio conforms to health standards; why there are legal ages to become tattooed; how to research your options; what a properly healing tattoo looks and feels like; and what to do if you get an infection or suspect there was a problem with the tattoo studio’s needles.

As teacher educators, the message in this study should be to re-visit and be thoughtful about the advice and guidance we give new teachers as they enter the field. When a student asks, ‘Should I remove my piercings,’ or ‘Should I cover my tattoos,’ pause a moment before you respond yes or no. Recall that these may not be simple accessories your students wear/display, but meaningful, important aspects of their self-identity. In today’s extremely competitive job

market, it may seem like the right thing to do to tell teacher candidates to cover their tattoos to increase their chances of being hired. This may in fact be the worst thing. Consider: might they feel false and phony as they try to conceal this aspect of themselves, rather than starting their careers accepted for who they are, without hidden facets or elements of surprise that are sure to slip out at some point? Consider setting aside a class at the start of term, before students go on their first practicum, to discuss the issue of teacher identity openly. Address concerns and anxieties students have openly. Together, you can talk about possible strategies for negotiating the times they feel they're not fitting in a teachers, and brainstorm strategies for mitigating these scenarios rather than pushing them out into the classroom to grapple with these worries alone. After their first practicum is over, have the discussion again in case unexpected mis-fits or judgments occurred while they were in the field. Also, as you usher new generations of teachers into their careers ask yourself these important questions (pose them to your teacher candidates even): Do teachers have to look today the way they have in the past? Why not have tattooed teachers? As the landscape of Western society changes, should we let old norms and expectations hold back a new vision of what teachers can look like? As our students change, and our students' students change, why should the teachers remain static? There is a whole world of differences emerging around us; let us try our best to welcome it into our schools.

Tattoos are not a familiar topic for all teachers, nor for all teacher educators. To aid this, a resource document could be produced, a guide that provides an overview of current tattooing trends set within the context of today's schools. The contents of this study's Literature Review might provide a starting point for a document of this nature. This resource could then be used alongside existing documents discussing issues of racial diversity, religious diversity, sexual diversity and anti-bullying that are currently available in most faculties of education. When

diversity and inclusiveness are discussed in Bachelor of Education classes, a component on tattooing and other forms of body modification such as piercing would enrich what is already being taught about accepting differences in our schools.

Tattoos also have strong connections to art and to science, yet very few exist to support teachers who wish to bring the topic into their classrooms. A series of resources that link the history, art, culture, and biology of tattooing to curriculum expectations would be an invaluable tool for those who wish to bring tattoos into the space of formal classroom learning.

A Stencil for the Future

While this study marks this first of its kind – an exploration of the lived experiences of three visibly tattooed teachers – many avenues remain for better understanding this area of research. To complete my inquiry, I interviewed Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam in-depth, and worked from the lived experiences they described. To extend on this, classroom observation could also be conducted to gather additional lived experience descriptions that would enrich our understanding of the phenomenon of being a visibly tattooed teacher. Likewise, studying this phenomenon from a different viewpoint – the experiences of students with tattooed teachers or the experiences of principals of tattooed teachers – would add a whole new dimension of understanding. Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam all worked within school boards that did not have rules or regulations about tattoos on employees. What are the experiences of teachers who work in school boards that enforce tattoo policies for employees like (e.g. certain States, or private schools that operate outside of provincial jurisdiction)? This study would make an excellent compliment to my own, and I encourage other interested phenomenologists to pursue it. Teachers with other forms of body modification could also be studied, such as body piercing, scarification, plastic surgery, or bodybuilding (Featherstone, 2000). To broaden the research

beyond the world of education, similar phenomenological studies could be completed to better understand what it is like to be a tattooed doctor, nurse, lawyer, law enforcement officer, or businessperson, which would provide insight on how tattoos are viewed and experienced in other professional workplaces. Victoria Pitts (2003) and Margo DeMello (2000) both note in their studies about tattoo culture that racial diversity, in particular people with dark skin, were not frequently, if at all, represented by their study participants. What might the experiences of tattooed teachers from different ethnic backgrounds be like, given the wide variety of cultural perspectives held about tattoos around the world?

From more qualitative approaches, there are also numerous paths to explore. To begin, no data currently exists documenting how many tattooed teachers there are today, not in North America, Canada, Ontario, or even a specific city within the province. To gain a clearer picture of how infused tattoos have become – or are becoming – in our schools, data collected about the incidences of tattooed teachers would prove invaluable. As a compliment to this, attitude surveys that flesh out how various members of the school community – students, parents, teachers, principals, administration, support staff – feel about tattoos would help clarify the context tattooed teachers work within. Given the notions of hiding/revealing inherently present in the lives of tattooed teachers, a comparative study contrasting the experiences of being ‘outed’ as homosexual (or another sexual orientated) teacher against the experience of being ‘outed’ as a tattooed teacher would make a unique and informative study that provides additional insight on personal identity struggles in the workplace.

This study is just the first step into the potential research that can be done surrounding tattoos, teachers, and schools. It is my hope that others will be compelled as I have been to explore this area of research, to add their information to the currently sparse literature.

Max van Manen forewarns that phenomenological studies affect the researcher (1997). I am no exception. Just as surely as the novel I describe in the introduction to this study imprinted itself on my memory (and later on my skin) and kindled my desire for tattoos, completing this study has left marks of its own. I have come to unexpected realizations, and left behind assumptions I once held. Before meeting Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam, I expected the lifeworld of the tattooed teacher to be heavily coloured by negative experiences. I braced myself to hear about being judged by principals, parents, colleagues, administrators, possibly even students. What I learned was a pleasant surprise. These judgmental moments do occur; the glares and erroneous assumptions and misunderstandings were not altogether absent from the stories I listened to. But they were memorable to Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam not because they single-handedly define their experiences, but because they stand out as the exception. Combined, the 12 years of teaching experience Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam represent contain notably few judgmental moments based on their tattoos. This gives me hope, a positive outlook on what my own days in the classroom might be like, a sense that while I might be judged once or twice, these moments likely won't take place every day or become a norm I am faced with.

In a less heartening realization, I also discovered just how powerful established notions of teacher image and identity can be in new teacher's minds. Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam's horribly uncomfortable descriptions of forcing themselves to buy and wear clothes they hate for the sake of fitting in as teachers were eye opening, to say the least. Despite the physical discomfort and emotional conflict, they still bought and wore the clothes, soldiering through their workdays with an undercurrent of displeasure. Nobody ordered them to cover their tattoos. No rule or code says they cannot be hired or enter the classroom with tattoos on display. And still, driven by a shockingly powerful urge to fit into the rigid norms of expected teacher identity, they tell

themselves to cover up to meet expectations for how a teacher ‘should’ look. This sheer power of self-regulation astounded me, made me question how beginning teachers arrive in their first classroom carrying this baggage of expectations with them. Perhaps we need to spend more time during teacher’s college classes openly exploring notions of self-identity within the teaching role; extend upon the assignments that ask us to consider teaching philosophy and classroom methods, create a space to think about what *becoming* and *being* a teacher means to us. Perhaps we should examine more closely the images of teachers that influence us personally, consider how close or far away they are from how we see ourselves and think about how this might affect us as we step into our new roles as teachers. Why not have teacher’s college instructors lead discussions about how we might negotiate the times when what we think we must be/become as teachers conflict with what we want to be?

But perhaps the most important mark this study has left is one of absence more than a presence. I have shed some of the angst and worry, left behind some of the anxiety and fear that two disparate facets of my self-identity – tattoos and teaching – might never merge into a comfortable coexistence. In hearing Vanessa, Chloe, and Adam describe their experiences of growing into comfort, in considering the unique circumstances that led them each to feel more at home in their tattooed teacher flesh, I felt a glimmer of confidence spark to life inside me. As I leave the early days of my teacher training behind, as I move beyond my graduate degree and into the professional world, I feel better prepared to negotiate my place in the world of education with less intimidation. I hope to let this newfound confidence grow over time into a full blazing warmth of comfort in my own flesh rather than a hot wave of anger, even when (or if) my body comes under scrutiny in the classroom or on the schoolyard. Rather than confronting judgments towards tattoos with a resentful scowl or blushing embarrassment, I hope to respond with a softer

sense of quiet self-confidence. Next time I feel questioned as a teacher for having tattoos, I will look right back with a steady openness that does not back down or walk away.

I hope too that my own eyes may soften as I learn to look with more tolerance at other teachers, and allow them to be different in their flesh the way I am different in mine. Whether this means sending smiling eyes to teachers whose appearances I do not personally understand (knitted vests, or sexy short skirts, or head-to-toe jogging suits outside the gym), this study has motivated me to become more intersubjectively aware, to better acknowledge the wide array of differences between the teachers I meet and myself. For we are all different in our own right, and should learn to see each other as so, whether for lip rings and arm tattoos, or for spiked heels or apple-themed kitschy pullovers.

I have also come to understand that it is not my tattoos that should be questioned, but how I react and respond to those who choose to discount me as a teacher because of them. Following a career in education should not mutually exclude me from the tattooing passion that been part of my life for over a decade. I no longer feel willing to give up facets of myself for the sake of 'looking the part' of a teacher. Either I am a tattooed teacher, or I am not. But removing the decorations from my skin or trying to hide them from inquiring eyes will not change who I am or what I believe in. When I attend job interviews in the years to come, I now feel a strong conviction to display all there is to see about me: my 12 visible piercings and any new tattoos I might have at this time. And if my shirt slips up as I lean over to shake a hand, pick up a dropped pencil, or reach up to write on the chalkboard, I will not react with an instant jolt of panic like I might have a year or two ago, but with a calmer resolve that allows the moment to unfold without me crumbling under the pressure to conceal who I am for the sake of being the same, not other (Luce Irigaray, 2004). For I am other, and I am starting to feel more at home with what this

means to me as a new teacher. If a certain principal, school board, or group in a staff room cannot allow me to dwell in my difference and still be “Teacher,” perhaps I will have the strength to admit this is not the place for me. I hope too that other tattooed teachers, other educators who somehow feel different in their skin, can find this resolve as well.



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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Letter of Consent

Description of Project

I, (name of researcher), am a graduate student at the University of Ottawa in the Faculty of Education. Currently, I am conducting research for my thesis study as part of the requirements for completing my master's degree. The goal of my thesis study is to explore the lived experiences of teachers who possess visible body piercings or tattoos, and to develop a deeper understanding of what their experiences are like. As a newly licensed teacher who is pierced 14 times and has 11 tattoos, I am deeply and personally motivated to better understand how having a visible tattoo or body piercing impacts on teachers' interactions with colleagues, students and other people within the school environment. The number of teachers who have visible piercings and tattoos is steadily rising. As part of this group of body-modified teachers, I am especially interested in discovering how these visible body modifications shape teachers' work experiences and social interactions while they are at school.

Participants in this study include teachers such as you and me who possess at least one visible body modification. This means a tattoo or a body piercing that can be seen while wearing summer clothes such as a short-sleeved shirt and shorts. If you agree to participate in this study, I will interview you about your experiences as a teacher who has a visible piercing(s) and/or tattoo(s). These interviews will be conversational in tone. Should you decide to participate in the study, I will interview you two times. These one-on-one interviews will take place in person between you and me, will be held in an informal location you feel comfortable with (such as your home or a library) and will last approximately 45-60 minutes. I will audio tape during these interviews to provide a record of our conversation. The purpose of these interview sessions is for you and me to discuss what your personal experiences of being a teacher with visible body modifications are like. I may bring short excerpts from our previous interview session to reflect on more deeply during the second interview session.

In between interviews, I may email three or four items of interest related to body modification to you, such as a newspaper article or photograph, and will invite you to comment on them via email or telephone. This will take approximately 20 minutes to complete each time you choose to respond. Once our two interview sessions are complete, I will ask you to review some of my study writing that pertains directly to your personal lived experiences as a body-modified teacher. The purpose of this is to verify whether you agree that the meanings I have interpreted from our conversations provide a fair representation of your experiences as a visibly body-modified teacher. This will take approximately one hour.

If you feel fully willing and comfortable doing so, I will request to take photographs of your visible piercings and/or tattoos with my own camera. If you agree, I would only photograph your piercings/tattoos that can be seen during a typical day of teaching, or those that are readily seen when you wear short sleeves or shorts. If you do feel comfortable and willingly agree to be photographed by me, the resulting images may be included in my thesis report, other academic publications or conference presentations related directly to disseminating the results of the research. Photographs taken during the study will not be used for any other purpose. I will retain the copyright and ownership of these photographs. You will be provided with an opportunity to review these photographs prior to their inclusion in the thesis report.

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. This means that even though you agree initially to participate in interviews and email/phone responses, you can withdraw from them at any point. You may ask questions of me at any time and you may refuse to answer any of the questions at any point during the study without any negative consequences.

Please be aware that there is a small chance you will have feelings of stress when talking or writing about your experiences as a visibly body-modified teacher. Also, there is a small chance you will feel uncomfortable sharing personal stories or information about your piercings and/or tattoos. However, you will never be asked to share any information you do not wish to, and you may decline to answer questions at any time during the study without any negative consequences. If you are looking for teaching employment during the study, there is a small chance you will feel anxiety over potential employers learning of your visible tattoos and/or piercings if they read the study. However, only your piercings and/or tattoos that are readily visible on a regular basis will be discussed for the study, which means that nothing secret will be revealed to others via the thesis report. There is a slim chance that you might be judged by your work or social peers for affiliating yourself with research about body modification. In the unlikely event that one of these potential outcomes should occur, please note the following contact information for teaching federation services that can help you arrange counseling services: 1) Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) professional relations services (contact information provided) 2) Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) (contact information provided) 3) Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), (contact information provided) 4) Montreal Teachers Association (MTA) (contact information provided).

Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated, and is meant to be an interesting experience. The results of this study will be presented to the educational community via my thesis report, and possibly as part of educational conference presentations and/or articles published in academic journals. Your identity will remain confidential. A pseudonym will be used in all written materials (including the final thesis report) and no identifying information will be provided at any time. As I am the person who will interview you for this study, and because I am aware of your name, your confidentiality can be ensured but anonymity cannot. Your anonymity will be guaranteed in reports and publications. Please be aware that every effort to guarantee this anonymity will be taken; pseudonyms will be used in all study materials and no identifying information will be shared about you at any time. To ensure your full comfort, you will have an opportunity to review the portions of the study that relate to your personal experiences as a body-modified teacher prior to any descriptions, details or photographs being included in the final report.

Every effort will be made to maintain your confidentiality as a participant in this study; however, there is a very small chance you might be indirectly identified. This means that because your piercings and/or tattoos might be unique, your identity might become recognizable to those who read the thesis report, articles, or academic presentation materials related to the study. As such, even though a pseudonym will be used for you in all study-related documents including the final report, and even though no identifying information will be shared about you at any time, there is a small potential for readers to indirectly discern your identity. Also, if you willingly agree to allow me to use photographs of your visible piercings and/or tattoos, and these body modifications happen to be unique to you and recognizable as such, it is possible that you might be indirectly identified. Every effort will be made to ensure this unlikely outcome does not occur. Your face will not be included in any photographs, and they will be taken in close-up view so that their location on your body will not be readily apparent. You will have the opportunity to review the photographs to ensure your full comfort with their inclusion in the study.

All study data will be conserved for a period of 5 years in professor (name of supervising professor) secure locked office on the University of Ottawa campus, commencing August 31, 2010, after which point it will be destroyed.

By sharing what the experiences of visibly pierced and tattooed teachers are like, it is my goal to bring increased understanding to the educational community about the meaning and significance of body modification. With increased understanding, it is my hope that all members of this community, body-modified or not, will interact with each other with renewed awareness, respect, and understanding beyond what the surface of the skin portrays.

Any inquiries about the research study should be addressed to the supervising professor (contact information provided). There are two copies of the consent form, one of which you may keep.

Any information, requests, or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project can be addressed to the Protocol Officer of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa (contact information provided). If you are interested in participating please read and sign the consent form on the following page.

Informed Consent

I have read the letter describing the research project. I understand the purpose of the study and what is required of me, and I agree to participate. I have been assured that my participation is voluntary and that my identity will remain confidential. I agree to participate, and I am aware that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence.

I am aware that any inquiries about the research study should be addressed to: (supervising professor; contact information provided).

I am aware that any concerns about the ethical conduct of this project may be addressed to the Protocol Officer of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa (contact information provided).

Participant's signature:

_____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature:

_____ Date: _____

Supervising Professor's signature:

_____ Date: _____

Appendix B**Recruitment Selection Email Text: Selected and Unselected Study Participants****Email script for selected participants**

Dear (first and last name of potential interview candidate),

This is professor (name of supervising professor), from the Faculty of Education, responding to your interest to participate in my study. My reason for contacting you is to happily accept your offer to be a participant in the study.

I will be in contact soon with information regarding the journal entries and interviews.

I look very forward to working with you. Thank you again for your interest in taking part in my study. Your time and efforts are truly appreciated.

If you have any questions for me in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me (contact information provided).

Email script for non-selected participants

Dear (first and last name of potential interview candidate),

This is professor (name of supervising professor), from the Faculty of Education, responding to your interest to participate in my study. My reason for contacting you is to respectfully decline your offer to be a participant in the study. There were a very limited number of places in the study, and all have been occupied at this time. The selection was made completely at random to fill these spots.

I thank you for your interest in the study, and appreciate your willingness to participate.

If you have any questions for me about the selection process, please do not hesitate to contact me (contact information provided).

Appendix C

Interview Guide for First Participant Interview Sessions

Pre-Interview Information

- Collect signed consent form
- Clarify any questions the participant has before starting the interview process
- Proper spelling of participant's first and last name
- Number of years teaching, levels taught and current teaching work (where applicable)
- Cities and school boards where the participants have taught
- Number of tattoos (brief description) and location on the body
- Number of piercings (brief description) and location on the body

General Phenomenological Prompts

- What was that like?
- Can you describe how that felt?
- Do you have a story to illustrate that?
- Do you remember any particular sights, sounds, smells, tastes or textures related to this experience?
- Can you give me an example?
- What did that experience lead you to think, do or react?
- What did that look like? Can you describe it in detail?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. When did you get your first tattoo (or piercing)? Can you tell me the story about how you got it?

- What is your opinion of tattooing/piercing in general?
 - What led you to decide to become tattooed/pierced?
 - Is there a specific meaning for your tattoo/piercing?
 - What does your tattoo/piercing mean to you?
 - Did you place the tattoo/piercing in a specific location on your body for a reason?
 - What was it like for you to become tattooed/pierced?
 - How did having a tattoo/piercing make you feel?
 - Were you tattooed/pierced before becoming a teacher or knowing you wanted to become a teacher – or was it after you started working as a teacher?
- If before teaching: What were your experiences like attending teaching job interviews, in light of your visible tattoo/piercing?**
- Were your tattoos/piercings visible during the interview?
 - What led you to decide whether or not to show your tattoos/piercings at the interview – can you describe this in detail please? How did the decision process make you feel?

- Were any comments made about your tattoos/piercings during your interview or another time during the hiring process? How did this make you feel (the presence or absence of comments)?
- Did you change anything in anticipation of entering the classroom as a teacher – can you please describe in detail? How did this decision make you feel?

If after teaching (or for subsequent tattoos/piercings): What were your experiences like after you became tattooed/pierced?

- Did you choose to have your new tattoo/piercing be visible right away – please describe why or why not and what led you to make this decision.
- Did anyone at school react when they saw your new tattoo/piercing? Do you have a memorable example or a story to describe this? How did the reactions make you feel?
- Did you change anything in response to how others at school reacted or did not react to your tattoo/piercing? Do you have an example or a story to describe this?

Sub-question 1: And your other tattoos/piercings, can you tell me the story about how you got them?

- Did you get these tattoos/piercings before or after you started teaching?
- Were there factors that shaped your decision to become tattooed/pierced again?
- Did your teaching have any impact on your decision to become tattooed/pierced again? Please explain in detail, using examples if you can.

2. What have your experiences as a visibly pierced/tattooed teacher been like?

- How do you feel about your piercing/tattoo when you are at school – can you describe this in detail for me?
- Is this feeling any different from when you are at home, in public, etc. – and if yes, can you please describe how?
- What are your interactions with others like when you are at school in relation to your visible tattoo/piercing? Do you have a story or a memorable example to describe what these interactions are like?

Sub-question 2: Interactions with... Students

- Colleagues (other teachers)
- Principal/supervisory staff
- Administration
- Parents of students

- How do these interactions make you feel (please describe in detail)?
- Have you ever changed how you act, think or feel in response to these interactions with others at school? Can you please describe and give examples or a story to explain? How did this make you feel?

Sub-question 3: Spaces and places within the school...

- What are your experiences and interactions with others like in different places within the school (are they different at all – do you have stories or examples that relate to these places)?

- The classroom
- The hallways/common areas
- The schoolyard
- Staff lounges/teachers' offices
- Other _____

3. **What have your experiences as a visibly tattooed/pierced teacher been like as time moves forward – as you gain experience, change schools, teach a different grade, change subjects, or even leave the classroom for other work?**
- How long have you been working (or worked) as a teacher?
 - How do you feel the length of time you have been a teacher shapes your experiences as a tattooed/pierced teacher?
 - Have your actions or feelings towards being visibly tattooed/pierced changed over time? Please describe using a story or examples.
 - Has your experience as a teacher shaped how you feel about your tattoos/piercings, or plans to either obtain/not obtain additional tattoos/piercings? Please describe in detail.
 - What feelings do you hold for your tattoo/piercing *today*? Has this changed since when you first got it (them)? Can you please describe these feelings in detail?
4. **How would you describe or characterize your school's acceptance of tattoos/piercings in general?**
- Have you ever been made aware of any rules or regulations relating to tattoos and piercings in your school(s)?
 - Have you ever been asked to cover or remove a tattoo/piercing by someone at school? If yes, can you please describe this experience in detail and explain how it made you feel?
 - Have you ever been asked to show or talk about a tattoo/piercing by someone at school? If yes, can you please describe this experience in detail and explain how it made you feel?
 - How do you feel your school shapes your experiences as a visibly tattooed/pierced teacher? Would things be different if you worked elsewhere – why or why not?
 - Do you feel your grade level or subject matter shapes your experiences as a tattooed/pierced teacher? Please explain in detail, and provide a story or examples if you can.
 - Do your colleagues have visible tattoos or piercings, and how does this presence/absence make you feel?
5. **Considering your experiences as a visibly tattooed/pierced teacher, how do you feel about the following:**
- Answering students' or other peoples' questions about your tattoos/piercings? How would you describe your feelings of openness and comfort in discussing your tattoos/piercings at school with others?
 - Covering your tattoos/piercings versus allowing them to be seen? How comfortable do you feel with others seeing your tattoos/piercings – do you take efforts to cover them up? Please explain your choice and what motivates you to cover/not cover your tattoos/piercings and how often (if at all) you choose to cover them.
 - Integrating tattooing/piercing into lessons, classroom curriculum or learning discussions? Have you ever used tattooing/piercing as a topic of a lesson or as a teachable moment – please describe in detail.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about before we wrap up the interview?

Appendix D

University of Ottawa Review Ethics Board Approved Study Protocols: January 18, 2010

The purpose of this thesis study is to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of teachers with visible body modifications (VBMs), specifically tattoos and body piercings (i.e. a lip ring). To do so, I will conduct a hermeneutic phenomenology by interviewing pierced and tattooed teachers, combined with my own reflective personal journal writing that focuses on my own experiences as a VBM teacher. Via my study, I intend to uncover what feelings VBM teachers hold towards their body modifications, and what sort of impact they feel their piercings or tattoos have on shaping their interactions with colleagues, students, and other members of the school community. The experiences of VBM teachers have gone largely unstudied. My goal is to help the educational community better understand this rarely discussed phenomenon: what it is like to be a visibly tattooed or pierced teacher within the current context of school settings.

Potential study participants will first be contacted by the researcher via email or telephone to determine if they are interested in participating in the study. The aim is to locate four study participants. The researcher will base inclusion of these four individuals on whether the potential participant meets all criteria listed in sections 6c and 6d of this form, on the individual's willingness to relate stories during conversational discussions, on the individual's anticipated geographic location during the time of the study (Ontario), and on the individual's voluntary willingness and availability to participate during the anticipated timeframe for the study.

If the participant voluntarily and willingly agrees to participate, the researcher will next ask him or her to participate in two in-person, in-depth, one-on-one, open-ended interviews. Each of these two interviews will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes in length. The researcher will attempt to schedule these in-depth interview dates at the time the participants willingly agree to participate in the study, as soon as they have signed the "Participant Letter of Consent". These interviews will be conducted by the researcher and will ideally be scheduled between December 2009 and early March 2010. The interviews will be tape recorded, and hand-written notes will be taken. During these conversational-style interviews, the researcher will collect lived-experience descriptions (stories, anecdotes, recollections of experiences) from participants. These interview sessions will also be used as a time to reflect upon descriptions provided by participants in previous discussions with the researcher (i.e. excerpts from previous interview transcripts), with the aim of deepening understanding of the phenomenon under study (living as a teacher with a visible tattoo or body piercing). Hermeneutical prompts such as magazine/newspaper articles, video clips, literary excerpts, or photographs related to body piercing and/or tattooing might also be used to generate discussion during interview sessions.

To create opportunities for participants and the researcher to reflect and co-reflect between the scheduled in-person interview sessions, the researcher will email short (one or two paragraphs) salient excerpts from the participant's previous interview transcripts (i.e. sections that gained the most interest or those requiring further discussion to understand) or hermeneutic prompts (i.e. video clips, newspaper articles, photographs) to each participant. In this email, the researcher will invite participants to voluntarily and willingly respond to these transcript passages or prompts via email or telephone, as they prefer.

After the final in-depth interview sessions are complete (ideally by mid-March 2010) and the thesis report has been written, each participant will be invited by the researcher over telephone to read the portions of the thesis report that relate to his or her personal experiences. The aim of this activity is for the participants to co-reflect with the researcher on the meanings depicted in the report writing, and for the researcher to verify that participants agree that accurate representations of their lived experiences are reflected in the written report. The researcher will take participants' suggestions and comments into consideration and will reserve the right to make changes, as she feels are appropriate.

The study sample will consist of four participants who must meet a number of criteria to be considered for inclusion. The first criterion that is that participants must possess at least one visible body piercing or tattoo (VBM) other than un-stretched earlobe piercings (which are considered mainstream accessories rather than body modifications). "Visible" will be defined as modifications that can be seen if the participant is wearing summer attire (i.e. short-sleeved shirt and shorts).

Participants must also be teachers, for they must be capable of relating workplace experiences that have occurred within school environments such as classrooms, staffrooms, hallways, schoolyards, resource rooms, etc. Thus, they must currently be or have recently been (within 3 years to ensure ability to recollect their experiences) professional educators with post-secondary (college or university) level licensing (i.e. a teacher, professor, or educational assistant).

Other criteria beyond the visibility of the body modification will include: at least one male and one female participant, a variety in the participants' board of schooling (public, Catholic, private, alternative, or supply teacher) and various levels of teaching experience (pre-service, primary, elementary, middle school, high school, college, or university).

Participants must be able to converse fluently in English, as the researcher collecting the data is Anglophone and cannot conduct a research interview in any language other than English.

This study is restricted to participants who can converse fluently in English, as the researcher collecting interview data is Anglophone, and is unable to conduct an interview in French or any other language. This study is also restricted to participants who are teachers with visible tattoos or body piercings. As the study is a phenomenology exploring the lived experiences of teachers with visible body modifications (VBMs), participants must be teachers with VBMs to provide relevant interview data.

As this study is a phenomenology, in-person interviews are most desirable. To accommodate this, and to minimize travel and accommodation expenses for the researcher (who lives in Ottawa), participants will be recruited in Ontario and the western portions of Quebec (from the Gatineau region to the Montreal region).

The researcher will be awaiting contact from four potential study participants. As of August 2009, the researcher, who is also a visibly body-modified (VBM) teacher, is informally aware of members of the Ontario teaching community who possess visible body modifications (piercings or tattoos). The researcher is aware of these individuals through her own participation in the body modification subculture of Ottawa, and via discussions with school colleagues at the University of Ottawa and at academic conferences (in the field of education).

The researcher learned of the first potential participant as a customer of a local (Ottawa) tattoo studio. The researcher's professional tattoo artist informed her of a client she knows to be a body-modified teacher. The professional tattoo artist offered to provide the researcher's contact email and phone number to this individual, to contact the researcher at her own volition, should she desire. The researcher did not extend any initial contact to this individual, and will wait to be contacted prior to sending any subsequent information about the study.

The researcher was made aware of the second potential participant via conversation with an acquaintance who attends the University of Toronto as a Bachelor of Education student. This acquaintance informed the researcher of a local teacher he is aware of (residing and working in Toronto) who is body-modified, and offered to provide this teacher with the researcher's contact information. Once again, the researcher did not initiate any contact with this second potential participant, and will await a reply prior to sending any subsequent study information, should this individual willingly respond.

A third potential participant (a body-modified supply teacher) was made known to the researcher by a different local (Ottawa) professional tattoo artist she has been tattooed by. This professional tattoo artist offered to provide the researcher's contact information to this individual, who is an employee in the studio where this tattoo artist works. Subsequently, the researcher also became aware of this potential participant as a casual acquaintance, as he is also a masters student at the University of Ottawa. However the researcher does not know this third individual well, as he is taking a different program from her and because she has never hired him in his professional capacity as a piercing artist. Again, the researcher has not initiated contact with this third potential participant about any matters related to the study; she will again wait to be contacted first prior to sending any further study information.

The fourth potential participant, previously unknown to the researcher, was introduced to her at an academic conference by a mutual acquaintance, a professor from the University of Ottawa. During casual conversation, this fourth potential participant voluntarily requested the researcher's email address so that he may write to her in the future about his interest in participating in the study (completely voluntarily – the researcher did not request to exchange information). Once again, the researcher will await being contacted by this individual if he chooses to do so of his own volition.

The researcher does not have any relationships of friendship or trust with any of these four potential participants, nor does she have any formal work or school-related relationships with them. At most, she is a very casual acquaintance of one potential participant (has had three or four brief conversations on the University of Ottawa campus about course-related matters in a span of two and a half years), and two conversations with a second potential participant (at academic conferences in education). She has yet to meet the third and fourth potential participants in any capacity.

The researcher does not have any relationships of friendship or trust with any of these four potential participants. She has not engaged in social outings of the type friends would have with any of the four potential participants, nor does she have any formal work or school-related relationship with them. At most, she is a very casual acquaintance of one potential participant (has had three or four brief conversations on the University of Ottawa campus about course-related matters in a span of two and a half years), two conversations with a second potential participant (at academic conferences in education), and has yet to meet the third and fourth potential participants in any capacity.

Only upon being willingly and voluntarily contacted first by each of these four potential participants, and upon receiving ethics approval, the researcher will send each individual an introductory email or will call them on the telephone (to introduce herself and explain the study). This method of recruitment is commonly known as the "snowball" sampling method of contacting people known to have direct experience with the phenomenon under study. This first contact (after ethics approval has been granted) will

ideally occur after November 2009, when teachers are not under the heavy administrative pressures associated with the start of the school year in September.

At this time, the participants who willingly and voluntarily agree to participate will be provided with a “Participant Letter of Consent”. This letter will be delivered by the researcher in a sealed envelope either by mail or in person (pending the participant’s geographic proximity to Ottawa).

Only the criteria listed in section 6c and 6d are required. Participants must have at least some formal post-secondary training as teaching professionals and possess at least one visible tattoo or body piercing other than un-stretched earlobe piercings. They must also be capable of conversing fluently in English.

The screening will be carried out via a brief in-person or telephone conversation with researcher. In the event that this conversation takes place via telephone rather than in-person, the researcher will request that photographs of the visible body piercing(s) or tattoo(s) be emailed or faxed to demonstrate the participant’s eligibility to participate. In the event that this initial contact occurs in person, the researcher will verify through observation if participant possesses visible piercing(s) or tattoo(s). The researcher will also assess each potential participant’s willingness to conversationally relate stories, their voluntary willingness to participate in the study, their availability during the anticipated timeframe of the study, and their geographic location at the time of the study (Ontario and western Quebec). Participants who are not selected for the study will be informed via phone call or email by the researcher.

Participants will be asked to participate in two in-person, in-depth, one-on-one, open-ended interviews of approximately 45-60 minutes in length. Each interview will take place between the researcher and the participant, and will be conversational in tone. If the participant lives in Ottawa, these interviews will take place in Ottawa at an informal location such as the participant’s home (if requested), a library, a coffee shop, or another location of the participant’s choosing. To collect meaningful phenomenological data, the participant must be comfortable speaking openly about his or her experiences. To attend to this need, the interview location will be flexible to accommodate each participant’s personal preferences. If the participant does not live in Ottawa, the interview will take place in a similar informal location in his or her city of residence.

During the 45-60 minute in-depth interview sessions, the researcher will collect lived-experience descriptions (stories, anecdotes, recollections of experiences) from participants using broad, open-ended questions. These interview sessions will also be used as a time to for the researcher and the participants to co-reflect upon descriptions provided by participants in previous sessions, with the aim of deepening understanding of the phenomenon under study (living as a teacher with a visible tattoo or body piercing). Portions of earlier interview transcripts will also be brought to interview sessions for continued conversations with participants, with an aim of forming a partnership of the “meaning making” of the study. Hermeneutical prompts such as magazine articles, video clips, literary excerpts, or photographs related to body piercing and/or tattooing might also be used to generate discussion during the in-depth interview sessions. If the participants are fully willing, the researcher will request photographs of their piercings or tattoos, as well.

To create opportunities for participants and the researcher to reflect on the phenomenon under study (living as a VBM teacher) between scheduled in-person interview sessions, the researcher will email short (one or two paragraphs long) salient excerpts from previous interview transcripts to participants (i.e. sections that gained the most interest, or those that require further discussion to understand) or prompts such as video clips or photographs. In these emails, the researcher will invite participants to respond to these items via email or telephone, as they desire. The time required to respond to these requests (if participants willingly volunteer to do so) will be approximately 10-30 minutes.

Lastly, after the interview sessions are complete and the thesis report has been written, each participant will be invited to read the portions of the text that relate specifically to his or her personal experiences. This text will be provided to participants in person by the researcher or mailed to their home. Reviewing the text will take approximately one hour to complete, with an aim of verifying whether the participants agree with the researcher over the general meanings assigned the the lived experiences as portrayed in the writing. The researcher will consider participants’ requests to change material, but will reserve the right to do so as she sees fit.

Potential participants will be asked to participate in two in-depth interviews, three or four email or phone prompt-response sessions, and one final read-over of the sections of the thesis report that pertain to each participant’s personal contribution to the study.

Each in-depth interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Email or phone prompt-response sessions will take approximately 10-30 minutes each. The read-over of the thesis report sections will take approximately one hour.

As participants will be visibly pierced or tattooed teachers, there is a possibility that people who know them very well, based on descriptions or photographs of their body modifications included in the thesis report, might discern their identity upon reading the thesis. However, as participants’ body modifications must be easily visible to qualify to participate in the study, it is highly

unlikely this would have detrimental effects of any kind. Members of the school community where the teacher participant resides will already know about, have seen, and be fully aware of any piercings or tattoos that are visible on the teacher's body as a matter of routine, meaning that no sensitive or damaging information will be revealed as a result of participating in the study.

During interviews, it is minimally possible that participants will experience feelings of stress, anxiety, anger, marginalization, or sadness when they talk about their lived experiences as visibly-body modified teachers in school settings. There is a small chance that some participants might feel uncomfortable revealing personal information pertaining to their piercings or tattoos. If participants are currently seeking employment in the field of education at the time of the study, there is a small chance that anxiety might be generated knowing that potential future employers could read about their body modifications in the thesis report. Participating in this study also poses a minimal risk that visibly body modified (VBM) teacher participants will be judged by others in the school community for affiliating themselves with body modification-related research. This is unlikely, however, as the participants' status as VBM teachers will already be known by their school community.

The risk of participants feeling distressed while talking about their experiences during interviews will be minimized by the researcher clearly informing them prior to all interviews that they may decline to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable or involve topics they do not wish to discuss. If particular experiences related to living as visibly body-modified (VBM) teachers are too awkward or too personal to relate, participants will not be pressured to continue speaking about these particular situations. Participants will be given the option of turning down questions as desired, or withdrawing from the study without any penalties at any time and without any negative repercussions whatsoever. The right to decline questions or opt out of the study entirely will be clearly indicated in the participant's "Participant Letter of Consent" and again verbally by the researcher prior to any in-person interviews, telephone discussions, or as part of the written content of all email correspondences. If participants choose to share information associated with negative feelings, this will be completely of their own volition. There will be absolutely no pressure for participants to recount traumatic or overly negative experiences during the study.

The risk of being judged by others in the school community will be mitigated by the fact that participants' identities will remain confidential in the final report and the researcher will not share identifying information at any point during or after the study. This risk is also quite minimal, as all participants will have visible body modifications, meaning that anyone who has seen them in public or in the school environment will already be aware of the modifications' existence. In other words, no "outing" will occur as a result of this study.

Furthermore, the researcher is also a teacher with visible body modifications (VBMs). To decrease participants' potential feelings that their tattoos or piercings are being judged in a research setting, she will clearly reveal her orientations towards body modification practices (which she views positively) prior to commencing all discussions and/or interviews. Revealing that she too is a VBM teacher aims to increase rapport and understanding between the researcher and the participants, and to enhance an atmosphere of comfort and informality conducive to non-stressful, mutually-respectful conversation.

To protect the participants from feeling unduly personally exposed by the written thesis report, pseudonyms will be used in the final report, in interview transcripts and research notes, and in any other written research documentation pertaining to the study. If a participant expresses concern over photographs of his or her body modifications being shared with the report-reading audience, images from this participant will not be included in the report. Only participants who willingly and freely volunteer photographs will have these images included in the written report.

If the participants are fully willing and comfortable, the researcher will request to take photographs of their visible piercings and/or tattoos with her own camera. Only those tattoos and/or piercings that are readily visible when wearing short sleeves or shorts (and are thus known to others in the school/social community already) would be photographed, ensuring that this process would not be invasive in any way to the participant. As the researcher will have taken the photographs herself, she will retain the copyright to include them in her thesis report and other published materials related to the study. Any photographs taken for the thesis research will be used solely for the purpose of disseminating research results, and for no other reason. To ensure their full comfort with the photographs to be included in the thesis report, the researcher will provide participants with a chance to review the photos (along with the written content pertaining to each participant's individual experiences) prior to their being included in the final thesis report and to express their full willingness to have them included. If for any reason a participant indicates that he or she would prefer a specific photograph of his or her body modification not be included, the researcher will remove said photograph.

There is a small potential for indirect identification of participants via inclusion of photographs in the study. Every possible effort will be made to ensure this does not occur. The researcher will only take and include photographs of tattoos and/or piercings in close-up views. This means that no faces will be included, minimizing any chance the participant will be indirectly identified. Furthermore, the close-up view will make it difficult to tell what part of the body a tattoo is placed on, reducing the chance for indirect identification even further. Body piercing photographs will be very unlikely to produce indirect identification. When body piercings are inserted, standard barbells and rings are used by professional piercers. Thus, photographs of such piercings in any location on the face or body would be nearly impossible to tell from one person to another. For example, a lip or an ear cartilage piercing photographed on one person could look like the lip or ear cartilage piercing on hundreds of other people.

There is a small chance of indirect identification of participants in this study. Tattoos and/or body piercings can be unique to a particular individual. Thus reading about them in the thesis descriptions or viewing them in photographs poses a small chance of indirect identification. However, this is unlikely to occur and every measure will be taken to ensure it does not. No identifying information will be shared about the participants at any time. Pseudonyms will be used in all documents including the thesis report, and no other identifying information will be shared at any time.

Every possible effort will be made to ensure that indirect identification via photographs does not occur. The researcher will only take and include photographs of tattoos and/or piercings in close-up views. This means that no faces will be included, minimizing any chance the participant will be indirectly identified. Furthermore, the close-up view will make it difficult to tell what part of the body a tattoo is placed on, reducing the chance for indirect identification even further. Body piercing photographs will be very unlikely to produce indirect identification. When body piercings are inserted, standard barbells and rings are used by professional piercers. Thus, photographs of such piercings in any location on the face or body would be nearly impossible to tell from one person to another. For example, a lip or an ear cartilage piercing photographed on one person could look like the lip or ear cartilage piercing on hundreds of other people.

While tattoos can be unique to a specific individual, the potential for indirect identification of a participant will be further minimized by the growing demographic of tattooed and pierced individuals in Ontario and in North America. Research strongly indicates steadily increasing numbers of pierced and tattooed individuals in the age and level of education demographic of the teachers who will be included as participants. The body modification subculture is steadily expanding – meaning that even if a tattoo looks or sounds somewhat familiar to a reader of the thesis, it could very well be attributed to numerous people rather than just one. General “styles” of tattooing, whether “tribal” or “Japanese” or “old school” or “realism,” or any other style have many similarities that span across the numerous individuals who have tattoos of these kinds. This diminishes the potential of indirect identification of a particular participants even further.

Also, individuals who are pierced and/or tattooed are extremely diverse in background; having a tattoo and/or body piercing most certainly does not mean that the individual will know other tattooed and/or pierced individuals. This applies to pierced and/tattooed teachers, as well. The number of body-modified North Americans is steadily growing, and the descriptions and photographs included in the thesis could describe the experiences of numerous individuals rather than just a few. While small compared to the full teaching community, the body-modified teaching community is by no means so small that a participant would be readily recognizable based on descriptions or photographs in the thesis study.

Furthermore, to ensure that participants are fully comfortable with the information that is shared about them via the thesis report, they will be given a chance to review the portions of the study that pertain to their personal experiences (including any photographs of their own piercings/tattoos). In the unlikely event that the participant feels a particular detail, description or photograph will reveal his or her identity and he or she objects to this, the participant will have the opportunity to request its removal, which the researcher will do to protect their confidentiality to the very best of her ability.

In the unlikely event that a participant is indirectly identified via the photograph included in the study, the potential for any negative outcome will be mitigated by the fact that the participant will have reviewed the photograph and indicated his/her full acceptance of its inclusion prior to its being viewed by the reading audience.

To minimize the possible anxieties related to employment in the field of education, participants will not be asked to discuss any piercings or tattoos that are not already clearly visible to others on a regular daily basis. Only those tattoos and piercings that are easily noticeable by people who view the participant in school-related settings outside the study parameters will be discussed as part of the study research. For example, if participants have body modifications that would routinely remain hidden under their clothing, they will not be expected to talk about these modifications unless they fully voluntarily and willingly offer to do so.

While participants might feel stress or mild anxiety in revealing information about their personal lived experiences or body modifications, the stories and anecdotes they share will help build an increased awareness in the educational community of what it is like to live as a teacher with visible tattoos or piercings. This study will help enhance understanding of body modification in school environments. By sharing the participants’ experiences, members of the public and the larger educational community might become better informed, thus dispelling misconceptions and stereotypes that exist about body modified teachers. With this comes the potential for greater acceptance, better understanding, and improved relations between body-modified teachers and non-modified members of the school community. As most negative perceptions towards body-modified individuals stem from misinformation or a lack of understanding, this study can only help improve the situation for participants. These benefits far outweigh the minimal risk of stress while recounting past experiences, especially considering how participants are under no obligation to share information that causes them negative feelings.

The phenomenon of living as a teacher with VBMs has gained very little attention in academics or scholarly literature. This means that few studies provide insight for educational professionals who wish to learn more about the experiences of VBM teachers. This thesis will provide educators with a rare chance to vicariously step into the skin of VBM colleagues and read about

their experiences, perhaps contemplating the implications of these experiences in ways they did not consider prior to encountering the study.

A deeper understanding of VBM teachers' lived experiences will also, it is hoped, decrease the likelihood that VBM teachers feel marginalized by others within school settings (i.e. the staffroom or classroom) who do not understand the personal significance or meanings associated with body modifications. Furthermore, as a better understanding of VBM teachers' experiences is built, it is hoped that the educational community might begin to rethink what an "acceptable" teacher body can look like in today's schools, perhaps expanding the "teacher image" to include bodies whose flesh is decorated tattoos or piercings.

A major aim of this study is to provoke educational professionals to think beyond the surface meanings of the tattoos or piercings they might view in their workplaces. For example, when a department head feels aversion to a bicep tattoo, or when a principal or student's parent wonders why a teacher would insert rings into their eyebrow, it is hoped the information in this thesis will help them to better appreciate the motivations and personal significance attached to these teachers' VBMs. Body-modified or not, it is hoped that all educators will be able to come away from this study better in tune with how it feels to be a teacher who works in a school day in and day out, with difference displayed on exposed flesh for all to see, sometimes understood yet frequently misconstrued. For teachers who are already visibly body-modified (such as the study participants), this thesis will hopefully give them a space to feel their experiences are gaining due attention, and also a space to reflect more fully on their status as VBM educators, which have yet to gain thorough scholarly consideration within the academic literature.

Prior to their participation in the study, participants will be asked to sign a "Participant Letter of Consent". This letter will either be mailed to the participants or delivered in person in a sealed envelope by the researcher. Upon receiving this letter, the researcher will ask each participant to read and sign the consent letter no later than 15 minutes prior to the scheduled start time of the first study interview. This will provide participants with a chance to thoroughly read the contents of the letter, ask questions or seek clarification from the researcher as needed, and sign the form before their participation in the study commences. All participants will be adults over the age of 18 who will be legally and mentally competent to read and sign this "Participant Letter of Consent."

The participants in this study do not fall under any specific cultural, social, or ethnic group or hold any divergent values, traditions, privacy issues or modes of communication requiring adaptations. Written consent will be obtained.

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project in the "Participant Letter of Consent", which will be presented to them prior to their participation in the study. They will also be reminded of this right verbally by the researcher at the start of all discussion/interview sessions before any questions are asked, prior to any phone discussions/interviews held, and in the contents of any email correspondence sent during the study process.

As this study is primarily based in Ontario, only English will be used. The researcher conducting the interviews is not proficient in written French, nor can she conduct a reserach interview in French. Thus, participants will be Anglophones or people who are proficient enough in spoken and written English to understand written and verbal communications in English.

To minimize study costs for this thesis (which is being conducted by a master's student), documents will be written in English only. Phenomenological research is primarily a writing-based and interview-based activity, which would make the cost of translation prohibitively expensive. The researcher conducting the interviews is not proficient in written French, nor can she conduct an interview in French. Thus, participants will be Anglophones or individuals with proficient use of verbal and written English.

Pseudonyms will be used in the written thesis report instead of the participants' real names. If school names, city names, colleagues' names, friends' names, or any other potentially personally identifying information is shared by the participant in material quoted from an interview transcript or hand-written researcher notes, the content of phone conversations, or the content of emails, the researcher will change these names to pseudonyms or otherwise alter the content in the quoted material to be included in the thesis report so that no personally identifying information will be revealed at any time.

Participants will be invited to respond to prompts emailed to them by the researcher. If they choose to write responses to these items via email, the researcher may quote from their responses in the final thesis report. To protect the confidentiality of the participants' identities, any potentially personally identifying details will be altered, such as place names, school names, or participants' names. These will be replaced by pseudonyms or otherwise altered to protect participants' identities.

Participants will be given the opportunity to review summaries of transcripts from their interview sessions. These summaries will be brought to subsequent interview sessions by the researcher. The researcher and the participant will discuss the meanings of the contents of these summaries, and the researcher will note any discrepancies in understanding that are brought to attention via these discussions. If the researcher recognizes that meanings must be altered to align more accurately with the participant's feelings towards the experiences discussed, changes will be made at her discretion.

The researcher is aware of the names of some of the potential participants of the study. She has taken university courses or graduate classes with some individuals, and has been told the names of other potential participants in informal discussions with contacts at the University of Ottawa or by personal acquaintances. Because body modification subculture is relatively small in Ontario, it often occurs that individuals with piercings and tattoos who also form part of a second community - in this case the teaching community - will learn each others' names. The community of visibly body-modified (VBM) teachers in Ontario is small enough that having met or heard of another VBM teacher's name is not uncommon.

The researcher, a master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, will collect study data.

Data will be collected by the researcher in tape-recorded, in-person interviews. The Panasonic digital audio recorder that will be used to record interviews is password-protected, and only the researcher and the principal investigator have access to this password. The researcher will also collect data via handwritten notes taken during in-person interviews. Email responses will be collected from participants who choose to reply to invitations to respond to prompts sent to them by the researcher. Photographs of participants' visible tattoo(s) and/or piercing(s) will be collected from those participants who fully voluntarily and willingly provide them.

The principal investigator and supervisor of this thesis study, and the researcher (a master's student) will have access to the collected data.

The names of participants will be kept confidential by asking them to select and use pseudonyms while speaking on tape during all interviews. Also, they will be asked to use pseudonyms when talking about people, places, institutions, etc. that might indirectly identify them. If the participant speaks identifying information on tape, the researcher will replace this information accordingly with pseudonyms when typing interview transcripts and writing the thesis report. The Panasonic digital recorder that will be used to tape-record interviews is password-protected, and only the researcher and the principal investigator have access to this password, minimizing the chances that participants' names could ever be accidentally revealed, even if they inadvertently speak their name or identifying information on tape.

The researcher will also use pseudonyms and alter any potentially identifying information as needed when taking handwritten notes during interviews, when typing interview transcripts, and when writing the thesis report. Any email responses sent to the researcher during the study will be sent to a password-protected inbox to which the researcher has sole access. When quoting from participant email responses in the thesis report, the researcher will use pseudonyms and alter any potentially identifying information as needed to protect the identity of the participant.

Pseudonyms will be used in the written thesis report instead of the participants' real names. If school names, city names, colleagues' names, friends' names, or any other potentially personally identifying information is shared by the participant in material quoted from an interview transcript, hand-written researcher notes, the content of phone conversations, or the content of emails, the researcher will change these names to pseudonyms or otherwise alter the content in the quoted material to be included in the thesis report so that no personally identifying information will be revealed at any time.

Hand-written researcher notes from interview sessions will be stored at the principal investigator's locked office at the University of Ottawa. Electronic data, including digital tapes and audio files from interviews, transcripts from interviews, and the researcher's personal journal entries and reflection notes will be stored on the principal investigator's password-protected computer in her locked office at the university of Ottawa. Copies of these items will also be kept in a locked office at the researcher's home on her password-protected computer. Study-related email correspondence will be stored on the researcher's password-protected email account on her computer in her locked home office, and copies will be saved as word processing documents on the principal investigator's computer in her locked office at the University of Ottawa. Any photographs offered by participants will be stored with written records in the principal investigator's locked office at the University of Ottawa, or stored electronically on her password-protected computer. A copy (in case of computer failure) of all aforementioned electronic items will be stored in backup format on an external hard drive device in the researcher's locked home office. Photocopies of all written materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's locked office at the University of Ottawa.

Interview tapes will be destroyed and all related digital audio files will be permanently erased. Hand-written notes will be shredded, along with any paper copies of transcripts or other hard copy documents pertaining to the study. All electronic files (computer files) pertaining to the study will be deleted and permanently removed from all computer systems or external hard drive devices.

Participants will be offered a copy of the final thesis report. If they accept a copy, it will be mailed to their home or delivered in a sealed envelope in person by the researcher.