Exploring body work practices: bodies, affect and becoming

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Abstract

This PhD thesis explores the body and contemporary body work practices. Through a Deleuzian approach to bodies, this research focuses on how body work and bodies are understood and lived using concepts of affect and becoming. Through interviews, I explore the affective relations involved in body work, including the ways that health and gender, two major ‘forces’ among many, affect participants and impact on the ways their bodies may be lived. The increase in health, beauty and fitness industries is aligned with an increase in attention to the body, and ‘body image’ for both women and men.

The relationship between the body and society has long been a key tension in sociology and feminist theory. Because ‘the body’ is central to this study, I argue that it is particularly crucial to look for ways to negotiate and move beyond the core dualism that frames the body; the mind/body dualism. Through the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari and others who have extended their concepts, the body can be understood as a process of connections, rather than an ‘object’ caught in dualisms. The challenge or aim of this research has been to find non-dualist, embodied approaches to studying the body empirically, whilst also critiquing the social conditions which frame the bodies of the participants.

The body is understood as a ‘relationship of forces’ which connects to other forces, including social relations such as gender, consumer culture and health discourses. These relations are central in the ways participants manage, understand and live their bodies, and affect but do not determine their bodies. I explore the ways these social relations affect participants’ body work including practices of exercise, weights training and cosmetic surgery. By focusing on the descriptions by participants as to how the body feels through body work practices, I explore the affects or embodied sensations of body work. Through examining the relations and affects between bodies and the world, I am concerned not for what the body is – and how it is determined or dominated – but for what relations and affects enable bodies to do.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

iii. the thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices or the thesis is [number of words] as approved by the RHD Committee.
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Publications

The following article was completed during candidacy:


I am the sole author of this publication. This article forms the basis of chapter five in this thesis.
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Chapter one: The body in contemporary society and sociological theory

This thesis explores the body and contemporary body work practices. Through a Deleuzian approach to bodies, I focus on the affective dimensions of body work through conceptualising the ways engagements and intra-actions between bodies are lived as powerfully embodied sensations. Through interviews, I explore the affective relations involved in body work, including the ways that health and gender, two major ‘forces’ among many, affect participants and impact on the ways their bodies may be lived.

A cornerstone of this thesis is a commitment to operationalising non-dualistic approaches to the body in exploring the body and body work practices in the current sociological context. Because ‘the body’ is central to this study, I argue that it is particularly crucial to find a way to negotiate and move beyond the core dualism that frames the body; the mind/body dualism. Theorising the body in this project is concerned with ‘wrestling notions of corporeality away from the constraints which have polarised and opposed it to the mind’ (Grosz 1994: 187). Through the work of feminist philosophers and sociologists such as Grosz (1994), Bray and Colebrook (1998), Barad (2007) and Budgeon (2003), I came to see the dualism of mind/body as a core problem to be negotiated in this study at the level of ontology and epistemology. The negotiation of mind/body binary means that other binaries such as representation/materiality, domination/resistance and structure/agency must also be addressed. The work of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza and other scholars who have used and extended their concepts and frameworks for understanding bodies (such as Hickey-Moody & Malins 2004, Buchanan 1997 and Coleman 2009) is particularly central to this thesis. Based on these frameworks, I argue that bodies do not preexist the relations that compose them; bodies and body work practices are ‘nothing more or less’ than the relations between them (Fraser, Kemby & Lury 2005: 3). The premise that bodies cannot be known in advance of their relations, affects or encounters is powerful because this perspective emphasises creativity and the potential for newness, rather than the ways bodies are restricted and reproduced.
The societal context in which bodies are located and in which body work practices take place are also central to this thesis, and is crucial for understanding the participants’ descriptions of their bodies and body work. Here, gender is central, along with the forces of consumer culture which include health ideals, individualism and ‘image’. These are described by participants as particularly important to their body work, and can also be understood as key features of the current social, economic and historical context in which body work takes place and meanings of bodies are negotiated. These conditions are crucial in understanding bodies and body work practices that are undertaken by participants in this study.

The central questions explored in this research are:

*How are knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies produced through body work practices?*

*How do other social relations (such as gender and health) intersect with body work practices, and what does this mean for understanding bodies from a Deleuzian perspective?*

*How do such social relations and body work practices affect the body’s possibilities?*

These questions are explored through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 22 young men and women aged 18 – 33 in Melbourne, Australia. The research questions for this project are drawn from the ontology and epistemology of Deleuze’s theoretical framework. These questions aim to advance the ways bodies are approached in sociology through using radical concepts such as those put forward by Deleuze. The research questions in this project also aim to contribute to developing new empirical approaches to the body. Following feminist poststructural sociologists, I use these concepts for rethinking the ways knowledge is produced beyond the epistemology of humanism (see St. Pierre 1997; Grosz 1994). The theoretical frameworks I have drawn upon in composing the research questions for this project pursue a different ontological and epistemological perspective that might be used for exploring bodies in sociological research. In this project, the focus is on the embodied experiences and potential of bodies.
within relations of power. I avoid reverting to models of structure and agency or of subjects and objects in analysis; or other disembodied models wherein the body is a ‘cultural object’ that ‘does no desiring of its own’ (Buchanan 1997: 75). These are ethical considerations too, based on the shift that Deleuze’s concepts enable. Deleuze’s ethics moves from aetiology (cause and effect) to ethology (action and affect), and dismantles the numerous Cartesian binaries which have ordered, stratified and diminished the body.

**The body and consumer culture, health, ‘body image’ and gender**

The particular social context frames contemporary understandings of bodies. The body, and more specifically the body ‘image’ of young people, is a core theme or ‘problem’ in mainstream discourse. Images of bodies are everywhere in consumer culture. Online and printed news media runs stories about bodies almost every day – about their transformations, problems, and about images or appearances of celebrities’ bodies. An article in The Age’s ‘Life and Style’ online section for example details the actor Keira Knightley’s confession of her ‘body image battle’ (The Age, 2012). One of the comments below the article reads, ‘Jeez! If she's got body image issues, what hope [sic] for the rest of us mere mortals?’ The previous week, the same ‘Life and Style’ section ran an article detailing strategies for women to ‘beat [their] genetics’ and change their body shape: ‘the good news is you can do a lot with the cards dealt to you. Admittedly, you can't suddenly spring long legs or determine where your excesses cling to you but with focused toning, you can dramatically alter what you have’ (King, 2012). The body’s corporeality is presented as something to be ‘battled with’ and altered, if one is willing to put in the work.

Popular interest and concern with the body is not limited only to women; body image, health and fitness are increasingly issues affecting men too. Men are increasingly targeted as consumers of body-care products, and the market for men’s ‘grooming products’ such

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as skin care is ‘doubling each year’ (Australian Centre for Retail Studies, 2005: 4). An article detailing the recent ‘fitness craze’ of martial arts and boxing classes at gyms cites a male participant of the class who explains its benefits: “I'm not overweight but I have a bit of a belly I want to get rid of...I tried to do home fitness and go for a run, but I was not as motivated as with this. It's a good solid workout and you're left on the floor in a pile of sweat at the end” (Pennington, 2012). ‘Motivation’ towards achieving a ‘good solid workout’ are the components here that are presented as enabling him to ‘rid’ himself of the excess ‘weight’ on part of his body. This is a common discourse surrounding the body and weight and practices of ‘fitness’, and a key way that the body is discussed and thought of in the contemporary, Western neoliberal context.

Crawford uses the term ‘healthism’, defined as the primary preoccupation with personal health as the achievement and definition of wellbeing, to describe the ways that solutions to health ‘rest within the individual’s determination’ (1980: 368). Health and working on the body are promoted as consumer choices; ‘choices’ essential to general wellbeing and success and the ‘quest to fulfill themselves’ (Rose 1996: 162). In this domain of consumption, ‘individuals will want to be healthy, experts will instruct them on how to be so, and entrepreneurs will exploit and enhance this market for health. Health will be ensured through a combination of the market, expertise and a regulated economy’ (Rose 1996: 162). The health, beauty and fitness industries are highly profitable in Australia, and continue to grow and change rapidly (Australian Centre for Retail Studies, 2005). In 2004, health and beauty retailing in Australia amounted to $8,821 million in 2004, up 13 percent on 2003 (Australian Centre for Retail Studies, 2005: 3). The health and fitness industry has seen a significant increase in demand for personal training and gym memberships, and the increase in fitness club openings and sales of fitness programs (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Between 2001 and 2005 the number of fitness centres in Australia rose by 24 percent, and the operating profit of fitness centres in this same period rose by 89 percent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

The presentation of the body in the above examples is also strongly delineated by gender. Even though men are now argued to be suffering the ‘dubious equality’ as consumers of health, fitness and cosmetic products (Featherstone 1982), the idealised physical
dimensions of the body are gendered in hegemonic ways (Connell 1995) and link with traditional understandings of men and women more broadly. The idealised woman’s body in this context remains slender (Bordo 2003), whilst the idealised man’s body is toned and muscular. The gendered physicalities of these ‘ideal’ bodies are telling, and relate to a range of underlying assumptions around men’s ‘natural’ physical strength and prowess, and women’s ‘natural daintiness’, as one participant in this project put it. The rise in men’s concern for the body can be understood as linked to their increasing participation in consumption practices around the body, yet the sorts of practices both women and men undertake in this context are as strongly geared towards emphasising gender differences as ever. Moore (2010) argues that traditional ideas about gender also underpin the particular attitude to the body found in contemporary health promotion; the body-consciousness and self-awareness demanded in new paradigms of health are attributes that have historically been associated with femininity (Moore 2010: 112). The increase in health, beauty and fitness industries is aligned with an increase in attention to the body, and ‘body image’ for both women and men.

‘Body image’ and the media

‘Body image’ is defined as the image, perception, thoughts and emotions a person has regarding their own body in terms of its size and attractiveness (Grogan 2006). Body image is a term that has linkages with psychology and medicalised definitions of health, since a person’s body image is thought to be ‘strongly influenced by the psyche and may or may not reflect a realistic interpretation of our actual bodies’ (Centre for Health Promotion 2010: 6). Whether or not a person’s ‘body image’ is deemed ‘realistic’ and if a person is ‘satisfied’ with their body determines if their body image is ‘healthy’. According to the Centre for Health Promotion (2010: 6), ‘a healthy body-image based on accepting and being satisfied with our body, is an important component of the health and wellbeing of all individuals’.
Unhealthy ‘body image’ is popularly understood as a problem affecting primarily young women and girls, however recent data from a Mission Australia (2010) study shows that the body is an issue of major concern to a large proportion of both young women and men. This study surveyed 29,000 young people in Australia and asked them to list the three issues of greatest concern to them. ‘Body image’ was in the top three personal concerns for young people aged 11 to 24. These figures have prompted a range of government initiatives aimed at promoting ‘positive body image’ and building young people’s ‘resilience to negative body image pressures’\(^2\). The National Advisory Group on Body Image was set up by the Australian Government to find strategies of addressing the problems associated with body image. Freedman, the chair of the Advisory Group writes ‘Whether it’s girls comparing themselves with the unrealistic images they see in the media and thinking they’re not tall or skinny enough or boys feeling they need to bulk up or slim down. All too often this translates to feelings of inadequacy and, in some cases, mental illness’ (National Advisory Group on Body Image, 2009). Images of ‘unhealthy’ bodies in the media are said to be a major cause of ‘unhealthy’ body image in young people, linked to psychological problems. A key argument around ‘body image’ is the extent to which images cause poor body image and impact health.

Similar concerns about images in the media negatively impacting the ‘body image’ of young people have been raised in the United Kingdom. In 2000, the Body Image Summit was held by the British Government to explore the links between the media and fashion industries and the effects associated with the unhealthy body image of young people, specifically girls, such as poor self esteem and eating disorders\(^3\). More recently, in 2011 the UK government launched the ‘Body Confidence Campaign’\(^4\), and in February 2012, a UN Summit was held on body image in the international media, and was the first international event discussing the ‘problem’ of body image\(^5\). As these government

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\(^3\) Information on this summit can be found at www.cabinet-office.office.gov.uk/women’s-unit/WhatWeDo/BodyImage.
\(^4\) Information about the UK government’s ‘Body Confidence Campaign’ can be found at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/equality-government/body-confidence/.
\(^5\) Information on the UN summit on body image can be found at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/UN-summit.
initiatives suggest, ‘body image’ is widely understood as a key contemporary issue relating to the body informing broader discourses of health and wellbeing.

Coleman (2009) has noted that the predominant arguments in popular discourse on the body and body image centre on the relations between girls’ and women’s bodies (in particular) and images. Medical and psychological studies discuss that the relations between bodies and images are etiological; much work in this area argues that images cause body image problems and eating disorders for example (see BMA 2000; Grogan & Wainwright 1996). Concomitantly, the Australian government’s approach runs along similar understandings which hold that young people, particularly young women are vulnerable to the effects of images in the media. The strategies proposed by the government include requiring media and fashion industries to use different representations of women’s bodies in the images they show, along with programs aimed at making young people more ‘resilient’ to the effects of images. This ‘media effects’ model of body image has a number of problems, which go right down to the ontology of how bodies are understood. Fundamentally, this model of bodies and body image as the effect of media images relies on a number of dualisms which work in restricted and deterministic ways: bodies are here conceived of as passive objects which, if exposed to ‘better’ images or more ‘realistic representations’, would be able to ‘reclaim their agency’. As Featherstone has argued, the way images work is much more complex than this (2010: 197). Feminist theory has grappled with these problems, and the theoretical arguments I pursue in this thesis are strongly informed by criticisms of dualism relating to the body in the work of Grosz (1994), Bray & Colebrook (1998), Coleman (2009) and Barad (2007). These theorists draw upon the work of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza to reconceptualise bodies.

Theorising the body and body work

Theories of the body are central to this study because of the sorts of ontological problems I outlined above in relation to bodies and images. Theoretical frameworks of how the
body and society are mutually implicated in the experience of the self are crucial in both theorising and understanding body work practices in this study.

The body and embodiment are key areas of social inquiry. Where it was once an ‘absent presence’ in sociology (Shilling 2003), in recent decades the body has become centrally important throughout the social sciences and humanities as well as in science and technology. Understandings of the body which position bodies as involved in etiological relations with social structures are underpinned by a dualistic ontology. Finding ways to theorise bodies beyond dualisms has been a central tenet of much poststructural feminist work, and has also contributed to recent sociological approaches to the body empirically. This concern has led to different approaches being sought to think through some of the most important sociological problems, including the relations between people and social structures and processes associated with how individuals negotiate ‘structure’ and ‘agency’. Here, Deleuzian understandings of bodies as processes (not entities) which are constantly shifting and being redefined based on their relations with other bodies and forces in the world, have been proposed as offering a way of conceptualising bodies beyond the most problematic dualisms in both feminist and sociological theory (see Coleman 2009; Grosz 1994; Budgeon 2003).

The concept of body work contributes to developing a sociology of the body (Gimlin 2007). Gimlin identifies the different forms of body work as (i) the work performed on one’s own body, (ii) paid labor carried out on the bodies of others, (iii) the management of embodied emotional experience and display, and (iv) the production or modification of bodies through work (2007: 353). This project draws on the definition of body work as work performed on one’s own body that connects to aesthetic modifications or maintenance of the body. Body work practices have been conceptualised in sociological approaches (Giddens 1991; Shilling 2003) as part of the ‘body project’ associated with the modern, Western individual’s ‘project’ of self-identity. Giddens (1991) and Shilling (2003) have proposed that work on the body is aligned with a range of other work on the ‘self’ which, along the lines of psychological models of development, enables an individual’s self identity to be ‘accomplished’ (Shilling 2003). Body work practices, as
discussed in the present study, are closely aligned with Giddens’s (1991) ‘body projects’ and Crossley’s (2006) ‘reflexive body techniques’, since all three terms describe the ways that individuals, in the current neoliberal context, monitor, maintain and modify their bodies and ‘selves’.

The definition of body work practices utilised in this study differs in important ways, however. Giddens has been widely criticised for viewing the social actor as ‘disembodied’, as an emphasis on reflexivity arguably produces a social actor whose mind enacts a choice on a blank and passive body (Turner 1992: 7; Budgeon 2003: 37), restating the Cartesian mind/body binary (Grosz 1994). Feminists primarily have sought to deconstruct the mind/body binary because of its connotations with phallocentric thought in which the female body is always ‘other’, and the implication that the body serves as a natural foundation upon which meanings are inscribed (Budgeon 2003: 36). This criticism, I argue, can also be extended to Crossley’s concepts of reflexive body techniques, which I discuss further in chapter four. In this study, I understand body work practices as work performed on one’s own body that connects to aesthetic modifications or maintenance of the body; understanding that these practices are an ongoing process (rather than a ‘project’) related to identity. Body work practices, as explored in this study, are also understood as linking particularly to dominant ideals of gender and health, as I explore in chapters five, six and seven in participants’ descriptions of their bodies and body work practices.

Because of the centrality of the body in consumer culture and popular discourse on gender, the body is a key area of feminist and sociological study. Exploring how people live their bodies and explain their practices of body work is crucial for understanding the processes and connections between societal forces and bodies. The theoretical, ontological and epistemological questions associated with approaching the body from a feminist sociological perspective are also particularly important, since new ways to understand bodies beyond questions of the binaristic ‘subject’ of humanism has wider implications for how other key areas of sociology are approached. Ontological questions about the body and its relationship with society are central in sociological discussions
about identity and agency. These questions are crucial not only for conceptualising processes of body work, but for a range of other topics. These theoretical considerations have implications for the ways that subjectivity, for example, is conceptualised. Following recent feminist philosophical discussions and emerging empirical studies of the body drawn from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza (see Budgeon 2003; Coleman 2008, 2009; and Bray & Colebrook 1998) the body is understood not as an object but as an event of becoming. I extend this work to argue that body work practices are also important in processes of becoming.

Deleuze’s approach to the body

Deleuzian frameworks conceptualise the body not as an object upon which culture writes meanings, but in terms of what a body can do; the capacities, capabilities, and transformations that may be possible (Grosz 1994, Coleman 2009, Budgeon 2003). This framework involves shifting focus from the distinctions of structure and agency to the relations between bodies that people are involved in, which constitute those bodies. Extending the consideration of bodies and the social beyond questions about agents who construct and are constructed, to instead focus on what bodies can do or what bodies are capable of, provides a profoundly different set of possibilities for analysing how current and potential experiences of body work impact on how the body is lived.

Deleuze’s philosophy of the body has important implications for understanding the body sociologically. Drawing on Spinoza, Deleuze’s understanding of bodies entails a shift from understanding the body as a bounded entity as an effect of culture or as a cultural object; to instead seeing the body and mind as parallel, inseparable from each other and focusing of the capacities of bodies (Deleuze 1988: 18). The affects and capacities of bodies cannot be known in advance; and thus we cannot presume to know the outcomes or intra-actions that may occur (such as the results of particular forms of body work practices, for example).
This perspective is radically different from analyses which would focus on the capacities of individuals for agency in their practices of body work, or analyses of the degrees to which bodies are structured, limited or repressed by the cultural environment in which their body work practices are located. Although social and cultural forces are undoubtedly central to practices of body work and embodiment, Deleuzian analysis starts from a very different premise. Rather than falling back on oppositional categories such as structure and agency to understand the society’s effects on the body, the affects and capacities of bodies are foregrounded in exploring the practices, meanings and experiences of body work.

The concept of affect is particularly important in the analysis of bodies and body work practices in this thesis. ‘Affect’ is a burgeoning area in the field of body-studies in sociology, and is implicated in the theoretical reformulation of bodies as processes rather than entities. This framework understands bodies as entangled processes that are ‘defined by their capacities to affect and be affected’ (Blackman & Venn 2010: 9). Deleuze’s position is that we are produced by affects, rather than in possession of affects. The affect a person experiences is what connects individual practice and feeling to social meanings, since it is a body’s ‘capacity for affecting and being affected that defines a body’ (Deleuze 1992: 625). Affect, then, is crucial in bodily encounters, and to processes of becoming. ‘Becoming’ can be understood as the outcomes of those affective relations between bodies and things. Deleuze’s (1992) framework of becoming proposes that all things, bodies and matter continually connect. The term ‘becoming’ refers to this process, and to the particular ontological perspective that bodies are not autonomous entities (subjects or objects), but are constituted through their connections. Becoming refers to a focus on bodies as intensities, rather than entities. Rather than asking ‘what are bodies’, or questioning the being of bodies, Deleuze asks ‘what can a body do?’ To study becoming is to study the micro-processes of change that occur through affect and relations. Bodies are thus understood in the context of the connections and relations that are formed and their potential for becoming.
The body is understood as a ‘relationship of forces’ which connects to other forces, including social relations such as gender, consumer culture and health discourses. These forces are conceptualised as central to the ways participants manage and live their bodies, and as affecting but not determining their bodies. The affects and capacities of bodies cannot be known in advance; it is only through studying the relations and affects of bodies that we can begin to explore the meanings, experiences and understandings of body work practices.

**Embodied research**

In feminist work aimed at ‘bringing the body back in’, ‘reflexivity’ has been a key ethical priority, through which the researcher reflects on and discusses the ways their own thoughts and feelings may have influenced the collection of the data and its analysis. Throsby and Gimlin (2010) argue however that these reflections are largely disembodied because only rarely is the researcher’s own physicality directly discussed. The researcher’s bodily appearances and practices matter in the research process in ways which are impossible to escape, yet are also very difficult to write about (Throsby & Gimlin 2010: 109). The effects of my own body in researching the body work practices and understandings of bodies are difficult to ‘know’ and definitively account for, since my own body and body work was not discussed in the interviews (with the exception of Isabelle, discussed in chapters four and eight). I think it is important however to try to introduce my own physicality in the context of this research on bodies, even if the effects (affects) surrounding my body cannot be directly known. The interview encounter between the participants and I is always already embodied. In a project such as this in which relations and affects between bodies are paramount, my own body is a key feature in the interview encounter. From a Deleuzian perspective, rather than producing research that only interprets, rhizomatic research sees that both participant and researcher are in processes of becoming, of affecting and being affected (Merceica & Merceica 2010). Because my body is not really discussed in interviews, my body must be made visible to
the reader in some way to avoid positioning myself as the privileged, disembodied researcher.

My physicality, in my age, body size and shape, and general appearance, are important in my encounters with participants in this study. I am aged in my late twenties; I am white (of Anglo-Saxon heritage); I have ‘fair’ blonde hair and blue eyes. I am relatively tall and slim. In many ways, my physical body is in line with current, normalised ideals of femininity. As a child I played a lot of sport and jogged regularly with my Dad on the beach. I still run a few times a week with my dog for company. I have never exercised or dieted for purposes of weight loss. I have always been told that, because of my physical shape, I ‘don’t need to’. As Bacon (2009: 2) argues, ‘there are unearned privileges that come by virtue of being thin’, whether one has to work hard to be thin or not. I have undoubtedly benefitted from what Bacon (2009) calls ‘thin privilege’. In interviews with participants, however, I felt self conscious or uncomfortable about the potential of my body to reinforce, rather than challenge, dominant ideals of slim femininity (Bordo 2003). I was concerned that my frame would lead participants to assume that I endorse slimming forms of body work to achieve the ‘feminine ideal’. Participants may also have assumed that I would be critical of them if they did not undertake much ‘body work’, such as when Steph said although she hardly has any spare time, ‘that’s a pretty shit excuse’ not to do exercise. Because of my awareness of my own physicality in the interviews, I made a concerted effort to open a space to ‘problematicise’ the slender feminine body, and many participants elaborated on their perspectives of a range of female body shapes being ‘beautiful’ to them beyond the ‘slender ideal’.

My age and ethnicity was very similar to most participants, and was likely also important in the interview encounter in providing a basis of ‘common ground’, through which participants may have assumed I would implicitly understand their perspective as a ‘young person’ like them. My body may also have made me seem like an ‘insider’ to those women (and men) in this study who undertook the most intensive forms of body work. As Throsby and Gimlin (2010) argue however, being an ‘outsider’ to research related to body practices can mean that participants give rich explanations of their
practices to someone who is ‘unknowing’. There were times such as in Beth’s description of anorexia, and Kate’s and Isabelle’s cosmetic surgery practices, as well as Ben’s weight lifting and Adam’s AFL training that I was (likely) encountered as a sympathetic ‘outsider’, and they gave me generous, rich descriptions of their experiences.

Through acknowledging and attempting to work through the consequences of my own (thin) embodied physicality in this research, I am also paying attention to the ways power operates at the level of my own body (see chapter eight). The ways my body has been implicated in the processes of interviewing for this thesis cannot be fully ‘known’, however I argue that in paying attention to the ways my body is necessarily embodied in the research process, my physicality can be used as a resource for thinking through the complexity of embodiment in empirical feminist and sociological work.

**Thesis structure**

The chapters throughout this thesis develop the theoretical and methodological implications for using a Deleuzian-based perspective to study bodies and body work practices empirically.

Chapter two develops the theoretical approach I use to explore how bodies are understood and experienced through practices of body work. Beginning with feminist philosophies which have informed many theoretical approaches to the body in sociology, such as Butler’s theorisation of materiality and performativity (1993), I extend this discussion to the contemporary insights from Barad (2007) and Bray and Colebrook (1998). They argue that concepts of materiality, discourse and subjectivity can be extended to think the body differently, beyond dualisms, through the philosophical concepts of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza. I then introduce the key concepts of these philosophers, and the implications of these concepts for advancing feminist and sociological understandings of the body and society. The cornerstone of this approach is
that bodies are understood not as ‘objects upon which culture writes meanings’ (Budgeon, 2003: 50) but in terms of their capacity for change and modulation.

In chapter three I discuss empirical studies of the body and body work related to gender, health and consumer culture. Whilst there are a vast number of studies relating to different aspects of the body, studies have tended to focus on one specific practice of body work such as bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, or practices related to ‘health’ and consumer culture such as exercise, but rarely explore the meanings of these practices from both men’s and women’s perspectives. The research in this thesis engages with these gaps by exploring a broad range of body work practices from the perspectives of both women and men, and their embodied understandings of gender and health discourses. In this chapter I also explore some of the key problems with studies of the body and body work, relating to how ‘agency’ is used in analysis and the range of other dualisms which underpin many studies’ conceptualisations of bodies. Through exploring the growing number of empirical studies which engage with Deleuzian concepts, I explore how new possibilities for understanding the body empirically beyond these problems can be taken up. Recent studies operationalise Deleuzian concepts of becoming and affect to explore the body related to gender, exercise and health practices, and provide a way forward to envisioning new ways of exploring the body in feminist and sociological study.

Chapter four details some of the methodological implications of using a Deleuzian framework for understanding the body in empirical research. I extend a discussion of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this approach, and explore ways to take up these concepts as tools in analysis and research design. The method in this research is in-depth semi-structured interviewing, and I argue that this technique enables experiences, relations and affects to be explored from a Deleuzian (or post-modern, post-humanist) ontology. In this chapter I also explore the dynamics of the interview encounters, and the affects and embodied experience of my body in interviews. I also detail the sampling and recruitment techniques, demographics of the participants, ethical considerations and data analysis from a Deleuzian perspective. Ethology, and Deleuze’s
ethics, prioritises a focus on change and possibility, rather than on what is already known. A Deleuzian approach to data analysis thus shares a parallel concern with post-structural feminist approaches which emphasise the multiplicity and variations within and across human identities, rather than a focus on the individual participant’s interview data as being compatible with the representation of a coherent ‘self’. This chapter aims to connect Deleuzian concepts with methodology to show the ways this approach can open up possibilities and change in feminist and sociological empirical work.

Chapters five, six and seven explore the key research questions, outlining how knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies were produced through body work practices; how assemblages (such as discourses of gender and health) intersect with body work practices, and what these assemblages mean for understanding bodies from a Deleuzian perspective. Chapter five discusses how gender intersects with body work practices, and the micro-processes of becoming in participants’ descriptions of masculinity and femininity which escape binary and molar structures of gender. Chapter six explores how health discourses are crucial in participants’ understandings, knowledges and experiences of bodies related to their body work practices. Through the concept of affect I explore participants’ descriptions of experiences of how body work practices such as exercise feel, and what this means for how their bodies are lived.

Chapter seven continues the analysis of affect in exploring other body work practices in the study, such as cosmetic surgery and ‘obsessive’ or ‘addictive’ approaches to exercise. This chapter also addresses the third research question around how discourses and assemblages surrounding body work practices direct the body’s possibilities.

The key challenge or aim of this research is to use non-dualist, embodied approaches to studying the body empirically, whilst exploring and critiquing the social conditions which frame the bodies of the participants. In these chapters, by focusing on the descriptions by participants as to how the body feels in relation to some forms of body work practices, I undertake an exploration of the affects or embodied sensations of body work. Asking what bodies are capable of, or what they can do, is to engage with the possibilities available to bodies. Through examining the relations and affects between bodies and the
world, there is a concern for not what the body is – whether it is objectified in this process for example – but for what these relations and affects enable bodies to do.
Chapter two: Theorising the body

Theories of the body are central to this study. Theoretical frameworks of how the body and society are mutually implicated in the experience of the self are crucial in both theorising and understanding body work practices in this study. Binaries of mind/body and subject/object are at the heart of discussions and analysis of the body in the social world. Theorising the body in this project is concerned with ‘wrestling notions of corporeality away from the constraints which have polarized and opposed it to mind, the mental or the conceptual, not to mention away from the confines of a biology that is considered universal, innate, fundamentally nonhistorical’ (Grosz 1994: 187). Much contemporary feminist philosophy and theory, through frameworks of embodiment and a focus on materiality have set about deconstructing or unhooking the body from dualistic and binaristic frameworks, as well as from psychoanalytic theories which define the body primarily as a ‘lack’ (Butler 1993).

Because ‘the body’ is central to this study, I argue that it is particularly crucial to look for ways to negotiate and move beyond the core dualism that frames the body; the mind/body dualism. Through the concepts of philosophers Deleuze and Guattari and others who have extended and used their concepts, the body can be rethought through as a process of connections, rather than an ‘object’ caught in dualisms. Deleuzian theories of the body propose that the connections between bodies, images and the world take place in a series of flows, in which subject and object can no longer be understood as discrete elements or entities (Grosz 1994). This ongoing process is termed by Deleuze as becoming; bodies and body work practices can be understood as ‘nothing more or less’ than the relations between them (Fraser, Kemby & Lury 2005: 3).

The concepts and frameworks of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza can add valuable contributions to social theory, and to sociological perspectives of the body in contemporary life. Finding ways to theorise the body beyond persistent binaries or dualisms has further implications for the ways that other large sociological issues may be conceptualised; such as understandings of the self, identity and subjectivity, as well as
tensions of structure and agency. The theoretical approach undertaken in this study is concerned with opening and moving beyond binaristic thought underpinning social theory and philosophy from which the body must be ‘wrested’. The theoretical frameworks drawn from Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza enable a way forward.

In this chapter I first address the challenges of theorising the body, sex and gender beyond dualistic separations through a discussion of Butler’s (1993) theorisation of materiality and performativity, and Barad’s (2007) framework of ‘agential realism’. These discussions propose that new ways of approaching the body are required, and I explore these through concepts from the theories of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza. I then discuss the ways that these concepts may be used to explore the current social, historical and cultural forces which contextualise this research, including gender, consumer culture and discourses of health.

Theorising materiality and subjectivity: sex, gender and the body

The challenges of theorising the body as matter (and as sexed and gendered) are indicative of broader challenges of theorising the negotiations of structure and agency, and of the relationship between bodies and society. Beginning with a discussion on feminist perspectives on the body, sex and gender, this section discusses Judith Butler’s theories of bodies and subjectification and consequent theories of agency, and other feminist work which has extended and rethought some of Butler’s concepts and ontology.

The relationship between the body and gender has been widely debated by feminist sociologists (Connell 1987, 1995, 2002; Oakley 1972; Davis 1997; Debold 2001; Witz 2000) and feminist philosophers (Butler 1993; Young 2005; Grosz 1994; Gatens 1983). Much feminist theory on the body has been concerned with showing the ways that women’s and men’s bodily differences have served as excuses for structural inequality (Young 2005: 4). For this reason, many social constructivist feminists have sought to dispel bodily differences as a basis of inequality, arguing that it is the discourses of
gender that create inequality, not the bodies of men and women themselves. As such, the
term ‘gender’, as distinct from ‘sex’, was intended to challenge the idea that ‘biology is
destiny’ (Young 2005:13). Here, Butler’s (1993) theorisations of the materiality of sex is
a cornerstone of feminist theory. Further feminist work (cf. Grosz 1994) has also been
crucial in conceptualising the body, sex and gender in problematising the mind/body
dualism prominent in binaristic Cartesian accounts.

Butler’s conceptualisation of gender as ‘performative’, historical and culturally
constructed has been widely influential. Butler (1993: 5) questions whether sex and
gender can in fact be conceptualised as being distinct, asking ‘What, if anything, is left of
“sex” once it has assumed its social character as gender?...It appears that sex is absorbed
by gender (and) “sex” becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy, retroactively
installed at the prelinguistic site to which there is not direct access’. Witz (2000) argues
that the sex/gender distinction has led either to the body being absent in accounts of
gender, or of the body being ‘valorised’ above gender and social processes. Witz (2000: 10)
further argues that ‘feminist sociology must somehow ensure the body is recuperated
within analyses of gendered sociality and gender relations without overwhelming the
sociality of gender by over-discursivising bodies or (re)embedding the totality of the
meaning of bodies’. Witz proposes then that a feminist sociology that is able to
incorporate attention to the lived experience of the body as well as the social dimensions
of gender could be achieved through paying attention to the operations and underlying
politics of embodiment, corporeality and sociality. Others such as Young (2005) and
Connell (1987) emphasise the continuing importance of the concept of gender for
theorising social structures and inequality. Connell’s theorisation of sex/gender and the
body is also particularly useful. As Connell has argued, ‘the body is never outside
history, and history never free of bodily presence and effect on the body’ (Connell 1987:
87). As these theorists attest, it is crucial to attend not only to the materiality and
historicity of the body as sexed, gendered, and embodied, but also to recognise the
salience of social structures such as gender for conceptualising inequality.
Butler argues that the ‘matter’ of bodies does not pre-exist bodies’ sexed and gendered constitution (1993: 2). Sex is not the ‘bodily given’ upon which gender is then mapped or inscribed; rather, sex is a ‘cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies’ (Butler 1993: 3). Butler contends that the body’s materiality is not merely a site or ‘surface’, or a passive receptor of discourse; rather it is a process (Butler 1993: 9). Similarly, sex is understood by Butler not as a natural, bodily given but as a process created by norms, through the reiteration and reinforcement of sex; a process that requires significant repetition. Butler’s theorisation aims to attend to the ‘fleshiness’ of bodies as they are lived, and explains that the very materiality of bodies cannot be understood outside of the discourses and power relations that constitute the body. The body is not a natural, pre-given entity outside or separate from culture and society; a passive receptor of power and discourse. Rather, it is through these social, cultural processes (and through discourse and power) that the body (as matter) is actively implicated in the world. Through the concept of performativity, aligned with the repetition, reiteration and reinforcement of sex (which constitutes the materiality of bodies), the activities involved in creating and sustaining sex and gender can be seen as ‘doings’ (Butler 1993). Sex, gender and the body can be understood as performatively ‘doings’. This ‘unsettles the social constructionist idea of gender as a real ontological category, a true foundation of ‘being’’ (Nayak & Kehily 2006: 463). As it is continuously subjected to ongoing construction through these ‘doings’, ‘the gendered body is a highly dubious zone upon which to anchor difference and a treacherously slippery surface on which to sustain gender meaning.’ (Nayak & Kehily 2006: 463) Gender can then be understood as ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’ (Nayak & Kehily 2006: 465).

In this sense, Butler’s theories of the ways gender operates (is reiterated and performed) offers a powerful tool for analysis. Feminist philosophers such as Barad (2007) and Bray and Colebrook (1998) however have critiqued and extended elements of Butler’s ontology of sex, gender and the body. Their perspectives will now be explored, with a view as to how their insights may further contribute to non-dualistic understandings of the body.
Barad and ‘agential realism’

Barad argues that whilst Butler’s theorisations are important in offering an account of the subject that ‘acknowledges the important constituting effects of discourses and power, without falling prey to social determinism’ as well as ‘an insightful analysis of the discursive dimensions of bodies through how discourse comes to matter’, ‘Butler’s account fails to analyse how matter comes to matter’ (Barad 2007: 191-192, original emphasis). Barad develops the concept of agential realism, through threading the theories of Butler and Foucault with those of physicist Bohr. Agential realism is the strategy or theory by which Barad understands matter as an inherently dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations (2007: 35). Through this framework, Barad reconceptualises agency, causality, and materiality. Barad draws upon and extends Butler’s theory of performativity and agency, introducing the term ‘intra-activity’ to conceptualise the process of materialisation (Barad 2007: 208). In contrast to ‘interaction’, which is founded on the premise that there are separate entities that precede their interaction, Barad uses the term ‘intra-action’ to theorise that entities, or ‘agencies’, do not exist prior to their interaction, but that rather both are constituted through their meeting (2007: 33). This perspective reconceptualises matter and discourse; neither pre-exists the other, leading to a dynamic and indeterminate conceptualisation of agency.

Barad draws on and extends Butler’s concept of performativity to explain how discourse as well as matter come to matter (Barad 2007: 207). Discourse is generally defined as a set of regulatory cultural norms, which, in Butler’s terms, is involved in production and materialisation of bodies (1993: xii), as ‘that which constrains and enables what can be said’ (Barad 2007: 146). Discourse is also linked to discursive practices, ‘the sociohistorical material conditions that enable and constrain disciplinary knowledge practices such as speaking, writing, thinking’ (Barad 2007: 147). Barad’s main departure from Butler’s theorisation of materiality is in Barad’s conceptualisation of matter as inherently dynamic, rather than a passive ‘source of sustainability’ for discourse (Barad 2007: 151). Barad argues that ‘bodies are material-discursive phenomena that materialize in intra-action with (and, by definition, are indissociable from) the particular apparatuses
of bodily production through which they come to matter (in both senses of the word)’
(Barad 2007: 209). Barad conceives of matter as a doing rather than a thing: ‘Matter is
substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency’
(Barad 2007: 210).

The framework of agential realism theorises ‘the material dimension of regulatory
apparatuses’, or how bodies, discourse and power are co-implicated, such as described in
Foucault’s accounts of bodily discipline and the functioning of power (Barad 1997: 210).
Through examining the material dimensions of ‘regulatory apparatuses’, or seeing the
materiality of phenomena, Barad’s theorisation enables an analysis of the process by
which regulatory practices have material effects. Yet these ‘material effects’ are not
deterministic due to the ‘intra-active production of material-discursive bodies’ (Barad
2007: 210). Further, Barad’s ontology of agential realism ‘makes it possible to take
account of the material dimensions of agency and the material dimensions of constraints
and exclusions without presuming matter to be a fixed ground existing outside of time,
history, or culture’ (2007: 211). Through a consideration of the ways that time, history
and culture are important to matter, Barad’s theoretical framework has much to offer
sociological theories of the body, social structures and power.

A major appeal of Barad’s conceptualisation of agential realism is that it theorises that
bodies, matter and agency are not foreclosed, but are in continual intra-action. Discussing
how agency, bodies and matter intra-act, Barad explains:

Even when apparatuses are primarily reinforcing, agency is not foreclosed
because agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something
that someone or something has. Agency cannot be designated as an attribute of
subjects or objects (as they do not pre-exist as such). Agency is a matter of
making iterative changes to particular practices through the dynamics of intra-
activity (including enfolding and other topographical reconfiguring). Agency is
about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-
discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary
articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices (2007: 214).
Barad’s argument that matter, or subjects and objects for example, do not precede their intra-action is critical to her retheorisation of agency as the outcome of intra-action, rather than a property of subjects. This argument is particularly consequential for feminist and sociological approaches seeking to move beyond humanist and constructionist frameworks of agency and structure.

The ‘enfolding’ that Barad notes in discussing possible changes through the dynamics of intra-activity has much in common with the concept of ‘folding’ discussed by Deleuze (a point which will be returned to in the next section of this chapter). Where humanist versions of agency posit it as an inherent ‘trait’ of the bounded subject of individualism, Barad situates agency in an entirely different philosophical framework, in which the universe becomes in ‘intra-activity’ (Barad 2007: 141). Rather than an ‘attribute’, agency is understood by Barad as ‘the ongoing reconfiguring of the world’ (2007: 141). Because matter itself is active and ‘has capacity’ from Barad’s perspective (2007: 66), words and things are not already vested with a meaning that is predetermined, nor is meaning ‘bestowed’ from the outside, by ‘man’, for example. Rather, ‘matter must be understood in more dynamic and productive terms’, as a ‘congealing of agency’ (2007: 150-1). Here, agency is reconceptualised beyond structure/agency dualisms, as Barad questions and refigures the epistemological and ontological frameworks that usually underpin humanist uses of ‘agency’. It is also relevant to the Deleuzian theoretical underpinnings this project draws upon (to be discussed shortly) in terms of Barad’s focus on post-human ontology.

Unpicking the dualism of representation and materiality in Butler

Where Barad argues that bodies do not pre-exist their intra-action with other entities (2007: 209), Bray and Colebrook concur that ‘the body is not a prediscursive matter that is then organised by representation’ (1998: 36). Bray and Colebrook (1998) argue that Butler’s (1993) work retains a dualism between representation and materiality, discourse and matter, because ‘Butler’s challenging discursive account of sex still posits a duality
between signification and matter, where matter is seen as radically anterior’ (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 44). Butler argues that ‘the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the human’ (1993: 209). However, like Barad, Bray and Colebrook do not understand the body as separate from discourse. Bray and Colebrook (1998) argue that Butler’s ontological account of the ways bodies come to ‘matter’ sustains an ontological separation of matter and discourse. Bray and Colebrook argue that ‘as long as representation is seen as a negation of corporeality, dualism can only ever be complicated and never overcome’ (1998: 45). These theoretical analyses show the centrality of the body and corporeality in dualistic forms of thought. The analyses of Barad, Bray and Colebrook inform the ways I approach the body in an attempt to open understandings of the body beyond these dualisms.

Working to overcome the dualism of materiality and representation is important, and this area has been widely discussed in feminist theory. The ways that the female body is represented has been a focus of much feminist critique. Bray and Colebrook argue, ‘the female body is considered as that which has been belied, distorted, and imagined by a male representational logic’ (1998: 35). There is a problem however in the argument that ‘representation intervenes to objectify, alienate, and dehumanize the body’, because such a view of representation unintentionally recreates a dualism in which the body is essentially made passive, and is overcoded by an ‘an all-pervasive, repressive, and dichotomous phallic logic’ (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 37). Where gender is understood as a ‘cultural construction’, this approach often fails to think of the body as anything other than an effect of noncorporeal factors (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 41). Conceptualisations in which the body is an effect of representation, or an effect of image consumption (in the case of popular psychological understandings of female body image, for example) are inadequate, yet often underlie feminist theorisations of the body. A further issue with gender and ‘representation’ is the near invisibility of critical attention to the representations of male bodies (see Gill, Henwood & McLean 2005 and Bell & McNaughton 2007). Where men’s bodies and experiences are not analysed in their cultural and historical contexts, men are left as ‘universal subjects’ and patriarchy or
gender inequality is made to seem static, rather than under constant renegotiation (Bell & McNaughton 2007).

According to Bray and Colebrook, Deleuze and Guattari, following Spinoza, enable a very different conceptualisation of the body, as ‘an event of expression’, and in terms of ‘its becomings, connections, events and activities’ (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 36); a focus on what bodies can do. If the body is understood as not pre-existing before, or outside of its social organisation or representation, there is then no such thing as a ‘normal’ body that could be ‘authentically represented’ in its ‘true’ form (Bray and Colebrook 1998). Spinozan conceptualisations of the body and the theory of knowledge hold that the body cannot be ‘definitively known’ and does not have a ‘truth’ or ‘true nature’; ‘the limits and capacities of bodies can only be revealed in the ongoing interactions of the body and its environment’ (Grosz 1994: 12). This perspective, based on the philosophies and frameworks of Spinoza and Deleuze (and Guattari) can provide the possibility of a positive, active and affirmative ethics of the body and the social world. The concepts and frameworks of these philosophers and theorists will be discussed in the sections to come.

The discussions above highlight the numerous complications involved in how to understand bodies in their materiality which always connect to broader social forces. Following these discussions, I understand gender and the body as embodied materially, yet also as extending out beyond the boundaries of the material human body. In the remainder of this chapter I discuss further theoretical approaches to the body which provide potential ways of overcoming binaristic accounts of the body.

**Theorising processes of agency and subjectification through ‘the fold’**

The concept of ‘the fold’, discussed by Rose (1996) and Coleman (2009) and based on Deleuzian theorisations of agency and subjectification (which are explored in depth later in this chapter), is a useful tool for understanding the processes of connection between bodies and the world as occurring through points of overlap, or ‘folding’ of each into the
other. Rose understands humans as ‘the target of a multiplicity of types of work, more like a latitude or a longitude at which different vectors of different speeds intersect.’ (1996: 37) Rose argues that feminist theorists have attempted to account for agency as resistance in order to avoid representing human subjects as passive or ‘interminably malleable’ objects of historical processes, yet ‘no such theory is required to account for conflict and contestation’ since the stable ethical ground upon which any appeal to the given nature of human beings is illusory in the first place (Rose 1996: 37).

The ‘question of agency’ poses a false problem, according to Rose: ‘to account for the capacity to act one needs no theory of the subject prior to and resistant to that which would capture it – such capacities for action emerge out of the specific regimes and technologies that machinate humans in diverse ways’ (1996: 187). Similar to Bray and Colebrook (1998), Rose (1996) argues that the idea of some prediscursive matter in the form of the body that possesses some mysterious force of ‘agency’ that is then organised and limited by ‘structures’ such as gender and society is problematic. Just as the body is not a ‘prediscursive matter that is then organised by representation’ (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 36), agency is not prediscursive matter inherent in the body that is then organised by representation and social structures. As Rose argues, ‘In our present culture, agency is part of an ‘experience’ of internality – it appears to well up and rise out of our depths’ (1996: 188). Rose argues that although agency may be experienced as a ‘force’, it does not emerge from any essential property of the subject, but is rather a result of the way humans are assembled in their affective relations. This perspective has much in common with Barad’s (2007) conceptualisation of agency as a result of intra-acting forces. Rose (1996) further understands agency as an affective force that constructs, and works to form, the body as an event. These theorisations of the body, the subject and agency are central to finding ways to move beyond binaries in sociological studies of the body, and inform the way I approach theorising the body throughout this thesis.
The fold

The metaphor of ‘the fold’ is useful as it aims to represent the process of subjectification in a way that does not fall into the constructivist traps underpinned by dualistic thought. As Rose explains:

…subjectification is always a matter of folding. The human is neither an actor essentially prepossessed of agency, nor a passive product or puppet of cultural forces; agency is produced in the course of practices under a whole variety of more or less onerous, explicit, punitive or seductive, disciplinary or passional constraints and relations of force. Our own ‘agency’ then is resultant of the ontology we have folded into ourselves in the course of our history and our practices. (Rose 1997: 189)

Subjectification, through the metaphor of the fold, is conceptualised as a process in which ‘the world is folded in a body and the body is folded in the world’ (Coleman 2009: 210). This allows distinctions and operations of structure and agency to be put to one side, because ‘bodies are not agents who construct or are constructed, but nor are they inserted into an always-already existing discursive structure’ (Coleman 2009: 211).

Rose has argued that ‘agency is no doubt a ‘force’, but it is a force that arises not from any essential properties of ‘the subject’ but out of the ways in which humans have been-assembled-together’ (1996: 188). This understanding of agency has much in common with Barad’s, as ‘intra-activity’ can be understood as the process of assembling human and non-human bodies, through relations and forces. According to Rose, force is that which is folded (1996: 189). Folding produces the effects of subjectification – but the relations of folding, (and of subjectification) are processual rather than passive or deterministic. Through this process, bodies ‘become through relations which are neither random nor inevitable but which assemble through the intensity of experience. These experiences can neither be located in structures nor agents but rather are folded through bodies in particular ways’ (Coleman 2009: 212).
For example, two participants in this study, Kate and Isabelle had very different experiences of undergoing breast enlargement surgery. Where Kate felt no further desire to change her body after the surgery, Isabelle described immediately wondering ‘what can I do next?’ Understanding Kate and Isabelle’s experiences through the metaphor of the fold enables us to examine the numerous forces at work with which they both intra-act, and which result in very different outcomes which cannot be located in Kate or Isabelle simply as ‘agents’ (see chapter seven for further discussion of Kate and Isabelle’s cosmetic surgery practices).

Coleman (2009) argues that the concept of folding has important and useful implications for theorising temporality with subjectification. Through the concept of the fold, the future, or possibility, is understood as ‘enfolding through (the intensity of) the past and present’ (2009: 214). This ‘enfolding’ takes place not in a way that simply unfolds the past directly into the present and future in a linear way (Coleman 2009: 214). Rather, enfolding occurs in ways that cannot be known in advance, because the outcomes or relations involved in the affective connections between bodies and the world cannot be predicted; are not predetermined. As Colebrook argues, ‘Repetition is not the convergence of the same old thing over and over again; to repeat is to begin again, to renew, to question, and to refuse remaining the same’ (2002: 8). Repetition is part of the way enfolding occurs temporally: folds ‘give… the world the possibility of… beginning over and over again (2003: 26). Coleman argues that this is how ‘time and repetition are always about the future’ (2009: 216). The repetition or recreation of the same is not understood as a reproduction of what has been but rather is taken in its own, immanent, terms and explored not for what it is but what it does (Coleman 2009: 216). As in Barad’s theorisation, it is the intra-activity of forces, or enfolding, that produces the ‘ongoing reconfiguring of the world’ (Barad 2007: 41).

This aspect is important to my analysis of gendered bodies in this project, since although experiences are still understood as constrained in certain ways by the conditions that limit and fix what is possible, Deleuzian concepts and ontology of becoming might be able to
‘open up the ways in which bodies, and the world, might be understood and explored’, to find new ways of understanding bodies, and of living. In this way, feminist understandings of the body are also in the process of becoming, of finding new ways to do research, refusing to stay the same. This concept of becoming and how it is situated in Deleuze’s broader ontology will be discussed in the next section.

The metaphor of the fold provides an introduction to Deleuzian concepts, and how they may be used in a sociological context on some of the most crucial areas of social theory, such as finding ways to theorise the body and agency in ways that are not trapped by dualistic frames of thought. As this section has explored, in more recent feminist work, some (notably Gatens 1988; Grosz 1994; Budgeon 2003; Braidotti 2011) have sought alternative and ‘positive’ epistemologies of the body, in an attempt to circumvent the pervasive ‘mind/body’ dualism that is so central to studies of women and men and structural social elements such as gender, race, class and sexuality.

Building on Butler’s theorisation that bodies materialise through forces such as sex and gender (but following the insights of Barad and Bray and Colebrook that bodies do not pre-exist their intra-action with other forces), I understand the body (and subjectification) as an ongoing process; as formed but not determined by the relations or forces it connects or engages with. Following Rose (1996: 188), I argue that ‘our regime of corporeality should itself be regarded as the unstable resultant of the assemblages within which humans are caught up’ – gender, sexuality, race, class all comprise this ‘unstable assemblage’, and thus are important to bodies’ corporeal experience. However the way in which this occurs does not rely on an etiological model of straightforward cause and effect. Rather, this process takes place through ongoing connections between bodies and the other (multiple) unstable assemblages with which they connect and relate. These conceptual positions provide the possibilities for exploring the body in a way that is not continuously haunted by Cartesian dualisms, and it is the capacities of bodies and their ongoing interactions this project sets out to explore.
The metaphor of ‘the fold’ enables an understanding that ‘the body is a particularly intense expression (or experience) of the world, and a particularly intense expression or experience of the world is a body’ (Coleman 2009: 210-11). From this perspective, ‘bodies become through the assemblage of temporal, and spatial, moments of experience’ (Coleman 2009: 211) (the conceptual relationship between subjectification and the Deleuzian concept of becoming is discussed in further sections). In reconceptualising subjectification and agency, Coleman explores the potential and possibility inherent in Deleuze’s theoretical framework of seeing bodies as produced through (but not determined by) their relations (Coleman 2009: 214). The ways Deleuze’s concept of ‘the fold’ links in with his broader theoretical framework is explored in depth in the next section.

**Bodies: Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza**

The theories and frameworks of Spinoza and Deleuze (and Guattari) can provide the possibility of a positive, active and affirmative ethics of the body and the social world. If the body is understood as not pre-existing or outside of its social organisation, there is then no such thing as a ‘normal’ body that could be ‘authentically represented’ in its ‘true’ form (Bray and Colebrook 1998). Spinozan conceptualisations of the body and the theory of knowledge hold that the body cannot be ‘definitively known’ and does not have a ‘truth’ or ‘true nature’; ‘the limits and capacities of bodies can only be revealed in the ongoing interactions of the body and its environment’ (Grosz 1994: 12).

Deleuzian frameworks understand bodies not as objects upon which culture writes meanings (Budgeon 2003), but in terms of what a body can do; the capacities, capabilities, and transformations that may be possible (Grosz 1994, Coleman 2009). This framework involves shifting focus from the distinctions of structure and agency to the relations between bodies that people are involved in, which constitute those bodies. The focus here extends beyond tensions of agency and structure, to instead consider what bodies can do or what bodies are capable of, providing a profoundly different set of
possibilities for analysing how current and potential experiences of body work may relate to how the body is lived.

Deleuze’s philosophy of the body has important implications for understanding the body sociologically. Drawing on Spinoza, Deleuze’s understanding of bodies entails a shift from understanding the body as a bounded entity as an effect of culture or as a cultural object; to instead seeing the body and mind as parallel, inseparable from each other and focusing on the capacities of bodies (Deleuze 1988: 18). The affects and capacities of bodies cannot be known in advance; and thus we cannot presume to know the outcomes or intra-actions that may occur (such as the results of particular forms of body work practices, for example).

This perspective is radically different from analyses which would focus on the capacities of individuals for agency in their practices of body work, or analyses of the degrees to which bodies are structured, limited or repressed by the cultural environment in which their body work practices are located. Although social and cultural forces are undoubtedly important, analysis starts from a very different premise; towards an exploration of the affects and capacities of bodies through body work, rather than to fall back upon oppositional categories such as agency and structure in exploring the practices, meanings and experiences of body work.

**Ethology: Deleuze’s understanding of bodies (what can a body do?)**

An ‘ethological’ (rather than etiological) understanding of the body refers to a concern for the affects and relations involved between bodies and other assemblages. Such an approach aims to move beyond understandings which would position bodies in deterministic or reductive ‘cause and effect’ models (for example, understanding bodies simply as effects of society or culture). ‘Ethology’ approaches the body as a complex relation, which is defined by the affects it is capable of (Deleuze 1992: 626). The study of affects; that is, the study of what a body can do, and what affects it is capable of, is termed ethology (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 257), following Spinoza’s Ethics. Ethics is
very different from a ‘morality’. Systems of morality, according to Deleuze and Guattari operate as an overarching or transcendent system of prior rules and judgments which work to close off and limit the potentiality of a situation, foreclosing its future (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 2). Following Spinoza and Nietzsche, Deleuze calls for an ‘immanent form of ethics: one which resides within (rather than above or outside) matter and practice, and seeks to evaluate relations as they emerge, rather than judge them a-priori’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 2).

Deleuze’s immanent ethics ‘locates the Divine in all matter: God and matter are not separable, any more than mind and body, interior and exterior, self and other, theory and practice, man and animal, organic and inorganic (Davies 2010: 55). The shift from aetiology (cause and effect) to ethology (action and affect) dismantles the numerous Cartesian binaries which have ordered, stratified and diminished the body. This shift to ethology ‘does not assume that the body is a given; rather, it takes the position that the body, like the mind, like knowledge, like understanding, is a philosophical problem’ (Buchanan 1997: 74-5). Deleuze's approach to ethics is thus concerned with evaluating ‘what we do, [and] what we say, in relation to the ways of existing involved’ (Deleuze 1995: 100-101) and in relation to the kinds of potentials and capacities that those ways of existing affirm (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2008: 3). An ethological approach to the body has important sociological implications in theorising the body, enabling a focus on the embodied experiences and potential of bodies within relations of power, without reverting to models of structure and agency in analysis, or disembodied models wherein the body is a ‘cultural object’ that ‘does no desiring of its own’ (Buchanan 1997: 75). The concepts crucial to this ethological view of the body are now detailed, to get a sense of the ways these concepts may assist sociological empirical analyses of the body for the purposes of this project.
The body as an assemblage

In much of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, the body, as a set of forces that connects with other forces, is termed an ‘assemblage’. To describe the body as an assemblage references the ontological perspective of the body as ‘a physiological and social institution, a relationship, an intense capacity that is sensed…it is a site where forces engage with each other’ (Goodchild 1997: 43). Rose (1996: 184) similarly describes the body as a ‘relationship of forces’:

Rather than speak of ‘the body’, we need to analyse how a particular body-regime has been produced, the channeling of processes, organs, flows, connections, the alignment of one aspect with another. Instead of ‘the body’ then, one has a series of possible ‘machines’, assemblages of various dimensions of humans with other elements and materials…Our regime of corporeality should thus itself be regarded as the unstable resultant of the assemblages within which humans are caught up, which induce a certain relation to ourselves as embodied, which render the body organically unified, traversed by vital processes, which differentiate – today by sex, for much of our history by race – which accord it a depth and a limit and equip it with a sexuality, establish the things it can and cannot do, define its vulnerability in relation to certain dangers, make it practicable in order to bind it into practices and activities…[We must be clear that] a body is not ‘the body’, but merely a particular relationship capable of being affected in particular ways.

This perspective extends the limits of the body beyond the flesh, to the numerous interactions and affects that it experiences, and which assemble and reassemble it. A person or subject’s ‘being-assembled-together’, according to Rose, is what can be labeled our ‘subjectification’ (1996: 171). Deleuze and Guattari write that assemblages emerge from the contestation between the relations and affects and the body’s own creative desire and sense-making capacities (1984: 9 ff). Subjects are formed within assemblages, Rose writes, and the ‘forces, movements, affects of other humans, animals, spaces and places’ produces our being-assembled-together’ (1996: 171). In this way, that which
theorists refer to as ‘agency’ may well be bound up in these multiple other forces, but cannot necessarily be singled out from the multiple forces and affects which assemble bodies and subjectivities. Goodchild (1997: 43), drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 159) reinforces this point, arguing that ‘we are already immersed in fields of subjectivity, where thoughts and passions are shaped by dominant strategies of subjectification; we are immersed in fields of signification, where meanings are regulated by hegemonic discourses; and we are immersed in organisation, where segments of bodies and materials are distributed through machinic interactions with segments of discourse’. Terming the body as an ‘assemblage’ connotes the immanence of relations and interactions.

The concept of bodies as assemblages extends the body from its corporeal form, as it connects with other assemblages (which are not necessarily human). Deleuze argues that ‘Each body is not enclosed by its own skin: a body is merely a skin that enfolds the whole of nature, history and society from its own perspective…each body is a social assemblage’ (Goodchild 1997: 44). As Currier further explains:

For Deleuze and Guattari, assemblages operate as functional units, within which disparate elements mix and form linkages in ways that constitute their localized form, function and meaning. The elements that compose an assemblage cannot be understood as stable, individuated and self-identical, prior to their engagement in an assemblage, but rather as composites of unformed flows and partial fragments of information, matter, ideas, particles, movements and intensities, which coalesce into particular recognizable forms and functions within the context of particular assemblages. Thus, while bodies are an undeniable concoction of material components, chemical compounds and electrical impulses, such elements are not fixed into an immutable order or unity. Instead they are continually in flux and in commerce with the circumstances, energies, fields of objects and discourses through which they find particular temporary articulations. (Currier 2003: 328)

The body as an assemblage conceptualises the body as a relationship in connection with numerous other forces. From this perspective the body is not a prior, unitary entity, but
‘merely a particular relationship capable of being affected in particular ways’ (Rose 1996: 184). Affect is a cornerstone of Deleuze and Guattari’s Spinozan influenced conceptualisation of the body, and how it ‘works’ (or what it does) within society. The concept of affect is critical for understanding what Deleuze and Guattari mean when asking ‘what can a body do?’ It is also crucial to their theorisation of the body.

The body and affect

In using a Deleuzian framework in this thesis, I understand the body’s relations and affects to be fundamental. Fox and Ward define affect ‘not in the sense of an emotional reaction, but simply as something which affects something else’ (2008: 1008), following Deleuze and Guattari’s definition (see Deleuze & Guattari 1988: xvi, 257). The concept of affect as it is used in *A Thousand Plateaus* is based on Spinoza’s concept *affectus*. It is defined simply as ‘an ability to affect and be affected’ (Massumi 1987: xvi):

[Affect] is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. Spinoza’s affection is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body. (Massumi 1987: xvi)

‘Affect’, from a practical perspective, can refer to the psychological, emotional and physical connections a body has: with other people (lovers, friends, colleagues, fellow commuters); abstract ideas (literature, film, music); activities (such as through body work practices of jogging, weights training, aerobics, or walking) and social constructs (including gender, race, class, and dominant discourses of health) (Fox & Ward 2008). There are of course, numerous other examples that could be used to describe how affect works as a process; and affective relations are not confined to human interactions. Crucially, the process of relations and affects is ‘dynamic, ongoing and dialogical’ because bodies are never fixed or given (Fox & Ward 2008: 1009).
As Hickey-Moody and Malins outline, affects, from a conceptual point of view, are related to possibility and potentiality inherent in processes of subjectification. Affect has ethical and political implications, because affects are related to change or action:

The production of affect has both ethical and political implications because affect determines the way in which a subject is approached. It provides, for example, the unconscious set of assumptions that motivate an embodied response to a woman in a hijab, or a person with a disability. As a concept, ‘affect’ enables us to think about how certain assemblages, languages or social institutions impact on bodies in ways that are not conscious. Affects have the capacity to disrupt habitual and entrenched ways of thinking. They have the capacity to make us move our bodies in new ways, to force us to relate to, and think about, the world differently. (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 9)

Affects, as described here, take place as a series of continuous, unconscious forces which are the locus for action. Affective relations do not only refer to relations between bodies (as humans or animals), but between everything in the world. Affects are also related to force. As Deleuze describes, ‘the more ways a body can be affected, the more force it has’ (Buchanan 1997: 88). In this way, agency, force and potentiality can be understood as operating similarly, in the contexts of affects and relations.

Rather than being the agent of our actions, Deleuze proposes that we are the affects produced through our thoughts and actions; ‘we are the affects of our ‘ways of existing’ or ‘styles of life’’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2008: 3). Body work practices, and the meanings attributed to them by those who undertake them, are linkages or relations with other bodies and the world, and are thoroughly implicated in a person’s ‘styles of life’ or ‘ways of existing’. In this way, exploring the affects related to body work practices is implicitly important from a Deleuzian perspective. Such a view is concerned with evaluating ‘what we do, what we say, in relations to the modes of existing involved’ (Deleuze 1995: 100-101), in which it is what the body is capable of that matters, and the meanings and affects produced through encounters with other bodies.
Deleuze and Guattari argue, ‘capacities to affect and be affected’ mediate action, or becomings (1988: 256). The concept of affect is thus directly related to agency, but avoids the problematic aspects inherent in the term, such as its oppositional usage and reliance on a prediscursive matter such as the human body as dualistic and prior to subjectivity. Deleuze’s conceptualisation of affect has significant implications for ‘agency’ as it is used in sociological work.

Deleuze’s position is that we are produced by affects, rather than in possession of affects. The affect a person experiences is what connects individual practices and feelings to social meanings, since it is a body’s ‘capacity for affecting and being affected that defines a body’ (Deleuze 1992: 625). The concept of affect is thus particularly important to the field of body-studies in sociology, and is implicated in a reformulation of bodies as processes rather than entities. This framework understands bodies as entangled processes that are ‘defined by their capacities to affect and be affected’ (Blackman & Venn 2010: 9). Affect, then, is crucial in bodily encounters, and to processes of becoming.

Affect and becoming

Following on from Spinoza and Deleuze’s conceptualisation of bodies as defined by the affects they are capable of, becoming refers to the outcomes of those affective relations between bodies and things. Deleuze’s (1992) framework of becoming proposes that all things, bodies and matter are in constant process and relation; with neither a start nor end point, but rather, always ‘taken up’ in the middle. It is a way of thinking which negates linear cause and effect models of the body’s relations with the social. Rather than asking ‘what are bodies’, or questioning the being of bodies, Deleuze asks ‘what can a body do?’. Bodies are thus understood in the context of the connections and relations that are formed and their potential for becoming. The focus on a body’s capacities to be affected does not presume to know in advance what those capacities are (Coleman 2009: 164). This focus on what bodies might do, what bodies may capable of, provides a profoundly
different set of possibilities for analysing how current and potential experiences of body work may relate to how the body is lived. Gatens describes that ‘subjectivity is always a becoming, and the identity of an individual is always a process which is very much affected by the context in which an individual becomes’ (Lloyd & Gatens 2000: 49). In this way, the context in which a body is situated and the affects between a body and its context is a process of change, or becoming. ‘Affects are becomings’:

To the relations composing, recomposing, or modifying an individual there corresponds intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. Affects are becomings. (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 256)

Becoming, like affect, relates implicitly to potentiality and change. Although bodies are subjected to particular historical configurations, ‘captured and articulated through various assemblages which to some extent determine them as particular bodies’, the possibility of becoming otherwise is never entirely excluded (Currier 2003: 332).

The term ‘the becoming of bodies’ refers to the conviction that ‘bodies must be conceived of as processes continually moving, rather than as discrete, autonomous elements’ (Coleman 2009: 1). Deleuze’s ontology of becoming dissolves the gap between subject and object, materiality and representation, and questions of cause and effect relating to the body in the social world, because Deleuze conceives of bodies not as discrete, independent entities, but rather, as constituted through their relations with other bodies and things. Deleuze understands bodies not as bounded subjects separate from power relations or the world; rather, the connections between other humans, social relations and the world are understood as constituting a body. The term becoming, then, can be used as a way of understanding the ways that bodies are experienced, affected, affecting, and ultimately lived.

This conception of bodies is particularly relevant to practices and experiences of body work, because it allows a way through Cartesian dualisms of mind/body, subject/object, structure/agency and materiality/representation which have been inadequate for
understanding the complexities of embodied experience. A Deleuzian analysis of bodies and body work understands bodies as *events* (not subjects and objects), similar to the ‘doings’ described by Butler and Barad in relation to gender, which are ‘continually in the process of becoming – as multiplicities that are never just found but made and remade’ (Budgeon 2003: 50). Affect and becoming are important concepts in this study, because they enable a more positive, productive understanding of the body (Grosz 1994), and provide a way to think through some of the most difficult and contested sociological problems, particularly in feminist work around the body. The implications for the concepts of affect and becoming in studies of the body in sociology are wide-reaching. These concepts link into a broader framework which facilitates a move beyond dualisms as well as a broader understanding of the way the body is lived and experienced through body work.

So far, the epistemological and ontological standpoints of Deleuzian theory, through the concepts of ethology, affect and becoming have been explored. The practical elements of Deleuze and Guattari’s (and Spinoza’s) understandings of bodies through affect and becomings are now explored, introducing concepts of the molar and molecular, re/de/territorialisation and the body without organs.

**Binary machines and the molar and molecular**

Deleuze and Guattari refer to social structures and institutions such as the state, gender, class and other dominating and normalising forces (including discourse) that operate on binary logic as binary machines. They do not focus explicitly on the characteristics of binary machines, but are more concerned with what escapes these machines (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Although we are bounded and ‘cut up in all sorts of directions’ by binary machines, particularly the binary machine of sex/gender, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose that the way in which this happens is not foreclosed. Like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari argue that power is not transcendent and does not have a ‘centre’ which emanates outwards, but rather, is ‘immanent’, melds with the real, and ‘operates through
normalization’ (1987: 130). Deleuze and Parnet have argued that the binary machine ‘overcodes society, [is] that which organises dominant utterances and the established order of a society, the dominant languages and knowledge, conformist actions and feelings, the segments which prevail over the others’ (2002: 129). Social identities such as man/woman, rational/irrational, masculine/feminine, mind/body, adult/child are products of the binary machine, and categories which Deleuze and Guattari (1987) seek to extricate from binarism through their theorisation of becoming.

Binary machines communicate dominant and established orders, and help to construct ‘conformist actions and feelings’. Deleuzian strategies posit a framework that looks at the ways that binaries and other powerful social systems of thought are already always being undermined and reorganised. Dominant and established orders are termed ‘molar’. The ‘molar’ is ‘something that is well-defined, massive and governing – such as large structures or identity categories’ (Jackson 2010: 581). The relations of affect that mediate becomings are termed ‘molecular’. Becoming ‘is movement through a unique event that produces experimentation and change’ (Jackson 2010: 581), and such change is conceptualised as ‘molecular’. The molecular relations of affect and becoming are part of ‘the continual production of difference immanent within events’ (Jackson 2010: 581). Because the production of difference and change is immanent within molar segments (and binary machines), power and assemblages are inherently unstable, and have a ‘molecular underside’ that is always at work concurrently. Binary machines and power are inherently unstable and characterised by fluctuation. Although ‘our lives are made in these segments’ of power and normalising discourse, ‘something always escapes’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 195). Deleuze and Guattari specify, ‘from the point of view of micropolitics, a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular. There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations’ (1987: 216). Although binary machines stratify, segment and ‘cut us up’, ‘molar segments are necessarily immersed in the molecular soup that nourishes them and makes their outlines waver. Every power centre has this microtexture’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 224). Becomings destabilise molar relations. Becoming is ‘directional’ (away from the molar) but not directed – it is not intentional (Massumi 1992).
Becoming happens in the middle of molar structures that break apart dichotomies that organise bodies, experiences, institutions, and histories; the molecular is the effect of this breaking apart. The molecular is a deterritorialisation of the molar, but more so, the molecular relates to singularities, to individual responses, to becoming. And molecular becomings are the very substance of events. (Jackson 2010: 582)

The ‘event’ - of production and interaction among immanent dynamics – ‘is the expression of becoming’ (Jackson 2010: 583). The concepts of the binary machine, the molar and the molecular are part of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of life or ‘vitalism’. From their perspective ‘life’ refers not to an ultimate principal of survival, but to a disrupting and destructive range of forces’ (Colebrook 2010: 137) which are immanent to bodies and society more broadly.

**Body without organs**

Buchanan specifies the body without organs is the consequence rather than the foundation of Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of the body (1997: 73). Most important to understanding the concept of the body without organs is that it is not like the physical body or organism in any sense. Instead, the body without organs is the outcome of the enfolding of the social and natural world (Fox 2002: 351). The body without organs is a ‘dynamic model for understanding the relations between the body and self’, and the body and the world (Fox 2002: 352). Fox explains that the body without organs ‘includes the physicality of embodied subjectivity’ and in many ways, it is similar to subjectivity (Fox 2002: 351). However, the expanded ontological framework of Deleuze and Guattari’s theorisation of the body as an event of expression; its becomings, connections, events, activities (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 36) opens up understandings of the body beyond its subjectivity or subjectification. In many ways, the body without organs is what ‘becoming’ is, it is how one ‘becomes’. It is about getting beyond the subject, the historical, the social, the individual to the intensities, flows, affects,
microperceptions that also ‘exist’; the becomings that can ‘replace the world of the subject’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 162). Creating a body without organs involves ‘dismantling the body as an organism’ (the subject); ‘opening yourself up to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 160). In other words, encounters between different people may involve affective relations which then come to define a person’s thinking or feelings (body without organs) around new limits, ‘opening up or closing down possibilities for the embodied self’ (Fox 2002: 351). The body without organs entails the linkages of affects, emotional and psychic forces with the forces of society and nature (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 150). To understand the way the body without organs connects more broadly to becoming and affect, the concepts of territorialisation (and deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation) need also to be discussed, as these concepts explain the processes of change and stasis in relation to bodies and the social.

**De/re/territorialisations**

Fox explains that territorialisation is an explanatory framework ‘for how the forces of the social impinge on individuals or cultures, from the stratification of class, gender and ethnicity through to the construction of subjectivities, for example, as ‘women’, ‘husbands’, ‘patients’ or ‘risk takers’. Deterritorialisation is the term Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use to describe the process by which a person (body) moves beyond or alters an aspect of their ‘territory’ or place within the social world, aligned with molecular lines and becoming. Everything and everyone has a ‘territory’, and through the relations between bodies, things and the world, these territories are continually being moved beyond (deterritorialised) and reinscribed (reterritorialised) (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 508).

What a body can do depends on its relations with situations and settings, ‘and to its aspirations within an unfolding, active experimentation’ (Fox 2002); because of how it is territorialised. It is the fostering of new relations which may open up a line of flight.
Where these cannot be seen, it does not mean they do not exist; because the relations and connections are always in process, and the results of connections cannot be known definitively in advance. According to Fox (2002: 358), ‘what a body can do is a matter of the deterritorialisation which the walking, working, reasoning-body makes possible…What a body can do deterritorialises the body without organs, to open up new possibilities for becoming-other’. However, whether a body deterritorialises (changes, becomes-other) or reterritorialises (is reasserted in territories structured by molar power arrangements) is similarly determined by the body itself, in the context of continual, multiple relations and affective connections with other bodies and the world. Hence ‘the intensification of an affect or relation can lead to a becoming which reterritorialises and inhibits further lines of flight’ (Fox 2002: 358).

An example of this is in Buchanan’s (1997) description of the anorexic which can be seen as ‘the slimming body gone critical’ (Fox 2002: 358). The lines that separate the slimming body from the anorexic body, or the fit-muscular body from the ‘reverse anorexic’ body, (see the discussion of Ben’s body in chapter seven) are blurred; one can shift over into the other. The body without organs is always in flux, as it is endlessly territorialised, deterritorialised and reterritorialised. Territorialisation is a function both of the forces of the social and by the motivated, ‘experimenting’ body without organs as it becomes-other, or stays the same, caught in limits from which it is hard to fly’ (Fox 2002: 360). Like understandings of the self or the body, the body without organs is ‘neither prior nor an outcome: it is processual, continually unfolding, and becoming other’ (Fox 2002: 360). Agency, capacity and possibility are always-already there; immanent because of the processes and relations our bodies are involved in, in our affective connections with the world (for better or worse).

The concepts introduced in this section have introduced the ways that a Deleuzian approach theorises bodies and their relations with the social. The entirety of Deleuze’s philosophy cannot be engaged with in this thesis, but it is intended that the concepts presented here will enable a Deleuze-inspired approach to bodies for the purposes of this thesis. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) argue that the aim of philosophy is to create and
enable concepts which allow something new to be thought or felt. Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007: 2) explain that for Deleuze and Guattari, the question of a theory or concept is not whether or not it is ‘true’, but whether it works, and whether it ‘opens up the range of possibilities in a given situation’. I argue that these concepts and theories of Deleuze and Guattari along with others such as Barad and Bray and Colebrook work for this project on bodies and body work namely because they enable a retheorisation of the body and the social beyond dualistic frameworks as an ongoing process, formed but not determined by the relations or forces connected or engaged with. The more specific theoretical practicalities involved in using Deleuzian/Spinozan approaches to the body and gender are now explored.

Deleuze, gender and becoming

As discussed in the previous section on the molar and the molecular, gender is understood by Deleuze as a crucial molar organisation in contemporary life (as are race and class, among many others). Because gender is a molar segment, Deleuze and Guattari privilege ‘becoming-woman’ as fundamental to all becomings, as part of the molecular dismantling of the ‘subject’. ‘Becoming-woman’ is the way that Deleuze and Guattari propose that gender can be gradually dismantled and can go beyond the central binarism of gender and the sexes. ‘Becoming woman’ involves moving beyond the woman as a molar subject, and ‘making your organism enter into composition with something else’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 274). Becoming necessarily involves becoming minoritarian (similar to molecular), rather than the majority (aligned with the molar). Deleuze and Guattari specify that ‘there is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular’ (1987: 292).

Becoming involves the creation of something different from the dominant standard, or ‘majority’ (even if not in numbers), the majority being that which assumes a state of power and domination, becomes the standard measure and defines normality (1987: 105). The ‘average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language’ is
this majority, linked very much with the ‘molar’ (1987: 292. This spectre of ‘majority’ remains relevant in the current Australian context. Becoming is ‘not attained by acquiring the majority’; rather ‘by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, by conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 106).

Deleuze and Guattari are sometimes interpreted as being ‘opposed to all forms of molar identity and as calling for the breakdown or rupture of all forms of subjectification’, which would render analyses of gender incompatible with a Deleuzian approach (Armstrong 2002: 49). However, rather than calling for ‘the destruction of gender (of the molar organisation of the sexes under patriarchy)’, Armstrong argues that we need to understand Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as privileging those forms of resistance to subjectification which are creative of new possibilities of life (Armstrong 2002: 49).

Many feminists have been suspicious of the concept of ‘becoming woman’ for a number of reasons (see Grosz 1994: 162-3). One of the main reasons for this is that Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘becoming woman’ does not refer to a woman as ‘defined by her form, endowed with organs and functions, and assigned as a subject’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 275), thus denying the materiality and specificity of a woman’s body, neutralising and depoliticising women’s particular struggles against gendered inequality (see Irigaray 1985; Jardine 1985; Grosz 1994). Since feminism is based largely on evaluating and critiquing gendered inequality, Deleuze and Guattari’s perceived call to ‘dismantle’ gender is seen by many as requiring a flattening out of gender relations, rendering gendered analyses unnecessary and impossible. For many (such as Jardine 1985) this constitutes an insurmountable problem with using Deleuze’s approach to theorise gender and bodies.

Braidotti (2011) thoroughly critiques and extends Deleuze’s concept of becoming woman in the context of feminist nomadism. Following Patton (2000), Braidotti argues that becomings should not be read as ideally leading to the destruction of gender. Rather, the ‘processes of undoing, recomposing and shifting the grounds for the constitution of sexed
and gendered subjectivities’ are central to becomings (Braidotti 2011: 279). Becomings ‘aim at nothing’, and are ‘open to all at any time’ (Patton 2000: 83), which means for Braidotti that ‘it is consequently futile to try to index processes of becoming to the general aim of human or women’s liberation’ (2011: 280). Deleuze and Guattari continually assert that becomings do not conform to a linear structure, and attempt to move beyond understandings concerning the ‘subject’, instead looking for what may be possible beyond contemporary categorisations and understandings of bodies, rather than privileging ‘men’ and ‘women’ as they are currently lived and known.

Similarly, Parisi argues that ‘for feminism, becoming-woman does not propose a becoming of the subject woman, but a becoming towards differentiation, the challenge of inventing new virtual (potential) bodies’ (2004: 199). It is Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on non-binarised forms of thought that compels them to look beyond woman as a subject, to think through new possibilities, not entirely separate from gender, but not bound by its dualism. For feminists concerned with the philosophical problems of dualistic thought and what it means for the way we conceive of bodies and lived experience, Deleuze and Guattari’s approach holds promise and possibility.

Deleuze and Guattari highlight that which ‘escapes’ subjectification because they are seeking ways of living (becoming) that create new possibilities of life (Armstrong 2002: 49). Deleuze and Guattari are insistent that this does not happen through an entire dissolution of all molar categories, such as gender. Deleuze and Guattari clearly and frequently state that becomings are not linear changes with clear trajectories; and as a result, they were never advocating that gender be systematically ‘dismantled’ or dissolved through calling for ‘every body to ungender itself” as Massumi (1992), for example, has suggested. Deleuze and Guattari explain becomings as having ‘only a middle’:

One does not break with the arborescent schema, one does not reach becoming or the molecular if the line is connected at two distant points…A line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor
Because becomings, as Armstrong (2002) argues, are not subject to a type of teleology, this means that forms of becoming which move beyond current organisations of gender are not simply moving in a linear way from ‘gendered’ to ‘ungendered’. Such a becoming involves a complex set of relations, affects and negotiations; the results of which cannot be known in advance. In this way, according to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming in the context of gender does not occur through a dissolution of all molar categories, such as gender.

Deleuze and Guattari strongly caution the dangers of experimental becoming involved with moving beyond the molar too forcefully. To dissolve gender would in many ways be to ‘dismantle the organism’, which is dangerous and potentially deadly (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). As they say, when experimenting, lines of flight and deterritorialisation can be very dangerous, as you risk deconstruction rather than (re)construction. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 161), ‘staying stratified is not the worst thing that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse’. Rather than an utter destruction of molar forms and the organism (as it is organised by gender, for example), Deleuze and Guattari provide directions on how, gradually, the organism may be dismantled: ‘we are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us…experiment with the opportunities it offers…it is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight’ (1987: 161). They insist that the ‘dreary bodies’ of drug addicts, anorexics and others who have ‘emptied themselves of their organs’ and become, effectively, bodies without organs, did so by ‘wildly destratifying’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 160). In contrast, a successful becoming involves ‘keeping enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn…you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 160). Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy does not advocate a destruction of gender as a category of analysis, but rather puts forward a framework which enables gender ‘becoming otherwise’ to be envisaged.
These points have important implications for the treatment of gender in analysis if using a Deleuzian approach. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari for empirical analysis does not necessitate ‘doing away with’ gender as a category of analysis. Deleuze and Guattari enable an understanding of gender as a sort of structuring narrative, that ‘whether historical or biographical, contains us within a logic of the evolution of molar forms and subjects’ (Armstrong 2002: 50). We cannot simply eliminate the narratives that segment us (gender), yet neither are we entirely reducible to these narratives. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) specify, ‘something always escapes’, and returns to reshuffle molar segments. Thus, gender is important to analyses of bodies and the world, and an analysis of gender necessarily takes place in the historical and social context of molar forms and subjects. Deleuze and Guattari however allow us to see beyond the social strata, or the social context in which data is collected and from which we undertake sociological empirical analysis for example; to think conceptually about what may be possible, since we are not wholly contained or reducible to the molar plane or to molar understandings of gender and the subject. It is an ‘analysis for the in-between, of what is produced when things are brought into relation’ (Armstrong 2002: 50) that is provided by Deleuze and Guattari in their framework of becomings; in between our necessary locatedness on the molar strata and the inevitable potential force of becoming otherwise.

‘Doing’ gender: gender and affect

As has been explored above, without dissolving gender altogether, Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of becoming formulate a way of thinking through sex and gender; the dualisms that have been, and continue to be, central to understanding bodies in the social world. This section explores what it means to use gender as a category of analysis. Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualisation of becoming (and becoming-woman) are important to the ways that gender is conceptualised and analysed. In this project, the body is understood as a relationship capable of being affected in particular ways, and that the ‘unstable assemblages in which humans are caught up’, such as sex and gender, (along
with many others), affect what the body can and cannot do (cf. Rose 1996: 184).
Understanding the body as a relationship capable of being affected in particular ways positions gender as a current, but not eternal point of differentiation between bodies which affect the ways bodies are lived. Our regime of corporeality results from the assemblages we are caught up in, which currently differentiates the body by sex and race, defines what it can and cannot do. The body is a practical relationship however, not bounded or unified, and is capable of being affected in numerous other ways, which are not known in advance. Gender is important to understandings of the body because gender is involved in the assemblage that the body enters into relations with. Gender is one of the main elements of the social assemblage that bodies (as ‘relationships’) connect with. The affective relations that result from these connections mediate the body’s capacities, or limits, towards action. In this way, gender is crucial to the body’s affective relations and capacities. As Coleman argues, gender is ‘not something that pre-exists bodies, but constitutes bodies…Gender is one of the ways in which the affective capacities of bodies become organised and produced’ (Coleman 2009: 142).

Gender is crucial to Deleuze and Guattari’s understandings of the social world, and the way it is stratified by binaries. As Buchanan argues, binaries such as gender, along with race, class, work, family and others, are ‘socially orchestrated captures of the body’, which segment and penetrate our experiences of ourselves so as to seem and feel bodily, and supposedly natural attributes (2002: 2). Gender and race in particular may look and feel to a person as natural and inherent aspects of the self, but Buchanan (2002) argues that Deleuze and Guattari are very clear that there is nothing inherent or natural at all about these categories. Deleuze and Guattari contend that although bodies exist in a state of continuous change, they are not felt to be because of the ways bodies are stratified, arranged within ‘grid-like categories’ such as gender. As Hickey-Moody and Malins (2008: 5) note, categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age and ability ‘can be extremely useful, for they create a stable sense of ‘self’ and enable the production of the thinking, speaking, political subject. Yet they are also limiting, for they reduce the body to particular modes of being and interacting; affecting not only how the body is understood, but its potentiality; its future capacity to affect and be affected.’
Gender as a concept differs from gender as it is experienced (Buchanan 2002). Gender may feel embodied, natural, and central to the experience of the body – and body work – yet, as these conceptualisations of gender highlight, gender is much less stable than it seems to be as a lived experience. This has significant implications for the ways that gender and bodies are treated as both concepts and realities (in the data) in this project.

Because of the focus this approach takes on the multiple ways bodies are negotiated through affective relations with forces such as gender and within the context of numerous other assemblages, bodies can be seen as ‘events’ of becoming, rather than subjects or objects, as in numerous other feminist studies of the body (Budgeon 2003). Gender is a key mediating force which works to form the event of the body, part of a series of negotiations which comes to bear on the corporeality of the body. Because the focus is on the connections bodies make and their reconfigurations that result, seeing the body as an event is to acknowledge the multiple negotiations it undertakes (Budgeon 2003). I argue that body work practices, like gender, can be more productively understood as related processes to bodies as events; as a series of practices of negotiation among many that are meaningful to the ways bodies are lived, and become.

**Consumer culture, health and what the body can do**

As well as gender, consumer culture and health discourses are central in the context in which participants manage and live their bodies, and crucial to their practices of body work. Featherstone (2010) has argued that consumer culture is obsessed with the body, and that through consuming products and pursuing health ‘strategies’, the positive benefits of bodily transformative work are ubiquitous. Here, cosmetic transformations and the ‘look good, feel good’ logic of consumer culture ‘is presented as within the reach of all’ (Featherstone 2010: 202). Numerous authors have theorised the link between cultural developments with an emphasis on consumption and the effect this has had on the way the body is approached as an ‘object’ to be worked on and improved (Bartky 1990, Bordo 2003, Crossley 2006, Dworkin & Wachs 2009). During the second half of
the twentieth century, a shift occurred in the culture of advanced capitalist societies in which conspicuous consumption became central in the ethos accompanying hard work in the realm of production (Shilling 2007; Featherstone 1982). As a result of this shift, some theorise that embodiment and the physical body came to be treated as both a ‘project’ and a ‘form of physical capital’ (Bourdieu 1978; Shilling 2003, 2007). Theorists such as Giddens (1991) and Crossley (2006) argue that the particular conditions accompanying consumer culture logic in the current neoliberal context enables people to reflexively ‘self fashion’ their bodies and selves through consuming a range of products (see chapter three for a more detailed discussion of Giddens and Crossley’s perspectives). The cosmetic, beauty, fitness and leisure industries all cater to the self-consciously constructing consumer (Featherstone 1982: 21). The implicit individualism of consumer culture’s attitude to the body means that any structural and cultural disadvantages and inequalities are made invisible. In this context, certain lifestyles are privileged and marked with morality, while others are marginalised and excluded and the effects of social inequalities and locations such as gender, class, race and sexuality are obscured, masking the structural production of health disparities (Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 21).

Individualisation is an implicit and crucial feature of neoliberalism and consumer culture. Lifestyle choices made through the consumption of products and services are undertaken in an effort to improve one’s quality of life and life chances, and individuals are enlisted to accept responsibility for managing and maintaining their own well-being (Rose 2000, 2001). Neoliberalism is widely discussed by social theorists and commentators as a ‘political-economic ideology and practice that promotes individualism, consumerism and transferring state power and responsibility to the individual’ (Leve 2012: 124). One example of neoliberal economic and political policy is the decentralisation of government power and funding through increased privatisation of areas such as healthcare, particularly in the USA, but also in other Anglo/Western systems such as the United Kingdom and Australia. This context means a particularly individualised response to health and care of the body is required of citizens, as individuals are called upon to ‘enter into the process of his or her own self-governance through processes of endless self-examination, self-care and self-improvement’ (Peterson 1997: 194).
Importantly, the specific bodily aims of consumer culture practices are decisively
gendered. Although men as well as women are invited to enjoy the ‘dubious equality’
(Featherstone 1982: 22) as consumers in the marketplace concerned with the appearance
of their bodies, the assemblages of gender mean that gendered body work practices are
played out in very complex ways. Even though research has found that men are almost as
dissatisfied with their bodies as women (see Grogan 1999), the particular physicality of
idealised bodies are gendered, men wanting to be ‘larger and more muscular’, whilst
‘women’s eating and body dysmorphic disorders lead her to want to eat less and be
smaller’ (Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 9). Dworkin and Wachs argue that rather than being
carried away with postfeminist claims that ‘we’re all in the same boat now’, it is
important to locate men’s (as well as women’s) concern for the appearance of their
bodies not simply as individualised disorders or anxieties, ‘but as part of the larger
tapestry of changing gender, race, class and sexuality relations and as part of the broader
structure of contemporary socioeconomic structures’ (2009: 9). Dworkin and Wachs
(2009: 9) criticise claims that because men and women in some contexts share a concern
for the body’s appearance, their experiences of objectification are parallel. Even though
‘objecthood for both men and women is a sign of status and part of the experience of
idealised subjecthood in consumer culture’ (Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 160), they specify
that the broader (unequal) relations of gender remain important in understanding the body
in this context. Although Dworkin and Wachs employ a nuanced analysis of subjecthood
and objecthood in how individuals’ negotiation of consumer culture requirements to work
on their bodies, there is an underlying dualism in etiological understandings of bodies as
the products of culture.

Rose (2000) and Deleuze (1995) enable a conceptual shift, from a concern for the
‘subject’, to a concern for the flows, capacities and potentialities involved in the
particular conditions of consumer capitalism and neoliberalism. Rose (2000) argues that
the particular government of conduct that takes place in what he terms ‘advanced liberal’
societies involves an ethos of individual autonomy, and an emphasis on choice, personal
responsibility, control over one’s fate, self control and self government. Self-governance
however takes place in the continuous circuits and flows of what Deleuze has termed the ‘control society’, as opposed to disciplinary societies (Rose 2000, Deleuze 1995). In disciplinary societies, regulation of behaviour was imposed in a particular location or setting that changed as one moved between them, such as the school, factory or barracks, inscribing ‘enduring corporeal and behavioural competencies’ (Rose 2000: 325). In a control society however, the corporeal and behavioural competencies that were restricted to particular settings in disciplinary societies flow out and extend:

Control society is one of never ending modulation where the modulation occurs within the flows and transactions between the forces and capacities of the human subjects and the practices in which he or she participates. One is always in continuous training, life-long learning, perpetual assessment, continual incitement to buy, to improve oneself, constant monitoring of self, constant monitoring of self and risk management. Control is not centralized but dispersed, it flows through a network of open circuits that are rhizomatic and not hierarchical. In such a regime of control, we are not dealing with subjects with a unique personality that is the expression of some inner fixed quality, but with elements, capacities, potentialities. (Rose 2000: 325)

The current neoliberal economic and political conditions can be understood as Deleuze’s control society. Deleuze says that control societies, rather than operating by confining people, instead ‘operate through continuous control and instant communication’ (1995: 175). The recent proliferation of new ways to communicate such as through the social media sites of Facebook and Twitter, and the development of technologies such as ‘smart phones’ and tablets which enable a literally constant connection to these global modes of communication is a particularly relevant contemporary example of the control society Deleuze describes.

The conditions of this control society, including consumer culture’s sharpened focus on the body in this context is crucial to the way I understand body work practices in this thesis. I argue that it is imperative to find ways to think about the body and society in a
way which is more open and complex than a struggle between objectification and subjectification. Through this discussion of the body in the context of neoliberalism and consumer culture, I have intended to show that an analysis of social and cultural conditions is crucial in understanding the body sociologically, and can extend beyond some of the more traditional theoretical groundings. I have also intended to show that through Deleuze’s perspective, in which we are no longer ‘dealing with subjects’ as we have previously known them, it is more productive to understand bodies as events; as a series of practices of negotiation among many that are meaningful to the ways bodies are lived, and become. Extending my argument that these concepts can be used to help understand the conditions and complexities of the ways bodies are contemporarily lived, before concluding this chapter I will briefly introduce the way Featherstone (2010) uses the concept of affect to analyse the particular ways in which bodies are experienced in the context of consumer culture.

**Consumer culture, images and affect**

‘Image’ is a crucial aspect of consumer culture, health and the body. Body image, or the mental image one has of their own body as they imagine it to appear to others, has shifted over time, and varies across cultures (Featherstone 2010; Grogan 1999). Featherstone argues that body image contemporarily is ambiguous and shifting, located in the particular historical and cultural context of ‘late modernity’ (Featherstone 2010: 194). The predominant images of the body in the media in this context are of ‘beautiful bodies, and the celebrities and models who exemplify the good life’ (Featherstone 2010: 197). These images may invite comparisons, which consumer culture and cosmetic, beauty and fashion industries capitalise on by offering strategies to work on the body towards these images. Although the consumer culture body image communicates that the strategies of body work are the means towards a better ‘self’, higher self esteem and better quality of life, the way images work is much more complex than this (Featherstone 2010: 197).

Featherstone draws on the concept of affect to explore the complex work that images ‘do’, arguing that there are intensive affective dimensions of images within consumer
culture and ‘the promotional view of the body’ (2010: 213). Featherstone understands affects as intensities, which are felt through bodies, and emitted by bodies (2010: 196). Through focusing on the affective dimensions of images, Featherstone argues that the ‘over-simplistic logic that assumes that transformative techniques such as slimming, cosmetic surgery etc. will result in a more positive and acceptable body image’ is problematised (2010: 213). The combined factors of consumer culture, wherein individuals are encouraged to consume products that enhance their appearance and maintain their ‘health’ along with health’s status as a metaphor for social and individual values of well-being, mean that ‘health’ is a complex and crucial set of discursive practices through which meanings and experiences of the body are negotiated. Consumer culture, including health ideals, individualism and image, is a feature of the current social, economic and historical context in which body work takes place, and these conditions are crucial in understanding bodies and body work practices that are undertaken by participants in this study.

This chapter has presented and explored some of the most central aspects of a theorisation of the body drawn from the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza. Through discussing the status and theorisation of the body in feminist work (cf. Butler 1993, Barad 2007), the body in this research can be understood beyond binary categorisations as ‘the place of one’s engagement with the world’ (McNay 1999). As well as gender, current discourses of health and body image in consumer culture can also be understood as ways that bodies, from a Deleuzian perspective, become ‘organised in socially and culturally recognizable ways’ (Coleman 2009: 142). This means that social, political and historical forces are crucial to analyses of body work and body practices, however, as Budgeon (2003) and Coleman (2009) argue, we must recognise the impossibility of predicting in advance the effects of these forces, or what bodies can do in these contexts. From this perspective, the body is productive because it connects (Deleuze & Guattari 1984).

The current social, cultural and economic contexts form the ‘unstable assemblages in which humans are caught up’, and affect what the body can and cannot do (Rose 1996:
184). Dominant discourses of health, for example, and its links with consumer culture and broader individualised responsibility, comprise a key ‘assemblage’ which affects the body. In this way, broader ideologies of health and individualism currently affect what the body can and cannot do. Analysing the specific practices and events that form bodies in this study such as cosmetic surgery, weights training and a multitude of others, enables an analysis of what bodies can do, how they connect, affect and are affected in the context of the unstable assemblages that form them. In this project, health and gender can be understood as ‘foldings’ which have a particular authority and particular importance in how the body is lived; health and gender are seen as powerful affecting forces. Yet in naming these forces, this does not define or delimit their influence in principal. As Rose argues, ‘the point is that anything might have authority. But at any one time and place, not everything does’ (1996: 189). This is a crucial point to take from the concepts and theories presented in this chapter.

**Conclusion: summarising key concepts towards a Deleuzian theory of the body**

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical approach that I will use to explore how bodies are understood and experienced through practices of body work. In setting out the theoretical underpinnings of this project, I first discussed feminist debates on how to theorise sex, gender and the body. Through a discussion of Butler’s (1993) theorisation of materiality and subjectivity, I argued, following Barad (2007) and Bray and Colebrook (1998) that although Butler’s arguments are useful in providing an account of how discourse matters, we need a theory that enables an understanding of how matter matters (Barad 2007: 191-192). I explored how Barad’s theory of agential realism enables an understanding of matter and discourse as mutually constituted through their intra-action; that is, neither are ontologically prior. This means also that ‘agency’ is not an ‘attribute’ of subjects or objects, since ‘they do not pre-exist as such’ (Barad 2007: 214). Rather, agency operates through the ongoing reconfiguring of the world (intra-action); agency is the outcome of intra-action. Bray and Colebrook (1998) enable an extension of Barad’s
ontology, and argue that the body cannot be understood as separate from discourse. Bray and Colebrook (1998) discuss that the dualism of materiality/representation is present in feminist work which refers to the possibility of recovering an authentic representation of women beyond dichotomous ‘phallocentric’ logic, and introduced the theories of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza as a way of overcoming these dualisms.

Through the work of Rose (1996), I introduced Deleuze’s concept of ‘the fold’ as a way to synthesise the previous arguments presented around agency, materiality and subjectification. The fold, I argued, is a useful metaphor or tool for understanding that the processes of connection between bodies and the world occur through points of overlap; a folding of each into the other. ‘The fold’ moves beyond terminology of subjects and objects to see bodies as constituted in intra-actions with the world (Barad 2007); as produced through this process rather than determined by their relations, as Coleman (2009) argued. I then introduced Deleuze’s ‘ethological’ understanding of bodies, which is premised on a concern not for trying to understand what bodies are, but rather what they can do; what affects and relations they are capable of (Deleuze 1992). I argue that an ethological approach to the body has important sociological implications in theorising the body, enabling a focus on the embodied experiences and potential of bodies within relations of power, without reverting to models of structure and agency in analysis, or disembodied models wherein the body is a ‘cultural object’ that ‘does no desiring of its own’ (Buchanan 1997: 75). The concepts such as assemblage, affect and becoming are central to Deleuze’s ethology. The body, in Deleuze’s conceptualisation can be understood as a relationship of forces or an ‘assemblage’ rather than a bound (human) entity. What a body is is thus extended, and places the focus on the relations and affects, or ‘embodied sensations’ that occur as a result of the body’s ongoing connections with other forces. ‘Becoming’ refers to the outcomes of those affective relations between bodies and other forces.

I also defined other important Deleuzian concepts that I will use in this thesis that relate to power such as binary machines, and the molar and molecular. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to social institutions and social structures such as the state, gender, class and
other dominating and normalising forces (including discourse) that operate on a binary logic as binary machines. Such binaries and dominant, established orders are termed ‘molar’; whereas the molecular demarcates the micro-processes that ‘always escape’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Becoming is also molecular. The body without organs is another major concept, and is a consequence rather than the foundation of Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of the body. The body without organs is the metaphor for analysing the processes of relations and affects that open and close certain paths or possibilities for living (Fox 2002). Analysing the body without organs is a way of examining what the body can do, and I discussed that the concept of territorialisation is also related here.

I then discussed the ways that these Deleuzian concepts may be used to explore the current social, historical and cultural forces which contextualise this research, and the meanings and experiences of participants’ bodies and body work. Throughout the thesis, I argue that gender, health and consumer culture are crucial in contextualising bodies and body work for the participants in this research. In the section in this chapter on gender, Deleuze and becoming, I explored gender as a ‘molar’ category, and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘becoming-woman’. In the molar category of gender, ‘something always escapes’. Gender is one of the key assemblages that ‘affects’ the body, and is thus meaningful to the ways bodies are lived, and become.

Similarly, I argued consumer culture and health discourses are also central as molar assemblages which affect the body, and which the body connects with in the contemporary context. In this section I discussed some of the features of healthism, neoliberalism and consumer culture, and the ways the body is implicated in these assemblages. Image and affect (Featherstone 2010) are also central in understanding how bodies are affected in what Deleuze (1995) terms ‘control societies’.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that these concepts drawn from Deleuzian theory enable a productive and innovative approach to studying the body both theoretically and empirically that is useful for sociology. Deleuze’s framework, in being concerned with
the relations, affects and capabilities of the body, provides a productive account of power that goes far beyond deterministic notions of power’s effect on subjects/agents. Throughout the thesis I will draw upon and expand this framework to explore the participants’ experiences of body work, and the ways that forces affect the body, but do not determine the body. The affects and capacities of bodies cannot be known in advance; it is only through studying the relations and affects of bodies that we can begin to explore the meanings, experiences and understandings of body work practices.
Chapter three: Contemporary studies of the body and society

In this chapter I explore some of the ways the body and body work have been studied, and engage with the diverse literature relating to studies of the body and society. My project draws on the definition of body work as work performed on one’s own body that connects to aesthetic modifications or maintenance of the body (cf. Gimlin 2007). Body work practices, as I define them in this thesis, are closely aligned with Giddens’s (1991) ‘body projects’ and Crossley’s (2006) ‘reflexive body techniques’, since all three terms describe the ways that individuals, in the current neoliberal context, monitor, maintain and modify their bodies and ‘selves’; however the definition of body work practices utilised in this study differs in important ways. Giddens has been widely criticised for viewing the social actor as ‘disembodied’, as an emphasis on reflexivity produces a social actor whose mind enacts a choice on a blank and passive body (Turner 1992: 7; Budgeon 2003: 37), restating the Cartesian mind/body binary (Grosz 1994). Feminists have sought to deconstruct the mind/body binary because of its connotations with phallocentric thought in which the female body is always ‘other’, and the implication that the body serves as a natural foundation upon which meanings are inscribed (Budgeon 2003: 36). This criticism, I argue, can also be extended to Crossley’s (2006) concepts of reflexive body techniques, which will be discussed in a further section of this chapter.

As participants in this study explain, body work practices are strongly linked to dominant ideals of gender and health. Ontological questions about the body and its relationship with society are central here, and the previous chapter explored some theoretical advancements through the work of Deleuze for example, that enable this relationship to be reconceptualised. Following recent feminist philosophical discussions and emerging empirical studies of the body drawn from the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza (see Budgeon 2003; Coleman 2008, 2009; Bray & Colebrook 1998) the body is understood not as an object but as an event of becoming; and body work practices are important to this process of becoming.
There is a wealth of empirical work dealing with the body and gender in the social sciences. Themes of gender and the body have featured prominently in feminist and sociological empirical studies. By contrast, empirical work which takes a Deleuzian and Spinozan-inspired theoretical approach to the body is relatively new, and hence scarce in sociological studies of the body. Other recent studies of the body relevant to this project draw upon theories of embodiment and feminist theory. I will first provide a brief overview of some of the studies which have been undertaken on the body in terms of gender and body work practices before discussing some of the more recent empirical work on bodies undertaken from a Deleuzian perspective in greater depth.

**Studies of the body in society**

For decades, feminist research in a range of disciplines has examined the female body in the context of gender and power, intersecting with numerous inequalities, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and disability (Davis 1997). The female body has been studied in diverse contexts of embodied experience, including: menstruation, pregnancy and menopause (Dworkin & Wachs 2004; Bailey 2001; Martin 1987); women’s health and medicalised discourses (Ehrenreich & English 1979); sexuality and sexual desire (Vance 1992; McClelland & Fine 2008) and disability (Waskul & Vannini 2006; Hickey-Moody 2007). Studies examining the interactions of the body and race, ethnicity and whiteness have also contributed to understandings of the ways bodies are experienced differently through structural inequalities and pervasive racism (hooks 1990, 1992; Fanon 1967). In an Australian context, Bird (2008), Riggs (2008), Kelada (2008), Hage (1998) and Dudgeon, Lazaroo and Pickett (1990) examine some of the bodily realities and inequalities of being Aboriginal in a colonised society. The complexities of culture and ‘otherness’ in relation to women’s bodies is also brought into focus through work on female bodily experience and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Africa elsewhere by Njambi (2004) and Henry-Waring (2004). Beverly Skeggs (1997) has examined the ways that class is implicated in women’s bodily experiences in Britain.
Studies of women’s beauty practices (Bordo 2003; Bartky 1990; Wolf 1991) and health and fitness practices (Hargreaves & Vertinsky 2007; Lloyd 1996; Markula 1995; Duncan 1994; Dworkin & Wachs 2009) are also particularly prominent in feminist sociology and the body, and focus on the ways that the female body is implicated in practices of regulating and modifying appearance. Studies examining the cultural and societal significance of cosmetic surgery are also prolific (see Davis 1995, 2003; Shildrick 2005; Goering 2003; Leve, Rubin & Pusic 2012; Tait 2007). The male body has not been examined in the same depth, in the context of body work practices or in broader studies of the intersections of the body and gender, class and race, however studies by Watson (2000) and Connell (1995) are crucial exceptions. Many studies of men’s bodies are focused on the work on the body through bodybuilding and gym culture (Crossley 2004, 2005; Monaghan 1999, 2001; Bridges 2009). Most work which focuses on men concerns the discursive construction of masculinity, rather than on men’s bodies and their embodied experiences of being a man.

**Gender and subjectivities**

Gender has been thoroughly examined in empirical studies of women, and more recently, men. Studies of gender often examine the interactions of other factors, particularly class (Walkerdine, Melody & Lucey 2000), race, ethnicity, and the invisibility of Whiteness (Riggs 2008; Bird 2008) and sexuality. Young femininity has also received significant empirical and theoretical attention, notably through the work of Harris (2004), Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) and McRobbie (2001, 2004, 2007). Masculinity, particularly in youth, is a focal point of study through the work of Connell (1995), Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman (2002), Mac an Ghaill (1994) and Kenway, Kraack & Hickey-Moody (2006), among others.

Studies of gender, youth and subjectivities have also proliferated in Britain, America and Australia, and often deal extensively with the ways that gender intersects with class and race in the processes of subjectivity and identity (McLeod & Yates 2006; Walkerdine,
Melody & Lucey 2000; Kenway & Willis 1990; Reay 2001). The ways that gendered identities and subjectivities are negotiated and formed by the participants is a key focus in these studies. In Australia, McLeod and Yates’s (2005) study of gender, subjectivity and social change interviewed and videotaped 26 young Australians attending different schools about how they ‘formed themselves’, and how social patterns and inequalities were negotiated and often perpetuated. The poststructural work of Bronwyn Davies (1989, 1993) involving the deconstruction of gender discourses with school children is also significant here. These studies draw upon poststructural approaches to gender and identity to conceptualise the ways gender is lived, and the self is negotiated in childhood and young adulthood.

Similarly, Nayak and Kehily’s (2006) ethnographic study of young people’s displays of gender embodiment in Britain examines the ways that gender is regulated, performed and embodied in school-based cultures, focusing on the subversion, regulation and embodiment of gender identities. Drawing on Butler’s theorisation of identity, the study understands identity as a ‘doing’ that is only made manifest at the point of action rather than a known and knowable social category (Nayak & Kehily 2006). From this perspective, Nayak and Kehily argue that in their study, ‘the struggle for sex-gender signs (what it means to be a ‘lesbian’, a ‘proper boy’, and so on) is not an activity that is happening outside of our doing. Rather it is an intersubjective process wherein we both act and are acted upon: we are concurrently the subjects and objects of the sign-making world.’ (2006: 465) Like Nayak and Kehily, I understand gender as ‘an act of problematic being and unfulfilled becoming’ (2006: 471). In my study, as in Nayak and Kehily’s, ‘ideas about gender were habitually embodied.’ (2006: 468) Extending Nayak and Kehily’s theorisation, gendered becoming is understood to be an intersubjective process, involving affect (which is not discussed by Nayak & Kehily). Becoming involves becoming different, otherwise – but the intersubjective activity involved in gendered subjectivities (becoming) often closes down prospects of difference, and marginalises and maligns difference. Becoming can be understood to refer to the ‘mercurial qualities of subjectivity itself’ (Nayak & Kehily 2006), whilst acknowledging the becomings that are not able to manifest as a result of the intersubjective process of
gender identity. These understandings are significant for the ways that gender, identity and bodies are conceptualised in this project.

**Embodiment, gender and body work**

Embodied perspectives of the body seek to correct the recent attention to the body by feminist scholarship which ‘privileges the body as a metaphor’ over the material body (Davis 1997: 15). Embodied theories intend to analyse the ‘particularities of embodied experiences and practices’ and pay particular attention to ‘the relationship between the symbolic and the material, between representations of the body and embodiment as experience’ (Davis 1997: 15), in an attempt to remedy previously ‘disembodied’ sociological studies.

Similarly, Nettleton and Watson contend that there has been ‘very little empirical investigation into the body as it is experienced by human beings, who both have and are bodies’ (1998: 2). They also note that although there is a wealth of scholarship on the body, there has been little research which deals with the everyday personal bodily experiences of ordinary men and women (Nettleton & Watson 1998: 2). In the decade since Nettleton and Watson’s assertion, there have been numerous studies which focus on the body as it is experienced (notably Monaghan 2001, Watson 2000; Crossley 2005, 2006; and Gill, Henwood & McLean 2000, 2005). Nettleton and Watson’s (1998) edited book *The Body in Everyday Life* features British studies on the embodied experiences of the ‘lived body’, ranging from health and change in middle aged people, bodily experiences of ageing, and beliefs about the nature of pain. Most of these studies utilise qualitative methods, particularly through semi-structured and in-depth interviews, focus groups, visual prompts, draw and write techniques, media representations and autobiography as approaches to ‘bring the body back in’ (Nettleton & Watson 1998: 20).
Studies of the body, gender and body work

Crossley (2004, 2005, 2007), Davis (1995, 2003) and Spitzak (1990) have undertaken empirical research in recent years of men and women’s embodied experiences in relation to their bodies and the body projects of modification/maintenance. Studies involving the embodied experiences of participants often do not foreground gender as related to the participants’ embodied experiences; or focus solely on masculinity (see Watson 2000; Gill et. al. 2000, 2005 and Monaghan 1999, 2001, Lee, Macdonald & Wright 2009); or femininity (see Davis 1998; Spitzak 1990; Markula 1995; Lenskyi 1994). Studies that deal with the embodied experiences of gender of both men and women are relatively scarce (although exceptions are Nettleton & Watson 1998 and Hargreaves & Vertinsky 2007). Furthermore, although these studies deal extensively with the bodies of men or women separately (and very occasionally both), few studies focus on body work and gender together. These studies usually focus on one related aspect of body work, such as fitness or work at the gym (Crossley 2005; Markula 1995) or broader concepts of health (Watson 2000).

There are numerous studies which focus on particular practices of body work, such as bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, ‘beauty work’ and health practices, and the discourses of health and gender that are involved in these practices. Studies which focus explicitly on more than one practice of body work include those by Gill et al. (2005, 2000), Gimlin (2002) and Crossley (2006). Gill et al. (2005) argue that there has been little research into the embodied nature of gender identity of those who are not disabled or chronically ill, and set about exploring young, healthy (predominantly British) male adults’ experiences of embodiment in undertaking body projects, mainly on the broad topic of body modification. Other studies of body work practices also draw upon Foucault’s ‘disciplined body’ to discuss gender and inequality (Spitzack 1990, Duncan 1994, Markula 1995) and a range of discourses related to health (Crawford 1987).
Studies of exercise and ‘health’ in consumer culture

Numerous studies have used textual analysis of ‘health’ and ‘fitness’ discourses surrounding body work or ‘body projects’ through analysing the content of magazines. Dworkin and Wachs (2009) provide a detailed discussion of discourses of health and fitness, and their implications for gender, class and race. Through content and textual analysis of men’s and women’s health magazines in America over a period of ten years, Dworkin and Wachs analyse ‘how a discourse of health is used to validate relational gender and engagement in consumer culture, and how healthism legitimates neoliberalism and consumerism’ (2009: 24). Lloyd (1994) also uses content analysis of women’s health and fitness magazines in America but focuses specifically on aerobics to critique the way aerobics intersects with dominant norms of femininity, namely beauty and the ‘tyranny of slenderness’. Similarly, Duncan (1994) undertakes a Foucaultian analysis of American fitness magazine *Shape* to explore the ‘self conscious body monitoring in women’ encouraged by this text (Duncan 1994: 49). These studies do not research the perspectives of those who consume health and fitness magazines, but their findings and discussions are relevant to analyses of the social contexts of body work.

Many studies of ‘fitness’ practices locate body practices in the current neoliberal consumer context. Numerous studies focus on women’s embodied experiences of Aerobics (Markula 1995; Lloyd 1996), Pilates (Markula 2006; 2011), jogging (Allen-Collinson 2011), swimming (McMahon 2011) and yoga (Lea 2009), for example. An edited collection by Kennedy and Markula (2011) titled *Women and Exercise: the Body, Health and Consumerism* draws together studies on diverse practices of body work undertaken by women, such as striptease aerobics (McIntyre 2011), martial arts (Aikido) (Lokman 2011), and participation at the gym (Mansfield 2011); as well as the experiences of stigmatisation of large women’s experiences of exercise at the gym (Mansfield 2011; Groven, Solbraekke & Engelsrud 2011; Rich, Evans & De Pian 2011); health promotion for older women of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Wray 2011) and the nexus between gender, ageing and exercise (Pike 2011). Hargreaves’s (2007) study of the ways the bodies of Muslim women in sport are experienced and mediated through
different ideological interpretations of Islam in a Western, modern context is another important study of the negotiation of femininities through the body and health and exercise practices.

Studies of men’s ‘fitness’ have a narrower focus on practices associated with muscularity and hegemonic masculinity through weights training at the gym (Crossley 2005, 2006; Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki, & Cohane 2004) and on bodybuilding (Waquant 1995; Monaghan 1999, 2001; Lee, et al. 2009; and Bridges 2009). Bridges’s (2009) study of male bodybuilders in Britain examined the ways that masculinity and gender capital is connected with the sport of bodybuilding. He also uses qualitative methods including participant observation, interviews with 23 men, and a grounded theory approach to the data. Monaghan’s (1999, 2001) work on the embodied experiences of British (predominantly male) bodybuilders also uses in-depth interviews to explore the connections between bodybuilding, consumer culture imperatives, health and fitness discourses and bodily regimes. Monaghan (2001) has argued that very little is known about people’s experience of health, particularly ‘vibrant health’ and physicality.

There have been far fewer studies focusing on men’s embodied experiences of gender than women’s, although Waquant (1995), Connell (1995), Watson (2000), Kimmel (2000) and Gill et al. (2005) are crucial exceptions. Gill et al. (2000, 2005) focus on British men’s embodied identities through their practices of body modification, including working out at a gym, body piercing and tattooing through individual life history interviews and small focus groups. They examined the ways that hegemonic and normative masculinity was regulated and negotiated by the men in their study through working on the ‘look’ of their bodies, and the prevalence of discourses of individualism and masculinity in the ways the men discussed their embodied identities and experiences of their bodies (Gill et al. 2005: 60). Connell’s (1995) Masculinities used life-history interviews to explore the experiences of a group of Australian men in the context of broad social and economic changes, and how patterns of gender are being renegotiated or reinscribed.
‘Beauty work’ practices and cosmetic surgery

The connections between feminised practices of health and beauty for women (the ‘fashion-beauty complex’) and broader gendered inequality have been widely critiqued (Bordo 2003; Bartky 1995). Spitzak (1990) uses Foucault’s concepts of disciplinary power through confession and self monitoring to analyse responses of American women to discourses on women’s health and beauty. Spitzak too used qualitative interviews to explore women’s experiences of dieting, wearing make up and other beauty practices. Spitzak thoroughly interrogates the conditions and discursive practices of women’s health and beauty, arguing that discourses on femininity and beauty invite a woman to be empowered through such body projects but that the resulting experiences of constant self monitoring are anything but empowering. Similarly, Gimlin’s (2002) study of women and beauty practices in an American city found that body work is particularly important to the gendered display of femininity. Gimlin (2002) examined the links between body work, the body and embodied femininity through participant observation in four settings of ‘female body work’: the hair salon, the aerobics class, the office of a cosmetic surgeon and the meetings of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance.

Feminist studies of women who have cosmetic surgery are also important to studies of body work (see for example the edited volume of Heyes & Jones (2009) titled Cosmetic Surgery: a Feminist Primer). Studies by Tait (2007), Leve et al. (2012) and Suissa (2008) explore the ways that surgery intersects with a range of social and cultural forces such as gender, neoliberalism, consumer culture and health and medical discourses. Suissa (2008) in an examination of literature on addiction to cosmetic surgery argues that there is a social trend towards the medicalisation of bodies via plastic surgery which individualises and pathologises those who are addicted to cosmetic surgery, obscuring the psychosocial and cultural factors at work. Tait (2007) explores the discursive production of cosmetic surgery in two television series, ‘Extreme Makeover’ and ‘Nip/Tuck’, and frames surgery as a ‘disciplinary system whereby bodies are brought into line with prevailing raced and gendered aesthetic norms…locating the individual as the only possible site of transformation following the logic of post-feminist consumer culture’ (2007: 132). Leve
et al. (2012) examine the material and symbolic risks associated with cosmetic surgery. Based on their interviews with a small group of women who had cosmetic surgery, they explore ‘how participants confront, and manage, medical, consumer and self-presentation risks associated with cosmetic surgery, under the political ethos of neoliberalism’ (Leve et al. 2012: 122). These studies are important as they locate cosmetic surgery in the context of specific historical, cultural and social conditions related to neoliberalism, individualism and consumer culture attitudes towards the body and self.

Kathy Davis’s (1995, 2003) focus on embodiment, agency and identity in women’s decisions to have cosmetic surgery is particularly significant (discussed further in a later section of this chapter). Davis (2003: 83) contends that cosmetic surgery not only reflects ‘the constraints and limitations of femininity’, but also ‘allows some women to renegotiate their relationships to their bodies, and through their bodies, to themselves’. Similarly, Gimlin (2010) argues that cosmetic surgical procedures involve fluid processes of identity work. According to Gimlin, as cosmetic surgery procedures are becoming more popular and widely practised in both Western and non-Western countries, cultural representations of ‘surgical others’ (women who have a problematic or ‘pathological’ relationship with cosmetic surgery) are also becoming more prominent. Gimlin (2010) explores the ways women negotiate the representation of the ‘surgical other’ in their dealings with surgeons and others, and the processes of ‘identity work’ undertaken by both patient and surgeon. For example, many women in interviews used tactics to distance themselves from perceived negative characteristics of the ‘surgical other’ such as narcissism or vanity, through emphasising areas of their lives that are ‘more important’, such as family or work (Gimlin 2010: 64).

Crossley’s ‘reflexive body techniques’

With the exception of Gimlin (2002) and Gill et al. (2005), most studies of gender and body work mentioned above focus explicitly on one practice (such as cosmetic surgery) and/or on either men’s or women’s experiences of a practice (not both together).
Crossley’s (2004, 2005, 2007) studies of ‘body projects’ and ‘reflexive body techniques’ however focus on both men’s and women’s embodied experiences of body work practices, and explores a number of different practices. Crossley suggests that studying ‘body techniques’ is instead a way of researching the embodied dimensions of body work. Crossley’s conceptualisation of body techniques and his epistemological standpoint of the body in sociology and social research differs from those in this study. Using ethnographic field work (participant observation) of a health club in England, Crossley (2004, 2005) explores the motivations and meanings of gym-use for men and women. Crossley’s observations were limited in that he had little contact with younger members of the club he attended, namely those in their teens or early twenties. Crossley (2004, 2005) foregrounds embodiment in his analysis, however as he did not formally interview those he observed in the gym, the voices of those he studied are not included in his analysis.

Another study by Crossley (2006, 2007) identifies a range of bodily techniques, from the ‘basic and everyday’ of washing the body or cleaning teeth, to less common techniques such as tattooing or body piercing. Using a small questionnaire survey ($n = 304$) of friends, family, students and colleagues in England and Wales, Crossley found that gender is ‘done’ through reflexive body techniques (2006: 16). Crossley’s study has limitations, namely in that qualitative techniques such as interviewing were not used, meaning that the embodied context in which gender is ‘done’ cannot be discussed. Although Crossley emphasises that reflexive body techniques (RBTs) are embodied, he implies that RBTs are actively chosen by agents with bodies; that RBTs are a reflexive choice. Crossley also does not interrogate the gendered experience implied in his data on RBTs, even though he notes that ‘the social pressure to look good is on women’ (Crossley 2006: 126). Crossley’s under-theorisation of the gendered experiences and contexts of RBTs at the expense of ‘reflexivity’ suggests that these practices are ‘chosen’ by social agents, which leaves a problematic and under-theorised account of gendered body work practices and gender inequality more broadly. Crossley (2007) argues that in studying the body and embodiment, both can become ‘objectively known’, rejecting an exploration of the embodied meanings of body work techniques (through interviewing for
example) because they are not ‘objective’. Feminist methodologies however posit that
objectivity in social research is necessarily situated and partial; and that tensions,
discontinuities and ambiguities inherent in interviewing as a method are integral to
embodied research (Bain & Nash 2006: 99).

Although Crossley rejects the dualist position that the self and body are separate (2006:
2), his theorisation of reflexive embodiment holds that we reflexively ‘turn back upon
and objectify ourselves’ (2001: 1), thus activating a range of dualisms including
subject/object and mind/body. As Shilling and Mellor (1996: 4) have argued, the
placement of the body ‘outside’ the actor is produced when reflexivity is
overemphasised, creating a view of the social actor as disembodied. As numerous
feminist critiques have established, it is crucial to try to find ways around the founding
system of binaries which have located women as outside of the realm of the subject, and
privileged the application of disembodied, objective, masculine knowledge (Budgeon
2003, see also Butler 1990, Grosz 1994 and Braidotti 2011).

Following this critique of Crossley’s studies of ‘reflexive body techniques’, I now want
to explore other binaries which operate in much feminist empirical work on the body with
a particular focus on the ways that agency and identity are theorised. These
considerations are crucial to the ontological and theoretical approaches of my thesis.

Studies of body work and agency

‘Agency’ is a concept that is widely used in empirical feminist studies, particularly
concerning the body. Agency is often used in sociological analysis as a taken-for-granted
element of an individual’s being, where an agent, possessing an intrinsic ‘agency’, is
understood as imbued with the power to act in ways other than dominant ‘structures’
impel. Agency, where it is theorised as an ‘essential property of the subject’ is
problematic (Barad 2007), as the examples below explore.
A recent example of the problematic theorisation of ‘agency’ in feminist sociology can be seen in the exchanges between Duits and van Zoonen and Gill relating to the article ‘Headscarves and Porno-Chic: Disciplining Girls’ Bodies in the European Multicultural Society’ (Duits & van Zoonen 2006). In this article, Duits and van Zoonen argue that whether wearing a headscarf or ‘porno-chic’ clothing (such as ‘visible G-strings’), girls’ bodies are submitted to the meta narratives of the dominant discourse, which define their everyday practices as inappropriate regardless of how the girls wearing a headscarf or ‘porno-chic’ clothing define it. Duits and van Zoonen argue that in the process of debates about both headscarves and porno-chic, ‘girls are denied their agency and autonomy’ (2006: 104). Duits and van Zoonen’s (2006) central argument is that feminist analysis should be aimed at ‘giving girls a voice’ to enable them to exercise their ‘agency’ relating to their clothing choices.

Gill’s (2007) response raises numerous theoretical difficulties implicit in Duits and van Zoonen’s treatment of the terms ‘agency’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘choice’ from a feminist perspective, and asks ‘how well such terms serve contemporary feminism’ in regard to their analytical purchase for the complex lived experience of girls’ and young women’s lives in a postfeminist, neoliberal society (Gill 2007: 72). Gill argues that a focus on the autonomous choices made by girls remains complicit with, rather than critical of, postfeminist and neoliberal discourses: ‘Duits and van Zoonen’s young women are constructed as unconstrained and freely choosing’ (2007: 74). In this way, Duits and van Zoonen conflate agency with autonomous choice, rather than interrogating the ‘powerful interests at work in promoting particular products and practices’ associated with the fashion, cosmetic and health industries (Gill 2007: 75).

The issues raised by Gill here are emblematic of the theoretical tension between structure and agency in sociological and feminist empirical work. This tension holds that people (subjects) are neither ‘cultural dopes’ nor ‘free agents’ (Davis 1995), but that ‘we are all enmeshed in matrices of power’ (Gill 2007: 77). The difficulty here is explaining the processes through which both agency and structure are brought to bear on the individual, since such explanations usually remain caught up in dualistic understandings of bodies.
and society, framing them in terms of liberation/repression or subjectification/objectification (see Budgeon 2003). For example Markula and Kennedy (2011) problematise the constructivist feminist argument that listening to the voices of women engaged in body practices can form a resistance to the oppressive social forces. They argue that this can result in an assumption of a binary between those forces and women’s bodies whose practices, voices and experiences are ‘endorsed as more authentic representations of femininity than media representations’ (Markula & Kennedy 2011: 11). As discussed in the previous section, the view that representation intervenes and organises the body is problematic because this presupposes a prior ‘authentic’ body which is then passively overcoded (Bray & Colebrook 1998).

Kwan and Trautner’s (2009) discussion of women’s ‘beauty work’ further illustrates the ways the concept of agency can be used in a problematic way which reinforces dualisms. Kwan and Trautner discuss numerous and wide-ranging empirical studies of women’s practices of ‘beauty work’, including those related to their hair, makeup, body hair, body size and shape, clothing, and nails. Kwan and Trautner (2009) argue that women are held accountable for these appearance norms, which are aligned with cultural representations of beauty in contemporary Western societies which are largely homogeneous and emphasise a feminine ideal of slenderness and firmness. These cultural representations of femininity, ‘transmitted by the mass media and other visual images’, are said to have the effect of inscribing power and social relations on women’s bodies ‘as a text’ (Kwan & Trautner 2009: 60; see also Bartky 1999). As a result, Kwan and Trautner argue that women who participate in beauty practices and body modification ‘can be thought of as ‘cultural dopes,’ passively adopting hegemonic beauty norms, who would require ‘consciousness-raising to inform them as to how their practices are complicit in larger systems of domination’ (2009: 63). Alternatively, they argue, it is possible to understand women as ‘active agents’ who participate in these practices to ‘reap certain rewards and avoid stigma’, as in through Davis’s (1995) study of women who undergo cosmetic surgery to alleviate suffering (Kwan & Trautner 2009: 63). Either way, Kwan and Trautner argue that beauty work practices reinforce hegemonic ideals which sustain and reproduce the social order (Kwan & Trautner 2009: 63).
This model of bodies and its relations with society is deeply dualistic and problematic, and relies on a faulty conception of agency. Even when cosmetic surgery, for example, is understood as undertaken by ‘agents’, women’s practices of cosmetic surgery feed back into the ‘reproduction’ of the social order. This view of agency is essentially passive. Here, women’s bodies are analysed as over-determined by patriarchy and are positioned as the ‘victims’ of representation and beauty practices, since even in their capacity as ‘agents’ they remain bound in repressive and constraining representations of femininity. Budgeon argues that the mind/body binary underlies critiques of the ways women’s bodies are ‘represented’, because such understandings reinforce that ‘women’s bodies can only ever be outside of representation, and within current representational practices women’s bodies can only be negated’ (2003: 41).

Agency is also a key theme of Davis’s (1995) study of women who undergo cosmetic surgery. Davis defines agency as concerning ‘both the problem of giving shape to one’s life under circumstances of social constraint and the degree to which cosmetic surgery may be a resource for empowerment for an individual woman’ (1995: 11). Instead of highlighting the ways that women who undergo cosmetic surgery (through their ‘agentic’ choices) necessarily reproduce the social order and cultural norms of femininity, Davis emphasises the lived dimensions of bodies and subjectivity. Davis’s study explores the ways that the body is situated by culture rather than determined by it (1995: 169). This more nuanced approach to women’s embodied experiences of body work enables an understanding in which ‘bodies are never just objects but part of a process of renegotiating and renegotiating self-identity’ (Budgeon 2003: 45).

As these examples show, binaristic understandings of the relations between the body and the social often underpin feminist empirical work regarding the body, identity and agency. Coleman argues that there has been significant recent feminist empirical work on the relations between young women’s bodies and images in the media, but much of this is underpinned implicitly by an oppositional model of body/image, subject/object (Coleman 2008: 163). For example, feminist studies of body dissatisfaction of young women in
relation to media images (see Grogan & Wainwright 1996) and women’s practices of body work and resulting relations of self image (see Gimlin 2002, although Gimlin’s most recent work (2010) corrects this) rely on a prior distinction of subjects and objects, and maps women’s bodies and media images through subject/object relations. Kwan and Trautner’s (2009) article exemplifies such an approach. It is important to note however that even in some studies of ‘embodied’ experiences of body work which aim to move beyond the mind/body binary, binaristic distinctions between subjects and objects remain when critiquing the social conditions which affect bodies and their forms of body work. The following studies are examples of this.

McMahon (2011) explores her bodily experiences as an Australian elite swimmer using an auto-ethnographic approach. She discusses the ways that the particular cultural and social environments of the Australian elite swimming team at the time she was competing compelled her to ‘self-regulate’ her body, as she became hyper-aware of controlling her body weight. Through critical comments made by her coach, peers, physiologists and dieticians as well as her mother, McMahon explores the ways the ‘rhetoric of performance’ affected decisions she made regarding the control of her body, in which her body and self were actively implicated in her body’s (strict) regulation. Although McMahon’s body is not positioned as a passive object, her discussions suggest that the regulatory practices she engaged in were the ‘effects’ of structures of power and control (2011: 49).

In a similar way, Allen-Collinson’s (2011) ‘autophenomenography’ also focuses on the lived bodily experience of a practice of body work, that of ‘female running’. Allen-Collinson (2011) explores the paradoxical experiences of power and vulnerability through encounters whilst running outdoors, which play out as the ‘constraints of social structure’ and the ‘potentials of female agency’. This focus on the lived, ‘fleshy’ body in both studies provides rich examples of ‘how it actually feels to be in the female sporting body’ (Allen-Collinson 2011: 294); however, the body is positioned as ontologically outside of, or prior to the power relations that regulate it. This position is problematic,
since the body is thus theorised as separate from (and in a binary relation with) society and power relations.

Another ethnographic study of embodied experiences of gender focuses on the body work and experiences of plus-size models in New York (Czerniawski 2011). Czerniawski (2011) examines the disciplinary and labour practices undertaken by the models according to the demands of their fashion employers. As a result of these practices, Czerniawski argues that instead of the creation of a new ‘fat aesthetic’ or broadening the range of ‘ideal’ feminine bodies, normative imperatives involving female bodies were ‘reified’ which perpetuated the models’ ‘sense of disembodiment’ (2011: 1). Czerniawski (2011) theorises embodiment as something which can be ‘reclaimed’ through refusing the sorts of corporal discipline required of all models, including ‘plus-size’ models. The logic upon which Czerniawski relies however is based on a binary of materiality and representation (Bray & Colebrook 1998) in her suggestion that there is a body that can be represented more ‘authentically’, such as through finding sites of resistance and empowerment. Further, like embodiment, agency is conceptualised by Czerniawski (2011) as something that can be ‘reclaimed’ by women through particular practices which transgress or resist normative femininity.

The numerous binaries of domination/resistance, structure/agency, embodiment/disembodiment, subject/object through which Czerniawski conceptualises the experiences of plus-size models are problematic, since such binaries underpin understandings that women who undertake feminine body work are ‘docile bodies’, ‘dupes’ of patriarchal culture, or bodies which bear the ‘imprint’ of culture (see Bordo 2003). Following the arguments of Bray & Colebrook (1998) (see chapter two), there are major epistemological and ontological problems associated with understanding women’s bodies as victims of (masculine) representation, firstly because this entails a view of the body that pre-exists and is separate from discourse and representation, and secondly because this binary of materiality/representation is associated with other binaries such as mind/body which feminist theorisations of embodiment have aimed to deconstruct.
These examples from Kwan and Trautner (2009), Gill (2007), Duits and van Zoonen (2006), Davis (1995), McMahon (2011), Allen-Collinson (2011) and Czerniawski (2011) show some of the conceptual problems surrounding how agency and bodies are theorised in empirical work. Problems such as these have prompted some feminist theorists to search for new terms through which to conceptualise bodies and forms of body work, and interactions (intra-actions) with society and the world (see Barad 2007, Budgeon 2003, Coleman 2009). Rather than seeing the body as primarily an ‘object’ upon which culture writes meanings, Budgeon (2003) and Coleman (2009), following some insights from Deleuzian theory, propose that it is the connection and processes between bodies and the world that affect how bodies are experienced, and how they may be lived. This involves a shift from a concern for ‘being’ to ‘becoming’, and for the different connections that are always in process between bodies and the world. My project takes up these understandings to examine the processes and practices of body work. My understanding of body work begins from the premise that the body is a process (rather than primarily a subject/object) that is made and remade through its ‘multiplicity of continuous connections with other bodies’ (Budgeon 2003). The practices of body work are an outcome of the body’s broader connections and relations with other bodies and the world. Such an understanding holds that the body is never foreclosed, but always in process, and that power and change are immanent rather than constrained.

**Feminism, Deleuze and the body**

Empirical work which uses Deleuzian theory explicitly in methodology and analysis is relatively new in sociological studies of the body. In the section below, I explore some of the studies of identity, gender, the body and body work which have utilised Deleuzian theory in the methodology and analysis.

Budgeon’s (2003) article investigates the ways young women in her study construct their identities, and how their bodies are involved in their understandings of self. Budgeon interviewed 33 young women across five sites in a city in Northern England to explore
the complex relations between embodiment and identity through their bodies and broader everyday lives. She argues for a way of thinking about bodies and identity which moves beyond a concern for what the body means towards a concern for what the body can do and how it becomes through a multiplicity of connections with other bodies (Budgeon 2003: 51). The theoretical implications for Budgeon’s (2003) study are most useful for this project in applying theoretical advancements to empirical data. Budgeon shows that bodies can be understood as more than the effects of representational practices, instead seeing embodied selves as processes or ‘events’ of becoming. Budgeon’s article shows how Deleuzian theory can open up new possibilities for understanding the body empirically, and uses examples from her participants to demonstrate the need for more complex analyses of the body beyond representation.

Markula is a feminist sports sociologist who has published extensively on the female body and exercise practices such as aerobics (1995), other cardio-vascular exercise (2004) and Pilates (2006, 2011). Markula (2006) describes some of the theoretical problems she has encountered in ‘looking to find resistance that would abolish the fit feminine body ideal’ (2006: 29), similar to those described above (e.g. Kwan & Trautner 2009). She explains that in her earlier work (1995) she argued that the slender, toned body is the socially constructed feminine ideal that oppresses women, and that it is the task of the researcher to ‘reveal, resist, and then discard this social construction to liberate women and empower them to appreciate their real identities’ (Markula 2006: 32). Through Deleuzian philosophy, Markula (2006) explains she came to see her theoretical approach to women’s bodies and identity as resembling the ‘arborescent’ forms of thought (‘the oldest, weariest forms of thought’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 5)) that limit thinking into following binary logic. Through using Deleuze’s concepts and critique of arborescent models of philosophical thought, new ways of looking at bodily identity can be opened up (Markula 2006: 32). In her most recent publications, Markula (2006, 2011) examines Pilates as an assemblage affecting the female body particularly, and its possibilities for deterritorialising the ‘fit feminine body’ (Markula 2006: 39).
Using Deleuze’s conceptual framework to examine the practice of Pilates, Markula attempts to move beyond the binary oppositions of masculine-feminine identities, oppressed-resistant selves, dominating-liberating practices, and the representational-material, towards ‘a more positive and flexible theoretical framework of constantly flowing intensities in flight’ (Markula 2006: 42). Markula (2006, 2011) uses Deleuzian concepts of the body without organs and assemblage as a way to deterritorialise the practice of Pilates from dominant health and fitness discourses which define the image of the fit feminine body. Using an ethnographic research design, Markula (2011) becomes a qualified Pilates instructor and teaches a Pilates class once a week for 12 months.

Markula investigates, from a Deleuzian perspective, what she can do as a researcher to ‘problematize the fitness industry’ and at the same time, unsettle individualised notions of identity construction of the participants in her class (Markula 2011: 66). Taking extensive notes from her participant observation of the classes, Markula attempts to analyse the ‘folds’ typically involved in fitness practices such as Pilates, and to find ways to unhook the practices of Pilates from the normative ‘purpose’ of the practices (such as ‘toning’ and controlling the ‘feminine’ body), to ‘continually problematize building a self, a body and a practice’ (Markula 2011: 74). In this article, Markula mainly discusses the theoretical background to her study and her own experience of undertaking this research, without exploring or discussing the experiences of those she instructed in the Pilates class (since she did not use the method of interviewing). Markula’s emphasis on finding ways to use Deleuze’s theories and shift binaries in an empirical context is significant for my project.

Coleman’s (2008, 2009) research focuses on girls’ bodies and their relations with images using a Deleuzian framework of ‘becoming’, in the place of more widespread feminist analyses of girls in which their bodies and subjectivities fall victim to the ‘effects’ of media images. Through interviews and focus groups with thirteen 13-year-old and 14-year-old girls from two schools in London and Oxfordshire, England, Coleman explores the ways the girls connect with various images through discussing photographs and creating their own montages of images that are important to them. Rather than studying the effects of images on the girls, Coleman is concerned with ‘the ways in which the
girls’ bodies can be understood as becoming through their relations with images’ (Coleman 2008: 170, original emphasis).

Coleman critiques the binaries of subject/object and body/image that are implicit in much feminist work on bodies (and women’s bodies in particular) and focuses on the relationality and inter-connective processes between girls and images to ‘get outside the dualisms’ (Coleman 2008: 168). Coleman argues, ‘A body is not a human subject who has relations with images, but rather the body is the relation between what conventional philosophy has called a human subject and images’ (2008: 168). This theoretical and philosophical shift means focusing on the ways relations between bodies and images produce particular affects; the experiences of which can be understood as creating possibilities for becoming different. From this perspective, ‘it is not that images have negative effects on the vulnerable bodies of girls as there are no clear lines of division between them’. Instead, through the affective relations between images and bodies, ‘knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies are produced through’ the connections and affective relations that occur between the (inseparability) of bodies and images (Coleman 2008: 172). Bodies and images are not separate (body/image), but rather, bodies become through images (body-image) (Coleman 2008: 175).

Coleman explains her approach ‘involved beginning with the partial, relational, immanent, intensive experiences produced through the research and tracing these to their conditions of possibility’ (2009: 215). Through exploring what is impossible and possible for the girls in her study, Coleman argues that the girls’ ‘bodies do not become what they want, but rather, certain becomings of bodies are repeated’ (2009: 215). The possibilities of the girls’ bodies in Coleman’s study are repetitive, and echo the sorts of constraints and experiences that have long been critiqued by feminist work on gender and the body, such as rigid requirements of femininity and heterosexuality. Coleman argues that using Deleuze’s theories of becoming enable her to attend to the ‘immanence of the girls’ experiences, that is not to presume in advance what and how bodies might become’, because Deleuze’s theories hold that bodily becomings may be ‘novel and creative, even in their repetition’ (2009: 215). As Colebrook argues, ‘Repetition is not the convergence
of the same old thing over and over again; to repeat is to begin again, to renew, to question, and to refuse remaining the same’ (2002: 8).

Gender can be understood as one of the ways that bodies, from a Deleuzian perspective, become ‘organised in socially and culturally recognizable ways (Coleman 2009: 142). Gender, however, is not an empirical category of study in Coleman’s project on girls and their relations with media images. Coleman argues that her research ‘is interested in processes which cannot be assumed in advance. It does not therefore begin with the objective of investigating the girls’ bodies in terms of gender, race, class and age’ (Coleman 2009: 74). I argue however that paying attention to gender is important in a study of embodied experience. Although gender is not a natural, essential or unchangeable category, its function to make bodies feel unified and ‘known’ contributes to the production of bodies as subjects, as Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) argue. To work with this frame of analysis is not to presuppose the ways that gender is lived or negotiated by participants, as Coleman argues.

Coleman’s study does not ‘begin’ from the position of examining gender in her project, however it would have been of great use if she had explored the relations between the girls’ bodies and gender as they emerged in the study. Coleman’s avoidance of an analysis of gender is a limitation of her study, as she acknowledges (2009: 74). Gender is engaged with and negotiated by those in Coleman’s study, and in the present study. Whilst gender may be continually remade and is a process that may have unknowable outcomes for the girls in Coleman’s study and the participants in this study, the frame of gender is more than a process; is part of the stratification of the social world in which we live, and Deleuze would argue is immanent to experience, despite his focus on the forms of life that ‘escape’ such binary organisations of life. Coleman’s (2008, 2009) empirical work on girls’ bodies and images as becomings is one of the most detailed applications of Deleuzian theoretical frameworks in empirical sociological feminist work. Coleman’s study is also particularly significant in the context of my project as it is one of the only studies I have found which discusses the girls’ words as data (collected through interviews) with a Deleuzian analysis (see also Budgeon 2003).
In Jackson’s (2010) feminist ethnographic study of subject formation of senior adolescent girls in rural, southern USA, she presents a Deleuzian analysis focusing on the ‘becoming and difference’ of Jesse, a cheerleader. Jackson explains that she is motivated to ‘work with the girl as an event, to notice how Jesse unfolds herself through micro-particular movements with her others’, rather than focusing on the ‘surface’ to see the uniformity or categorisation of Jesse as a cheerleader (2010: 580). Drawing on Deleuzian theorisations of becoming, including terminology of molar and molecular and ‘the event’ of movement or expression through which becoming occurs, Jackson explores micro-processual ways that Jesse simultaneously occupies the molar territory of cheerleading (‘a dominant form that attempted to stabilize her identity’) whilst at the same time ‘molecular processes of her becoming deterritorialised this space’ (2010: 582).

In her analysis, Jackson employs a ‘molecular form of writing’, by writing a narrative ‘snapshot’ of Jesse in the second person as she goes about a morning at school, including her training as a cheerleader and attending classes. Through this, Jackson explains she ‘did not seek the meaning of Jesse’s becoming, but to analyse the connectives to see what opens up and what closes down inside the material and discursive molar machine of cheerleading in the southern USA’ (2010: 584). Jackson’s intention through this ‘mapping’ is not to merely represent Jesse’s experiences, but to also present something that is ‘to be interpreted yet again… [to] attempt to create lines of flight’ (2010: 584). Jackson’s use of the second person to create a narrative from her notes taken through participant observation is effective, and invites the reader to experience the events described with Jesse, rather than being a passive and critical reader.

Potts (2004) uses a Deleuzian approach to bodies to problematise biomedical conceptualisations of the ‘normal human sexual response’ through interviews with men and women in New Zealand on the social impact of drugs such as Viagra. Gendered assumptions related to ‘masculine’ sexuality as active (penetrative) and virile framed many participants’ descriptions of the impact of Viagra, and Potts analyses these as re-establishing ‘molar forms of sex’ (2004: 26). Potts also explored however what ‘did not
work’ in Viagra use, and some couples’ use of experimentation with different modes of erotic relations beyond the ‘molar’. Rather than seeing Viagra as ‘good or bad’, Potts argues that because Viagra’s ‘purpose is understood according to predetermined behaviours and goals, its effects are confined to the usual experiences [and] the production of positive difference and innovation is curbed’ (2004: 33). Although the molar model of masculine sexuality emphasises the importance of erections in sexual relations, there were participants in Potts’s study for whom Viagra had ‘failed’ who pursued alternative and more creative ways of relating erotically (Potts 2004: 34).

Fox and Ward (2008) in their paper on ‘health identities’ outline a theoretical basis for the study of identities based on a Deleuzian framework of embodied subjectivity and use this basis to consider findings from their previous empirical work on health and bodies (2008: 1008). They highlight subjectivity as originating in the ‘dialogical confluence between social context and the affirming, creative and embodied experimentation/engagement of the living body’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1008). In this theoretical approach, the body’s relations and affects are fundamental. Fox and Ward define affect ‘not in the sense of an emotional reaction, but simply as something which affects something else’ (2008: 1008), following Deleuze and Guattari’s definition (see Deleuze & Guattari 1988: xvi, 257). Elsewhere, Fox (2002) has discussed Deleuze’s theoretical framework and how it may be applied to understandings of health, illness and health care in the context of thinking through the relationship between bodies and society (2002: 347).

Fox uses the Deleuzian concept of the ‘body without organs’, which he defines in the context of his empirical work as the ‘body-self’ relation, or the ‘in-folding’ of the social and natural world of a person’s embodied subjectivity (2002: 351). Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) discussions of bodies without organs centre on the hypochondriac body, the anorexic body and the drugged and masochistic body. Fox, however, maps ‘less extreme’ bodies without organs too, including the slimming body, the becoming-fit body and the cancerous body (2002: 357). Through ‘counting the relations’ of a body, the numerous ways in which the body is affected are examined in the context of how the
meanings of certain encounters may redefine (or reassert) the limits of the body without organs (body-self) (Fox 2002). For example, the becoming-fit body has relations with gravity, which it must resist and push against ‘for its creation and sustenance’, and new relations between the muscles and skin are formed as they grow (Fox 2002: 357). To these could be added numerous other relations, including with other bodies at the gym and the gendered contexts of others’ bodies (are they larger or smaller than yours? Do you feel at home?); with pain (how intense is it? Can you push through? Do you even want to?); with sweat; and broader social expectations or images of ‘fit’ bodies, and so on. Fox (2002) highlights the ambiguity and ambivalence of affects and relations, and the micro-processes through which becoming-other may occur. Some bodies without organs however, are less open to possibilities for becoming-other. For example, if affects or relations are intensified (such as in Buchanan’s (1997) example of the anorexic body’s relations and affects surrounding food) this body (and body without organs) ‘cannot easily be escaped’ independently. Fox argues that in the multiplication of affects and relations ‘we may need all the help we can get’ (2002: 359).

This theoretical model from Fox’s (2002) study is drawn upon to propose a methodology of studying health identities in Fox and Ward’s (2008) article. Fox and Ward (2008) suggest that instead of trying to understand or analyse a person’s ‘experiences’ or dominant systems of thought in qualitative empirical research, ‘we can seek out their myriad relations or affects’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1010). In their discussion of methodology relating to empirical efforts to understand the complex ways that relations, affects and assemblages impinge on identity, Fox and Ward argue that working with these tools may enable the possibilities and limits of identity to emerge within the context of ‘what (else) a body can do’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1010). They argue that qualitative methods of data collection, namely interviews, provide an ‘ideal’ way into the study of relations and affects (Fox & Ward 2008: 1013). Interviews which focus on asking participants to give detailed explanations of their lives and to reflect on the meanings of their experiences (in the context of the topic of research) can provide a method for exploring affects, ‘those things that affect an individual’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1013). Paying attention to affective or non-verbal aspects of an interview may also contribute
important insights (Fox & Ward 2008: 1013). The aim in this approach is not to attempt to list every one of a person’s relations and affects, since ‘the relations that each of us have is legion, dating back to birth or even conception, and no empirical approach could be expected to capture the entirety of a life’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1013). Rather, through qualitative interviewing, a wealth of data can be generated that ‘can aspire to cover at least the main relations of a person, particularly if focused on a specific aspect of identity’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1013).

In the context of this thesis, ‘body work’ and ‘gendered bodies’ would be the specific aspects of ‘identity’ mentioned by Fox and Ward as the main relations and affects relevant to the study. Fox and Ward (2008) show how some Deleuzian theories can be used as tools for analysing interview data, through looking at the ways that health, among other embodiment factors, shaped one participant’s identity. Their implementation and operationalisation of Deleuzian terminology informs both their theoretical approach as well as their approach to the data, and provides extremely useful insights to be incorporated in this thesis.

These studies discussed above show the ways that Deleuzian theory and concepts can be applied to empirical sociological studies of the body. These studies show how Deleuzian theories enable the relations between bodies, practices and the social world to be rethought and worked with in ways which open beyond binaristic and essentialist readings of power and resistance. Studies by Coleman (2009) and Fox and Ward (2008) are particularly useful and relevant to this study, as they each deal directly with bodies in the two main contexts with which this thesis is concerned: gender (Coleman 2008, 2009) and health (Fox & Ward 2008, Fox 2002). Fox and Ward’s synthesis of Deleuzian concepts into methodological tools (such as the body without organs, territorialisations and assemblages) are particularly important, and are central in informing my approach to the data in this project. There are other studies which have used Deleuzian concepts empirically (such as Hickey-Moody’s 2007 study of disability and affect) which, due to space limitations, I have not been able to discuss here. Studies of the body are extremely diverse and wide-ranging in their focus, and for this reason I have aimed to discuss only
the studies which are most similar to mine in terms of themes of body work, gender and health, and their relations with embodied identities. There are few studies which focus on broad practices of body work in relation to identity and gender. The studies by Fox (2002) and Fox and Ward (2008) in the United Kingdom are the only ones I have found which focus explicitly on Deleuzian theory to inform a methodology of bodies in relation to health. Drawing on their work, in this thesis I will extend this focus to exploring gender as well.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the ontological and epistemological problems related to empirical studies of the body in feminist and sociological work. I engaged with the vast number of studies on the body and gender in sociology and feminism broadly, before discussing studies of the body related to body work practices in greater depth. Embodiment is a key area of feminist sociological study relating to the body and body practices, and empirical work deals with different aspects of this area. Work tends to focus on one specific practice of body work such as bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, or practices related to ‘health’ and consumer culture such as exercise, but rarely explores gender from both men’s and women’s perspectives. Whilst many studies deal with the bodies of men and women separately, few studies focus on broad practices of body work from a gendered perspective with both women and men. Studies by Crossley on embodied ‘reflexive body techniques’ (2006, 2007) do explore broad body work techniques using both women and men as participants; however gender is under-theorised in this work, and Crossley’s theorisation of embodied reflexivity retains a dualist separation between mind and body, and subject and object.

I also explored agency as it is used in many feminist and sociological empirical studies of the body and body work and the implicit dualisms between structure/agency, repression/liberation and subject/object that are problematic in this work. Studies on women’s ‘beauty work’ particularly demonstrated the problems with conceiving agency
as an attribute that can be ‘reclaimed’ when women are freed from repressive beauty standards (see Kwan & Trautner 2009). Such a perspective positions women involved in beauty work as ‘cultural dopes’ whose bodies are the passive effects of culture and representations. This view of agency is deterministic, and relies on binaristic understandings of the body’s relationship with societal and cultural forces. These conceptual problems have inspired new terms and frameworks to be sought to understand the body beyond these dualisms.

Through examining some studies of the body, gender, embodiment and subjectivity and the ways that agency and identity are often conceptualised in problematic and binaristic ways, I have argued that approaches are required that open up, rather than close down, how we think of the body and society. I use insights from Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza to examine the connections and processes between bodies and the world that affect how bodies are experienced, and what they may become.

Studies by Budgeon (2003) and Coleman (2008, 2009) explore the concept of becoming in theorising the body’s relations with the world. Through this concept, the processes and relations between the body and other aspects of the world, such as images (Coleman 2009) are not separate, but rather through these processes, possibilities for change are immanent. Jackson (2010) shows how the interplay of molar and molecular categories are at work in processes of becoming, and argues that because these processes and relations are ongoing, they cannot be ‘known’ but must be interpreted as particular connections and relations change. Fox (2002) and Fox and Ward (2008) show how affect and identity are linked and can be approached methodologically through ‘counting affects’ in an interview for example. The relations and processes that affect someone, Fox and Ward (2008) argue, are central for understanding how identity is constructed and lived. Fox’s (2002) discussion of the body without organs as the process of in-folding between the body and the world explores the nexus between social and cultural processes and embodied subjectivity.
In the work of these theorists, Deleuze’s key concepts of becoming and affect are operationalised, and are linked to other sociological issues and concepts, such as identity formation and subjectivity. These studies show how Deleuze’s concepts enable a shift from a concern for ‘being’, to a concern for ‘becoming’, and for the different connections that are always in process between bodies and the world. From this, I understand body work as a set of practices of engagement and negotiation between bodies and other assemblages. Body work is one process (among many others) through which the body is involved in multiple and continuous connections with other bodies (Budgeon 2003).

Where the previous chapter focused on theoretical issues surrounding the body and body work concerning gender and health, this chapter has shown how others have studied these issues empirically. A cornerstone of this thesis is a commitment to operationalising non-dualistic approaches to the body in exploring the body and body work practices in the current sociological context. The above studies share this conviction, and use a Deleuzian framework to find new accounts of the body. As well as pursuing new frameworks for understanding bodies and the social world beyond dualistic and deterministic theoretical structures, my study also engages with other gaps in the literature. Few studies explore the embodied experiences and understandings of both men and women who undertake a broad range of body work practices with a particular focus on gender. I have not found any studies which explore broad practices of body work of men and women in Australia. In the budding number of feminist and sociological studies which draw upon Deleuze to do empirical work, the body, body practices, health and gender are beginning to be explored, but I have not found any study which focuses on the ways bodies and body work practices are understood and experienced by both men and women with a focus on gender and health in analysis.

Given these points, this study is significant in advancing new approaches to the body in feminism and sociology. Drawing on Deleuze, relations and affects are understood as producing bodies’ ongoing possibilities for living. Through engaging with key Deleuzian concepts such as affect and becoming, this research explores how Deleuzian theory can open up new possibilities for understanding the body empirically. The next chapter
explores how these concepts can be used practically, and develops a Deleuzian methodology that I will use in this study.
Chapter four: Methodology

This research uses Deleuzian theory to inform a methodology of bodies and practices of body work in relation to gender, health and consumer culture. I define body work practices as a series of affective relations between the body and its environment; and as an embodied process. The term body work implies the inseparability of the mind-body, subject-object in the way the self is experienced and involved in relations with the world. Body work practices require a conscious investment in the appearance and function of the body. The practices undertaken as ‘body work’ can include any practices which involve the intent to alter the body’s appearance, as well as altering the subjective experience of the body (such as practices aimed at ‘feeling healthier’). Forms of body work undertaken by participants in this study, for example, include exercise and fitness regimes such as lifting weights or jogging, monitoring their diet, styling their hair or wearing make up as well as cosmetic surgery.

This study examines the affective relations involved in body work, including the ways that health and gender, two molar segments among many, affect participants. The central research questions are drawn from the ontological and epistemological frameworks I have outlined based on Deleuzian approaches to the body:

*How are knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies produced through body work practices?*

*How do social relations (such as gender and health) intersect with body work practices, and what does this mean for understanding bodies from a Deleuzian perspective?*

*How do social relations and body work practices affect the body’s possibilities?*

These questions are addressed through an analysis of available literature and conceptual frameworks, and through drawing on original evidence produced through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 22 men and women between the ages of 18-33 who live in and around Melbourne, Australia.
The epistemological and ontological groundings of this project have been introduced in chapters two and three, but I will briefly revisit these in the context of the methodology of this research. In this chapter, I intend to demonstrate the ways epistemological and ontological shifts informed by the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza can be expressed methodologically in feminist sociology. First, I discuss the methodological implications of concepts such as experience and affect in the context of interviewing. I then discuss the processes of the interviews, sample, and ethical considerations and analytic techniques used in this study.

**Epistemological and ontological groundings**

Feminist poststructural researchers and theorists have thoroughly critiqued and deconstructed the humanist foundations of research such as objectivity, knowledge and ‘truth’. St Pierre and Pillow argue that the task of feminist poststructuralist researchers is to ‘ask questions that produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently’ (2000: 1). As Lather (2001: 202) has argued, ‘methodology often diverts attention from more fundamental issues of epistemology’. For these reasons, the epistemological and ontological groundings of this project are central, and inform the methodological approach of in-depth semi-structured interviewing in this project. The epistemological and ontological perspectives I adopt in this project are drawn from feminist uses of Deleuze and Guattari and Spinoza. I intend that through using these perspectives new questions and knowledges may be able to be produced (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000), particularly for how the body is thought of in sociological and feminist empirical work. In the following section, I expand on some of the key issues for feminist methodologies in the context of the ontological and epistemological perspectives of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza I introduced in chapters two and three.
**Knowledge and the researcher**

The idea that knowledge in empirical research is produced by an ‘objective researcher’ is redundant in postmodern and post-structural epistemologies (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000). Instead, the ‘knowledge’ produced in the research process is understood as historically situated and able to give only partial rendering of any situation (Denzin & Lincoln 2002: xi; Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Schwandt 2003). In light of this, Donna Haraway’s theorisation of situated knowledge has been central in feminist researchers’ negotiation of the epistemological difficulties surrounding the goal of producing ‘objective knowledge’ in research. The epistemological position of ‘situated knowledge’ holds that ‘infinite vision is an illusion’, but that all vision is necessarily particular, partial and embodied (Haraway 1988: 582). Haraway argues for ‘the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity’ (1988: 589). Situated knowledge, or the ‘view from a body’ emphasises the necessarily embodied and contextual production of all knowledge and experience, in which there are no ‘innocent’ or omniscient perspectives from which to theorise or do research. Haraway (1988: 579) argues, we ‘need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made…in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life’ (1988: 580). Following Haraway, I understand that the ways knowledge and bodies are theorised is political and that ethics are implicit in epistemological foundations of all research.

Knowledge can be understood as constructed in multiple ways, and from multiple viewpoints. Collins (1990) and bell hooks (1990), among many others, have argued that there are multiple feminist knowledges, and that race, ethnicity, sexuality and class must all be examined as well as gender in order to give focus to the diverse meanings of women’s experiences. This agenda of ‘multiple knowledges’ has been instrumental in efforts to ‘dissolve an unremitting whiteness in feminist research’ (Olesen 2005: 239), to work against the forms of knowledge that have closed down the meanings of some bodies and their chances for life (as Haraway (1988) argued above).
St Pierre and Pillow (2000) discuss that poststructural feminists have troubled the established ways of thinking provided by humanism, and challenged some of ‘foundationalism’s most heinous formations – racism, patriarchy, homophobia, ageism and so forth’ which has meant that new ways of conducting and grounding research are required (2000: 2). New epistemologies and methodologies are being sought that may further destabilise these formations, such as those introduced by Deleuze for example (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000: 2). It is crucial to seek new research strategies, such as new approaches to research text and new understandings of old methods, based on a revisioning of epistemology, as Denzin and Lincoln (2002: xi) have argued.

Deleuze throughout his work argues that Western philosophy has privileged a certain ‘optics’ that begins with the human subject viewing the world from a privileged and foundational ‘point of view’ (Hultman & Taguchi 2010: 526). Feminist philosophers such as Colebrook (2002) and Grosz (1994) have shown how the use of Deleuzian theory can help us to move away from viewing the world from a privileged or transcendent point of view. Rather than producing kinds of knowledge that are based on the ‘differentiation of some grounding identity (humanity)’ (Colebrook 2004: 189, in Hultman & Taguchi 2010: 526), Deleuze and Guattari urge us towards finding new ways of thinking and producing different kinds of knowledge.

The need to de-centre the humanist researcher as knowing subject is echoed by Karen Barad (2007), whose theories are aligned with Deleuze’s ontological and epistemological concerns. Barad argues that ‘practices of knowing cannot be fully claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part’ (2007: 185). For this reason, Barad argues that knowing and being are not separate, and as such, ontology and epistemology can be seen as inter-dependent. Barad terms this as ‘onto-epistemology’, defined as ‘the study of practices of knowing in being’ (Barad 2007: 185). Barad argues, ‘we don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world and its differential becoming’ (2007: 185).
This onto-epistemological way of thinking de-centres the researcher as a knowing subject and ‘takes us beyond the dominating subject/object, human/non-human, as well as the discourse/matter and nature/culture dichotomies: it becomes impossible to isolate knowing from being and discourse from matter; they are mutually implicated’ (Hultman & Taguchi 2010: 539). Based on these considerations, I understand that as a researcher producing knowledge, I am necessarily situated in the world, with a ‘view from somewhere’ (Haraway 1988), ‘understanding the world from within and as part of it’ (Barad 2007: 88). My own body and experience of embodiment is present and a part of all stages of this research project, in the planning, the interviewing, the analysis and writing. My own presence is as much a part of the research and the ‘data’ as the participants are. This point is explored in more depth in chapter eight through an examination of how one participant, Isabelle, made an observation about my body being ‘skinny’. Through this encounter, I am compelled to address the unintended ‘extra-discursive effects’ of embodied discourses communicated through my own physical presence in the interview encounter.

Deleuze, ‘ethology’ and the body

I understand the body as the point of overlap between the physical, the social, the symbolic and the sociological; as ‘the threshold through which the subject’s lived experience of the world is incorporated and realised, and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject…it is the place of one’s engagement with the world’ (McNay 2000: 42). Following Deleuze and Guattari, I also understand the body as ‘an event of expression’, in terms of ‘its becomings, connections, events and activities’ and what it can do (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 36). I conceptualise that bodies are produced through, but not determined by, their relations (Coleman 2009: 214). Building on Butler’s theorisation that bodies materialise through forces such as sex and gender, and following the insights of Barad (2007) and Bray & Colebrook (1998) that bodies do not pre-exist their intra-action with other forces, I understand the body (and subjectification) as an ongoing
process; as formed but not determined by the relations or forces it connects or engages with. As detailed in chapter two of this thesis, ‘ethology’ signals an epistemological and ontological shift in which the body is not understood as a ‘given’, a natural ‘fact’, but as a philosophical problem that can be approached through a concern for the relations and affects between bodies and other forces. As Hickey-Moody and Malins describe:

By giving the name ethology (the study of animal relations) to this practice of ethics, Deleuze draws attention to the importance of evaluating relations between all bodies. Ethics, for Deleuze, is about maximizing the capacities of all bodies to affect and to be affected. It is also about affirming difference and the production of the new. Rather than limiting the future to what has already been or to what is already known, ethics involves opening up the potential for the unknown.

(Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 4)

From this perspective, a focus on bodies involves an ethical concern for the affects and relations between bodies, and extending beyond human bodies only. Ontologically, it becomes an ethical position to understand the body not as an object or entity but as an event of becoming, in which the affects and relations in encounters are crucial to the formulation of change or action. Following Ethology, and Deleuze’s ethics, I prioritise a focus on change and possibility, rather than on what is already known.

As Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) argue, Deleuze described his concepts as ‘tools’, which he intended to be taken up and practically applied in whichever way they ‘work’ to enable the range of possibilities and difference to be opened and extended. In this way, ‘the question is not whether a particular concept is ‘true’, but whether it works, and whether it opens up the range of possibilities in a given situation. Deleuze's philosophy can therefore be approached as an open system, rather than a totalising structure which must be taken as a unified system of belief (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 2). Deleuze’s concepts are ‘not models for thought or research but open possibilities for them’ (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 87). It is in this spirit that I employ Deleuze’s concepts and framework for understanding bodies and body work.
Methodology and method

With the epistemological considerations discussed above as a grounding, I aim to make sense of the range of body work practices undertaken by participants in this study through exploring the ways these practices are involved in the ongoing relations of the body and its environment. I take a qualitative approach to explore the experiences, perspectives and understandings of body work practices of a small group of women and men in Melbourne, Australia through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Experience as methodology

In-depth interviewing is a well-established method aligned with feminist approaches, premised on the importance of meaning-making and subjectivity in social research (Travers 2006: 290; Rubin & Rubin 2005: 19). Although interviews are used to explore the participants’ descriptions of experiences of their bodies, I do not claim that interviewing offers privileged authentic experience to their ‘true selves’ (Sandelowski 2002: 105). Interviews were used as a method to explore the ways in which participants described their experiences, and especially their practices and negotiations of their bodies through body work.

I use a post-humanist/post-modern conceptualisation of experience in the methodology of this project. Deleuze conceives of experience as an open and immanent whole; ‘experience is not the experience of some subject’, rather experience forms the subject (Colebrook 2002: 81-1, emphasis added). In other words, this perspective does not begin from the premise that there is first a subject who experiences things, and that researchers have access to this subject’s experience in research. Instead, the connections formed between bodies, entities, and social forces can be thought of as experiences, the human subject being the effect, rather than the origin of ‘one particular series of experiential
connections’ (Colebrook 2002: 81). This means that experience refers not only to humans (or subjects), but to all perceptions and impressions, such as plants perceiving light or muscles in the body experiencing strain (Colebrook 2002: 81).

Coleman (2009) further argues that from a Deleuzian perspective, bodies are understood as processes which do not pre-exist their relations with other entities; rather, entities (bodies) are constituted through their relations. Because of this, Coleman (2009: 50) argues, research needs to focus on the relations between bodies, and the experiences and knowledges that are produced. This position has significant implications for how data is collected, explored and analysed in my study. Exploring how people experience their bodies and how knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies are produced through body work practices is central to addressing the research questions in my project. In-depth interviewing provides a method of exploring understandings and knowledges, and enabled participants to describe their experiences of bodies and body work practices in detail. Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer to explore diverse understandings and practices; the descriptions of experiences rather than accessing ‘authentic’ experience (Sandelowski 2002).

Experience as methodology has been central to much feminist work, and has been widely debated and critiqued over past decades, particularly concerning interviewing as a method and the sort of data interviews produce (Coleman 2009). Skeggs (1997) argues the battle over ‘whose experiences count as knowledge’ has been crucial to feminist research. ‘Experience’ can be problematic in research when it is used to produce knowledge and to legitimate the perspectives of a small group that come to stand for all ‘others’; when it leads to an essentialist, ‘romantic’ conception of inner meaning; or produces overly individualised accounts (Silverman 2004: 344). Following these critiques, I understand ‘experience’ as located in the cultural and social position of the participant and researcher; and that experience is constitutive, rather than a reflective of a ‘true, inner self’. Rather than being concerned with issues of ‘authentic representation’ of the research subject/object, the priority in this project is to explore and discuss the limits and capacities of bodies (the researcher’s as well as the participants’) in the ongoing
interactions of those bodies and their environments (Grosz 1994). As Coleman argues, an exploration of embodied experience does not approach experience as ‘coherent and unitary’; rather embodied experience is necessarily contradictory, multiple and partial (Coleman 2009: 56).

In this way, an analysis of lived experience, however partial and situated, of both the researcher and participants has the potential to extend beyond problematic subject/object binaries, to instead see the integrated and co-constructed nature of the research process. Others have argued (Acker, Barry & Esseweld 1991; Coleman 2009) that methodology as experience, such as through using the approach of women interviewing women, is a way of dislodging the subject/object binary between the researcher and participant. However in this project, following Barad (2007) and Coleman (2009), I understand that my body, like the participants’, is also constituted through its relations with other entities rather than pre-existing them. The participants and I, through our relations, are in processes of becoming through our embodied experiences, including in the interview encounter.

Experience as a methodology also relates to the temporality of bodies. A focus on experience as embodied, following Deleuze or Barad’s onto-epistemology approaches bodies as multiplicities of experience, where experience is the past, present and future possibilities of a body (Coleman 2009: 59). This means understanding bodies not only in terms of gender or race, but understanding that bodies are already in the process of, or becoming of gendering, racing, ageing; a process which is not straightforward or linear, but involves progressions and movements in different directions (Coleman 2009: 59). For example, Coleman discusses the ways participants aged 13-14 in her study described themselves as being young and old, woman and girl all at once as contexts changed. Bodies are thus understood as experienced in a multiplicity of ways (Coleman 2009: 60). Consequently, the multiplicities of experience involved in the relations of becoming between bodies and practices of body work are central to this study. Because the ontological status of the body in this project holds bodies are constituted through their affective relations with other bodies and entities which cannot be known in advance, experience as methodology is important, since experiences, discussed in interviews,
allows for these relations to (partially) emerge. The experiences and relations between bodies and body work are thus not presumed in advance, but manifest in the process of the affective relations of the interview encounter.

**Methodology and affect**

Affect can be understood as ‘embodied sensation’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007). According to Deleuze, what we are capable of is directly related to embodied sensation (affect), and it is the relations of affect that produce a body’s capacities (Coleman 2009). Affects are thus related to actions of the body and experience. Just as in the above section, which discussed the ways that exploring experience through interviewing is a way of exploring the relations between bodies (and body work), affect can also be explored in this way. To affect and be affected is, for Deleuze, becoming. It is the image of thought that Deleuze and Guattari depict as rhizomatic or nomadic in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), as Merceica and Merceica argue (2010: 86). Exploring affect, methodologically, is a way of exploring the becomings and experiences of bodies in their relations with body work practices.

Affects refer simultaneously to both sides of a causal relationship: our power to both affect (other bodies, environments) and to be affected. Spinoza proposed that the mind’s power to think is parallel to the body’s power to act, and thus that mind and body develop in parallel; and affect refers to the current state of the mind and body (Hardt 2007: x). As Gatens has explained, Spinoza’s theorisation of affect in the mind-body relation holds that ‘if someone can’t imagine doing something, they will not be able to do that thing’ (Lloyd & Gatens 2000: 47). Affect and action are thus linked. Through affects, events and actions begin to take form (Manning 2010). Spinoza argued that ‘the greater our power to be affected, the greater our power to act’ (Hardt 2007: x). Because affects are constantly produced in relations with others and in encounters, we do not know in advance what the body can do, or what a mind can think, and hence, what affects are
possible. As a result, this ontology of humans and bodies is constantly open and renewed (Hardt 2007: x).

**Interviewing and affect**

Blackman and Venn (2010) discuss some methodological implications that result from the ‘turn to affect’, which has seen a rethinking of embodiment to understand bodies as processes rather than objects or fixed entities. Blackman and Venn argue that in this shift, ‘affect is invoked to gesture towards something that perhaps escapes or remains in excess of the practices of the ‘speaking subject’’ (2010: 9). Blackman and Venn suggest that established qualitative methods, based on observation and language, may be inadequate or inappropriate for studying bodies as affective processes. Because of this, I want to reconsider the ways that ‘representational thinking’ is often produced through qualitative methods.

A project that sets out to discursively represent the research object is antithetical to a study of bodies as affective processes. For this reason I do not approach interviewing as a method that is capable of producing a narrative of the speaking subject. Rather, I intend the interview to be a way of entering into a discussion, quite literally, to ‘gather the relations and affect, those things that affect an individual’ (Fox & Ward 2008). The affects and relations of bodies through body work practices are the main focus of this study. Kate and Isabelle had particular engagements with their bodies through cosmetic surgery procedures such as breast enlargement surgery. Other participants’ key affects and relations were associated with exercise such as jogging and yoga in Gillian and Paul’s examples. As Fox and Ward note, the relations that every one of us has is legion, and in focusing of a specific aspect of identity the qualitative interview can aspire to cover ‘at least the main relations’ and affects of a person (Fox & Ward 2008: 1013). The discussions that comprise the interview (and the data for this project) are partial, non-totalisable and non-representative fragments of participants’ experiences. Interviewing provides a meaningful and sensitive method through which to explore affects and
relations, if appropriate care is taken to enable insight and reflection in a participants’ discussion of experiences (Fox & Ward 2008).

Others working with these similar frameworks in empirical research (Fox & Ward 2008; St Pierre 2002) suggest that a focus on non-verbal aspects of the interviews, such as body signals and other sensory elements (Sandelowski 2002) can open the research up beyond the confines of traditional methodology. Addressing the affects and relations of the researcher in the interview encounter is also important because the method of interviewing is itself a process of relations between the interviewer and participant.

I experienced most interviews as complex and intense social encounters. As a relatively inexperienced interviewer, it was a challenge to negotiate the numerous elements of the interview event. I was often aware of my elevated heart-rate on my way to the interview as I searched for a parking space and negotiated the often-unfamiliar location of the interview, and as I rechecked the audio-recorder and supply of batteries. I was also always aware of the social competency and sensitivity I must bring to the interview, and felt pressure and responsibility around trying to make the interview encounter as pleasant and friendly as possible. My blood pressure would slow as the interviews began, particularly if the encounter was progressing smoothly, and the participant was talkative and warm. As I gained more experience interviewing and using the topic list, and as the same themes or details arose with different participants, I became more adept at being ‘present’ in the discussion; to respond actively and direct the interview rather than constantly needing to look down at my topic list.

The affects and relations I was aware of experiencing in the interview context mainly surround the techniques of communicating with the participants; of being self-conscious about my way of asking questions. Initially, when I was aware of the participants’ mutual self-consciousness it became even more difficult to explore their topics around the body in depth. For example, Jason’s voice would fade to an almost inaudible level at times during the interview when he was discussing details or characteristics of men’s physical bodies. In the interview guide this topic was intended as a way to ‘break the ice’ in
speaking about others’ bodies before going on to ask them about their own bodies and body work, but in Jason’s interview, my tactic did not work! Jason was only the fifth person I had interviewed for this project, and the second man I had spoken to. The majority of the other interviews with men took place towards the end of interviewing; when I had done fifteen or so interviews. By this stage, I felt better able to negotiate instances when their answers were self-conscious; to more confidently direct the interview in a different direction, or to pause and give the participant space to think without rushing on.

The ‘data’ produced through the conversation of the interview encounter is thus co-created by both parties, and the affects of both are also involved in the production of the ‘data’. As Coleman argues, ‘bodies are processes which become through their relations and as such there are not relations between pre-existent entities (bodies and images, subjects and objects) but rather entities are constituted through their relations’ (Coleman 2009: 50). The interview can thus be understood as constituted through the relations between the interviewer and participants. Many participants would have been aware of my self-consciousness in moments, just as I was aware of theirs. The affects of the interview encounters constitute the data, along with the text of their words.

A study by Walkerdine (2010) of a community’s struggle for cohesion and connection, faced with the dismantling of industrial modes of work, similarly uses the technique of interviewing with the aim of engaging the affects and relations of the participants. Through paying attention to the interviewer’s own feelings and affective responses to an interview, the data includes the examination of forms of bodily knowing that are not part of the interview narrative. The researcher is placed not as a neutral observer ‘but rather as somebody who interferes and helps to orient the interviewee to that which might usually remain unsaid’ (Blackman & Venn 2010: 18). This technique further distances traditional methods of interviewing based on ontological and epistemological approaches of representing the ‘speaking subject’. Walkerdine’s study pursues more intra-active (Barad 2007) techniques in which the interviewer is as implicated in the production of data as the participant, and in which both researcher and participant are involved in affective
relations with each other in the interview encounter as a process, rather than an objective, knowledge-and-truth-producing exercise.

Research which involves mapping the affective capacities of bodies can be termed rhizomatic research. Where arborescent thought systems are static, fixed and a ‘self-contained totality or closed system that equal just to the sum of its parts’ (Stagoll, 2005: 13), rhizomatic research (or thought) focuses more on engagement and connections than on interpreting and eliciting reality out there (Merceica & Merceica 2010). Through the exploration of forces, intensities and connections, the focus is on ‘difference which is produced within something, not seen in relation to or compared and contrasted to that which is taken as a norm. It is forward-looking’ (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 89). In-depth semi-structured interviewing allows a (partial) exploration of these forces and intensities, and can be used as a rhizomatic method. In rhizomatic research, the researcher is understood as in processes of becoming, of affecting and being affected. The shift is from research that only interprets, to an experience in which the researcher and the researched engage with each other (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 86).

Recruitment and participants

I conducted 22 in-depth, semi-structured interviews between March and October 2010. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling using my personal network as the initial points of contact on the online social networking site, Facebook. Personal contacts were asked to forward an electronic advertisement to some of their personal contacts (whom I did not know) who may be interested in participating. In this way, personal contacts recruited others on my behalf. Participants were invited to email me if they were interested in finding out some more information about the project, and/or if they wanted to participate in a study about their everyday experiences of body work.6 Recruiting

6 Gill et. al. (2005) recruited the men in their study from a variety of ‘body conscious’ sites, such as gyms, nightclubs, shopping malls, schools and universities. Since this project is focused on the more everyday experiences of body work, targeting specifically ‘body conscious’ individuals was not expected to be
through social media and electronic advertisements was time and cost-effective, as it allowed me to distribute a large number of advertisements and reach a diverse group of potential participants very quickly. Another advantage of this recruitment method is that it is relatively unobtrusive, since participants did not have to take any direct action or engagement with the advertisement unless they were interested in accessing more information or wanted to participate in the research. This enabled participants to self-select, and lowered the likelihood that they may feel pressured or coerced into participating, and also meant that those people with a strong interest in the topic are most likely to self-select (Tranter 2006: 139). In a non-representative study such as this, finding a number of willing respondents who hold a personal interest in the themes of the project is ideal.

To counteract ‘digital divide’ issues\(^7\), in that those without access to Facebook or the internet were not initially reached, I invited personal contacts to distribute hard copy advertisements to people in their network who they thought may wish to participate. My phone number was listed on these advertisements. This meant that having a Facebook account or access to the internet was not required for participation. Through this approach to sampling I made an effort to ensure a variety of perspectives and experiences were included.

The criteria for inclusion in my study was broad, since I wanted to explore the everyday, embodied body work practices of a range of young people rather than one specific target group, or set of body work practices. Participants who were eligible for inclusion were aged between 18 – 35 years old, living in and around Melbourne and included an even number of male and female participants. Women have traditionally been the subjects of studies of the body due the greater prevalence of ‘eating disorders’ in women and feminist critiques of cultural pressures of body image (Bordo 2003, Bartky 1990), necessary; and this expectation was borne out in the responses and body work practices of those interviewed.

\(^7\) According to the Internet World Statistics website, as of 2009, 80.1% of Australian households had an internet connection; and as of August 31, 2010, the number of Australian Facebook users was 9,520,960. Available at: http://www.internetworldstats.com/sp/au.htm.
however many now argue that these concerns increasingly relate to men (Featherstone 2010; Henwood, Gill & McLean 1999).

Participants in my study were aged 18 to 33. For ethical reasons around consent I did not interview participants under the age of 18. I selected this age range because a concern for the body’s appearance or ‘body image’ is of particular concern to young people. The Mission Australia (2010) study found that ‘body image’ is a key issue of concern to young people, and surveyed young people up to the age of 24. I used a wider age range above 24 to broaden the criteria for inclusion, since I believed that body image, or a concern with the body’s appearance was likely a continuing concern for those in their thirties (and beyond). Similarly, Gill et al. (2005) interviewed men aged 18-35 in their study on body projects, and argued that those in this age category have experienced the broad social changes such as feminism, the invitation to men to participate in consumer culture and retail, the rise of the gay community, and the marketing of women’s desire (Gill et. al. 2005: 101-105). Others add that those between the ages of 18-35 in Western cultures have grown up in the context of consumer and neoliberal imperatives vital to understanding the types of body work which are pervasive in contemporary Western contexts (McRobbie 2007).

Most participants identified as ‘middle class’ though as will be discussed, there was considerable confusion surrounding how to establish or decide their ‘class’. Just under half (ten) had attained university degrees, six had completed TAFE or other practical tertiary training, five listed VCE as their highest level of education, and one reported year 11 as being their highest level of education. As McLeod and Yates specify in their study on young people in Australia, ‘to use “class” as a focus and interpretative marker is to address issues of social distinction, hierarchy, power in individual identities and in the patterns of social relationships between individuals’ (2005: 161). Class contexts include family and education, patterns of work, and the ‘dispositions, capital, power, lack of capital and power that pertain to different kinds of jobs’, as well as education (McLeod & Yates 2005: 161). Class categories and terms are difficult to pinpoint in contemporary Australia, though class distinctions undoubtedly exist and are lived out by everyone (McLeod & Yates 2005). Even in England, a much analysed ‘classed society’, class is not
a category young people themselves think with, according to a study by Phoenix and Tizard (1996).

A question on the demographic information sheet completed by participants at the conclusion of the interview asked what ‘class’ they would identify with. With the exception of six participants, all asked me to clarify the question; for example, Jason asked, ‘Um, class? What should I put here?’ I would respond that the question was ‘sort of referring to middle, working class or upper class’ and tell participants not to worry about leaving the question blank. A few did leave it blank; others wrote ‘middle’. Of those who did not ask what it meant, three wrote ‘middle-upper’ (those participants held bachelor’s degrees and had attended prestigious private schools), one wrote ‘White/middle’ (also had a bachelor’s degree); two wrote ‘lower middle’ (one had bachelor’s degree, the other had completed VCE); and one wrote ‘all’, probably due to the wording of the question, and his interpretation of the word ‘identify’. Issues surrounding class were not directly discussed in the interviews, however most were able to engage with the sorts of ‘health’ and ‘fitness’ lifestyles that are currently privileged. The bodily ideals prevalent in ‘healthism’ and consumer culture underscore white, middle class bodies (Dworkin & Wachs 2009); and many of the participants in this study could be considered part of this privileged, dominant classed and raced group.

In terms of race and ethnicity, the sample largely identified as ‘white’, ‘Anglo Saxon’ or ‘Caucasian’. As Dworkin and Wachs (2009) have argued, white bodies dominate bodily ideals. Although I had distributed advertisements to a range of personal contacts who themselves would not identify as ‘Anglo/white Australians’, and to many friends who I knew to have friends from a range of ethnic backgrounds, overwhelmingly, it was the ‘white’ Australians who self-selected to participate in this study. The demographics form asked ‘Do you identify with a particular racial group or ethnic group?’ Half of the respondents either left this question blank, drew a dash ( - ), wrote ‘No’ or ‘N/A’. This could likely be due to the phrasing of the question. Had I phrased the question ‘What is your racial or ethnic background’, the question would have implied that everyone does indeed have a ‘race’ or ethnicity, rather than implying that they may not (hence the ‘N/A’ responses). Further, though, these responses by visibly white and likely Anglo-Saxon
participants suggests the pervasiveness and privilege of the invisibility of whiteness such as Australia, where whiteness is so normalised that white people perceive they have no race at all (Fanon 1967; Weiss 1999; bell hooks 1992; Bird 2008; Riggs 2008). All participants were born in Australia. Four women did not identify as being ‘white’ or ‘Anglo’. Angela identified as ‘Asian/Japanese’; Kim specified being ‘Asian/Chinese/Vietnamese’; Sara said she was of ‘Dutch/Filipino’ descent; and Isabelle wrote that she identifies as being ‘Serbian/Romanian’ in ethnicity. None of these participants discussed their race or ethnicity as relevant to their experience of their bodies or body work practices.

Twenty one of the participants identified as ‘heterosexual’, and one man (Simon) identified as homosexual. Simon did not discuss his sexuality in the context of his body or body work practices, though heterosexual participants often linked their body work practices with wanting to attract partners. Like the other demographics information, sexuality was listed on the form given to participants at the conclusion of the interview. Participants were asked to note whether they were ‘heterosexual’, ‘homosexual’, ‘bisexual’ or to write any other category. Most participants completed this question by circling one of the ‘options’, some wrote ‘hetero’ or ‘heterosexual’. Some commented on or asked about this question, saying things such as ‘Which one is the normal one?’ or ‘I don’t want to get this one wrong!’ suggesting the pervasive norms surrounding heterosexuality.

Participants’ ages ranged fairly evenly from 18 – 33 years old, with the majority in their twenties. Two men and two women were students at Universities with part-time jobs, and others had roles in various professions. The women (who were not students) were currently working in hospitality, retail, the health and beauty industries (as a make up artist, dental assistant and beauty therapist), marketing, or as a nanny or administrative assistant. It is notable that many of these roles are traditionally ‘feminised’ forms of work in the ‘care’ and service sectors. The men who were not students were in less traditional gendered occupations than the women; two were musicians also working in other professions such as sound engineering or graphic design, and two other men worked solely as a graphic designer and as a sound editor for film and television. The occupations
of the other five men in the study were an accountant, a barber, a nurse and a firefighter and professional footballer in the Victorian Football League.

Roughly half of the participants lived in suburbs very close to the centre of Melbourne, such as Carlton, Fitzroy, Flemington and Brunswick; whilst the other participants were from the surrounding metropolitan suburbs, ranging from Werribee, Eltham and Heidelberg, towards the South-Eastern bayside suburbs such as Beaumaris, Parkdale, Frankston and Mornington.

Though this study does not aim to be representative, I attempted to garner a range of perspectives through my personal contacts. Although the participants are predominantly white and middle class, there was a high level of variety in participants’ body work practices, as well as in their understandings and descriptions of experiences related to bodies. The sample in this study relates to the epistemology underpinning this thesis. This small study does not aim to represent or ‘know’ a particular population; instead, I have set out to explore how body work is done by those who self-selected to participate. This work was intended to be conceptually generative (Crouch & McKenzie 2006). I use the data to illustrate theoretical arguments, not to analyse a representative sample of bodies. I approach the body not as an object or entity but as an event of becoming, in which the affects and relations in encounters are crucial to the formulation of change or action.

The relations and affects of the bodies are the primary concern in this study, and health, consumer culture and gender were particularly important to participants’ understandings and experiences of bodies. Affect and becoming can be studied in the context of any connections a body has; with other people, abstract ideas, activities and social constructs (Fox & Ward 2008). The participants in this study are predominantly white and middle class, and this affects the ways their bodies are lived as part of the ‘dominant group’, particularly in relation to consumer culture and health ideals. Images of white, middle class bodies embody the ideal healthy citizen (Dworkin & Wachs 2009), and this may help to explain their participation in and endorsement of body work practices aimed at achieving ‘health’. Further work in the future could focus specifically on the affects and relations of body work practices and understandings of bodies from a range of cultural
and ethnic backgrounds; or could focus on homosexuality in relation to body work and understandings and experiences of bodies.

**Interview processes**

In my project, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were preferable to more structured or standardised interview designs because I was able to be flexible in the topic schedule (Holloway & Jefferson 2000). This enabled me to deviate from the topic guide depending on the interview context, and to experiment with the order of topic for each participant as necessary. Interviews were evenly weighted between male and female participants. I had initially set out to conduct approximately 20 interviews. I stopped interviewing when I had completed 22 interviews mainly because I felt I had achieved theoretical saturation (Morse 2004) and had a diverse range of responses and experiences from participants, as well as a balance in gender, education and a variety of occupations. Most interviews took about one hour. The shortest interview lasted 34 minutes, and the longest was almost two hours. Interviews covered the following topics and broad questions:

- **Life context:** work and/or study, living arrangements, general life discussion.
- ‘Ideal’ bodies: what sorts of bodies (men’s and women’s) are presented as ‘ideal’? What are their features? What do you think of these bodies? What sorts of work would be involved in the appearances of these bodies?
- **Body work:** do you do anything to work on your body? Discuss in detail. What does it mean to you? What are your motivations for doing this?
- **Demographic answer sheet** completed at the end of the interview.

These questions and topics were piloted with one male and one female friend, both aged 25, prior to interviewing. The sequence of questions and topics was altered based on the comments from the pilot participants, as well as experiences of early interviews. The topic list gave me a good way to begin the interview, and from there I was able to follow the flow of conversation and guide it towards these topics as they became relevant, or to
rely on it more heavily to structure and guide the interview depending on the participant. The topic list functioned mostly as a touchstone to remind me of all of the areas I wanted to ask about, but enabled me enough freedom to follow the flows of the interview.

Interviews were conducted at a location and time convenient to the participant. Interviews commonly took place in cafes, parks, and in one instance, a pub. In most interviews we would both drink coffee. I used the time they were reading through the plain language statement and consent form to order and pay for the coffee to give them some space. These locations were generally appropriate for interviewing as the atmosphere was casual and friendly. The setting of the interview at a pub in the evening was not ideal however, and the connection between Peter and I never felt relaxed or comfortable. The lighting was dim, and the ‘mood’ of the pub did not really lend itself well to the deep discussion of bodies and body work practices. In the future I would aim to conduct all interviews in cafes, and in daylight hours. In most cases however, the location and time for the interview was chosen by the participant in order to make it most convenient for them. I aimed to be early for all of the interviews to find a good place to set up the audio-recorder, and a place for us both to sit so we could sit close enough to each other for our conversation to be private. In the interviews with Isabelle and Sara however, when I arrived early they were already waiting for me. I would always introduce myself with a handshake, and begin with some small talk about the location or the weather, before moving on to a discussion of what is happening in their lives around work and so on.

Most interviews followed the ‘question; response’ format. Only on a couple of occasions did participants ask me any questions. I tried to even out the power relations between us by sharing my own experiences on a topic, particularly in the early parts of the interview when speaking about work and life in general. For example, I mentioned to Gillian, Steph and Anna that, like them, I had been a waitress for many years, and we discussed some parts of that work such as the long hours, and how difficult it can be to negotiate the time to eat a meal during a shift (since hours of work coincide with lunch or dinner, or both). In the early interviews, I would be more talkative or ‘bubbly’ if the other person was
having trouble discussing a particular topic. As I mentioned previously, I tried to make
the social encounter between us as easy-going and informal as I could, not only to put the
other person at ease, but also in an attempt to offset my ‘authority’ as a researcher. This
of course did not really work though, since mostly I was the one asking questions and
recording their answers. At the conclusion of every interview, I asked if they would like
to ask me any questions. I wanted to include this so that they had the opportunity to ask
about any aspect of the project. Some wanted to know how long it would take me to write
up my findings, and how many words my PhD thesis would be. Isabelle was interested to
know about the sorts of body work other participants had been speaking about. None
asked me directly about my own body or body work practices.

The interview is an inevitably affective and embodied encounter in which both bodies are
involved in a set of relations with the other. However, my researcher’s body is privileged:
my own experiences and meanings of my body regarding body work are allowed to
remain silent in the interview encounter, where the participants are required to speak. I
would have been eager to discuss my own body experiences and body work practices
with participants, but I did not want to introduce them without being asked. I think most
participants would not have been interested in hearing about them in any case. As other
researchers have argued (Manderson, Bennett & Andajani-Sutjahjo 2004; Bain & Nash
2006), it is not only the flow of dialogue but the whole myriad of detail including the
positioning of bodies, atmosphere of surrounding music or sounds, visual details and
gestures that comprise the affective relations of the interview encounter. The interview
encounter is also inevitably located in a regime of power, in which the interviewer holds
some authority in directing the interview event. Through approaching the interview as a
social encounter in which my body is open to question and discussion, and by making the
interviews as informal and ‘easy’ as possible, I hoped that participants’ experience of any
imbalance would be minimised. Though through the method of interviewing the relations
between my body and the participants’ bodies seem unevenly dealt with, the
methodological approach I use in this project seeks to remedy it. I understood my own
body, like the participants’ bodies, as involved in processes of becoming, of affecting and
being affected. Although it is primarily the participants’ bodies that I am discussing, my
own body is implicitly a part of this project. Through paying attention to the operations of
power at the level of my own body, my body and my own experiences can become visible, making me a participant in the research (see Burns 2003). I take up a more detailed exploration of these issues in chapter eight.

Ethics

Ethical issues in social research are concerned to ‘ensure that the interests of participants in research are safeguarded’ (Holloway & Jefferson 2000: 84). The Australian Government describe that the ethical relationship between the researcher and research participants should be grounded in ‘respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence to help shape that relationship as one of trust, mutual responsibility and ethical equality’ (NHMRC 2007: 6). Issues regarding how knowledge is created, questions of privacy and confidentiality, informed consent and researcher ‘power’ are particular concerns for the way feminist and sociological qualitative research is conducted (Olesen 2005). Relationships with participants are central to feminist ethical concerns.

This project was granted ethics approval in December 2009 by the Behavioural and Social Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of Melbourne. All participants gave informed consent by reading the provided Plain Language Statement (PLS) and signing a consent form. The plain language statement gave participants all details about what was involved in the research, such as audio recording, de-identification of their personal details such as their real names, as well as information regarding seeking help in the event the research causes distress. Consent rests on the ethical principle that ‘participation is voluntary and based on sufficient information’, and based on an ‘adequate understanding of the purpose, methods, demands, risks and potential benefits of the research’ (NHMRC 2007: 23). Some feminist researchers argue that the PLS and consent form serve as a ‘crude tool – a conscience – to remind us of our accountability and position…stripping us of our illusions of friendship and reciprocity’ and exposing the inherently unequal relationship between researcher and participant (Fine, Weis, Weesen & Wong 2003: 178). Doing as much as possible to establish an equitable relationship in
interviews is crucial, and even though the formality of the consent form and plain language statements may destabilise this, the plain language statement and consent forms are crucial for conducting research that is ethical, and are also a policy requirement. As Holloway and Jefferson argue, informed consent should revolve around the criterion of guarding against harm, and whilst assessing harm is not simple or completely predictable, the ‘emphasis is on the researcher's responsibility for creating a safe context, in which issues of honesty, sympathy and respect are central’ (Holloway & Jefferson 2000: 89).

I am aware that in asking people to discuss their bodies I am doing research in a potentially very sensitive area. This topic has the potential to disturb or challenge some participants, so it was particularly important that consent procedures were followed, and that confidentiality was emphasised. Most interviews did not seem to challenge or emotionally affect participants overtly. However, Beth and Isabelle discussed suffering from ‘body issues’ in the past in the form of eating disorders. Isabelle and Beth were very willing to discuss their experiences with me, although I was as careful as possible to avoid causing them distress by asking too many questions or probing too much. I took as much care as possible to check that they were comfortable with speaking about their experiences, and offered the contact details for a local counsellor which they both refused.

I found Beth’s interview difficult and upsetting. Beth spoke about suffering from anorexia just a few years ago, and I felt unsettled as I wished I could do more to help her. In the days afterwards felt quite helpless. After speaking to someone who had experienced such a violent relationship with her own body, I felt that the study’s focus on body work practices such as dieting and exercise was frivolous. I also felt guilty that I had been unaware of Beth’s history of anorexia prior to the interview, and felt that I had unintentionally and rather clumsily stumbled upon it through asking what she meant when she said she had ‘body issues’ in the past. I felt humbled and appalled by what Beth had gone through in suffering and recovering from anorexia. I apologised that the topic had come up, and asked her if she would like to continue speaking about it, which she said she was happy to do. I asked if I could help her in any way, through arranging
someone for her to talk to such as a counsellor, and she shook her head, smiled and said, ‘No, it’s ok. I’m fine now’. Finch and Lewis (2003) describe that in discussing sensitive issues, researchers may feel that they are as distressed, or more distressed than the participant. I felt as though Beth thought I was fussing over her, and I whilst I wanted to ensure as far as possible that I was fulfilling my ethical duty of care to Beth, I also did not want to annoy or pester her. I emailed Beth a few weeks after the interview to see if she had asked a friend she had mentioned who might be interested in being interviewed, and was able to use this opportunity to make sure she was feeling ok about her interview; she said she was.

Ethics, power relations and interviews

Briggs argues that asymmetries of power are inherent in interview situations, rooted in the dynamics of the interview, since the interviewer usually has control over the direction of the interview, and the length and scope of a respondent’s answers, and thus power relations are deeply embedded in the data produced from interviews (Briggs 2002: 911-12). As a result, interviewing is political and is much more than ‘merely methodological’ (Briggs 2002: 920). It is thus particularly ‘essential to think through the power, obligations and responsibilities of social research’ (Fine et al. 2003: 168). Reflecting on my own position in the research, in terms of the ways power relations are played out throughout interviews and the ways that my own blind spots and physical presence may shape the data and presentation of the research are important for debunking the ‘neutrality’ of the researcher’s presence (Fine et al. 2003; Olesen 2005; Al-Hindi & Kabwata 2002; Gergen & Gergen 2003). This project, exploring the lived relations between bodies and the world through body work and gender, starts from the position that ‘every subject (including the researcher) exists in an established communicative relationship to everything in the world’ (Engelsrud 2005: 269). Further, as Bain and Nash (2006) argue, the researcher’s body is central to the research process, and to the data that is (co)produced in fieldwork.
In one interview, Isabelle made direct reference to my body. As a relatively thin woman (see Bacon 2009) researching women’s and men’s bodies and their experiences of body work, I usually felt a flash of self-consciousness whenever participants mentioned slenderness as an idealised physical form of femininity. At these times I wished for my body to be invisible, since I felt that my own slenderness could potentially and unintentionally reinforce rather than disrupt dominant gender ideals. Isabelle however named my physicality, and forced me to confront my physical embodied presence in the interview encounter. It was towards to end of our interview, and Isabelle had been asking me about what sorts of things other people had been talking about in interviews, along the lines of ‘are they as stuffed up as me [laughing]?’. Then Isabelle said:

When you asked to interview me I was like, oh I don’t know if you want to interview me, I’m a bit stuffed up in the head!’ [laughing] And then when you walked in here I was like ‘why is she so skinny?!’

At the time, I reacted awkwardly and tried to laugh her comment off, saying ‘Oh…er, yeah, I just always have been, my metabolism, I guess’. I felt so uncomfortable, and I also felt a sense of guilt that I am ‘skinny’. My physicality had been named and valorised by a participant who had just told me about her previous suffering from bulimia and ongoing, severe dieting; along with numerous cosmetic surgical procedures. I had been previously unaware and comfortable in my (unintentionally) disembodied position as the researcher, interviewing Isabelle about her own embodiment, pretending (and hoping, I suppose) that my own body would be invisible, or at least unnamed in this research encounter. In referring directly to my own body, Isabelle revealed the power relations that had been working implicitly, though unintentionally. I had been asking participants to describe and discuss their bodily experiences and feelings in great detail – yet my own privileged embodiment was entitled to remain silent. Isabelle disrupted this.

Through Isabelle’s comment, I was made painfully aware that relations between bodies are constantly taking place, particularly between participant and interviewer. Although these relations are inevitable, and feminist methodologies are intended to open up and reveal these relations, I found the experience difficult, and ethically problematic. As a
researcher I wanted to put Isabelle at ease throughout the interview and avoid causing her any discomfort. When she commented on my own body in a way that suggested it resembled the shape towards which she spends so much time and effort aspiring, I felt that I had failed in this. Yet my own physicality is inevitable, and inevitably affects the research in ways beyond my control, as with Isabelle. I continue a discussion of this interview encounter and its implications for feminist methodologies in chapter eight.

Feminist poststructural methodologies have highlighted that a disruption of interviewer/interviewee power relation is to be desired, since it allows the ‘privileged authority’ of the interviewer to be shaken and urges a de-centering of subject positions (Denzin 1989). St. Pierre describes that through her data analysis, she was forced to theorise her own identity as she theorised her participants’. She writes, ‘the examination of one’s own frailty surely makes one more careful about the inscription of others’ (St. Pierre 1997: 181). In this context, the ethics of sense-making between the researcher and respondent is critical, in which the relations between them are central (and subject to analysis and attention), as is the foregrounding of theoretical frameworks (St. Pierre 1997: 186). Deleuzian ethics urge a further destabilisation of power relations between researchers and participants in research, through approaching both as involved in affective relations of becoming through their connections in the interview encounter. The implications of Deleuzian theory for an embodied, feminist methodology are considered further in chapter eight.

**Deleuzian ethics**

Deleuze’s ethics are very different from a ‘morality’, which operates as an overarching or transcendent system of prior rules and judgments, closing off and limiting ‘the potentiality of a situation, foreclosing its future’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 3). Ethology, and Deleuze’s ethics, prioritises a focus on change and possibility, rather than on what is already known. A focus on relations and affects as possibilities for becoming are central to Deleuzian ethics. Deleuze’s ethics are about maximising the capacities of
all bodies to affect and to be affected. I argue the in-depth interviews conducted in this project provide a space for this. Where interviewing allows a (partial) exploration of forces and intensities, interviewing becomes a rhizomatic method. In rhizomatic research, the researcher, like the participant is understood as in processes of becoming, of affecting and being affected. Rather than producing research that only interprets, in rhizomatic research the researcher and the participant engage with each other (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 86). For Deleuze’s ethics, which is concerned with affirming difference and the production of the new (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007), interviewing which explores and maximises the affective capacities of researcher and participant involves an ethical opening up to the potential of the unknown.

**Analysis**

Decisions made in analysing qualitative data, just as in data collection, are important ethically. Dunbar, Rodriguez and Parker (2002) highlight that interviews and analysis ‘should aim to reflexively engage subjects in terms that capture the complexities of their lives’ in order to do justice to their experience (2002: 295). Recent methodological perspectives based on Deleuze and Barad however argue that reflexive methodology, in paying attention to the researcher’s own thinking and seeing still hold the world at a distance, through taking a ‘step back’ to look at their research (Hultman & Taguchi 2011). For this reason, Barad argues that ‘reflexivity cannot bridge the epistemological gap between the knower and the known’ (Barad 2007: 88). My view, as a white (Anglo-Saxon), middle class, heterosexual woman in her mid twenties, like all researchers’, is a view from somewhere, not a view from nowhere (Haraway 1988). My own positioning has an impact on the way data is approached, analysed, and co-created in the interview encounter. From Barad’s onto-epistemological perspective, I do not obtain knowledge through this research by ‘standing outside the world’; rather, through being part of this research, I am ‘part of the world and its differential becoming’ (Barad 2007: 185). This means that analysis, rather than reflexively ‘capturing’ research subjects, is engaged in exploring intra-active processes of the interview and ‘data’.
What can data do?

As St. Pierre has argued, ‘data’ as a signifier in traditional qualitative research methodology is problematic, but is not an isolated problem. It is part of the wider problems of the ‘epistemology that grounds the humanist narrative of qualitative methodology’ (St. Pierre 1997: 179). As St. Pierre and Pillow (2000: 4) argue, ‘We are always speaking within the language of humanism, our mother tongue, a discourse that spawns structure after structure – binaries, categories, hierarchies, and other grids of regularity that are not only linguistic but also very material’. Traditional qualitative analysis involves an approach to data that is, essentially, language which is then coded and sorted into categories, ‘which in the end are simply words’ (St. Pierre 1997: 179). Data as words is then implicated in all of the problematic aspects of language, and is ruthlessly linear in traditional (humanist) methodological approaches. Subjecting language to poststructural deconstruction, however, is much more uncomfortable and unpredictable, and necessary in a study concerned with openness to possibility and difference. St. Pierre (1997) and Mazzei and McCoy (2011) utilise Deleuzian concepts to work towards such openness.

Mazzei and McCoy (2011: 505) argue that to draw upon Deleuze’s concepts is to attempt to ‘think with the vocabularies that provide new means of description and that encourage different understandings or engagements’. In this way, St. Pierre’s (1997) expansion of what counts as ‘data’ (through using sensual data and dream data) in her project expands what data can do, and what qualitative research can do. Other researchers, such as Holloway and Jefferson (2000) emphasise experimentation in approaches to qualitative data analysis. They argue that the integrity of the data is compromised when it is broken into convenient pieces to fit into preset categories, and that data should be approached in a way that is open to complexity and intensity and to the possibilities of being led into unexpected and uncharted territories (Holloway & Jefferson 2000).

These approaches have informed my management of interview data in this project. I have been particularly concerned with exploring how Deleuze’s concepts might produce new
ways of understanding or engaging with bodies and body work practices, beyond understanding them in terms of the potential for ‘objectification’ or agency, or as pathologised. What would these concepts enable me to ‘do’ with the interview data?

The structured methods of data analysis I used broadly followed techniques associated with thematic analysis and inductive processes (Minichiello et al. 2008; Willis 2006). I transcribed each interview within a week word for word and made extensive notes to record as much detail as possible, including my own reactions and experiences of the interview, setting and encounter. Since interviews took place over a period of a few months, transcribing interviews one at a time was an effective way to begin analysis as this allowed me to focus on the research experience and interview content of each participant separately. This also enabled me to reflect upon my interviewing technique and become more open and experimental in each interview, or follow up on themes or comments previous participants had raised. The interactions between bodies in the interview setting may be equally, if not more important than communications expressed verbally (Engelsrud 2005, Csordas 1994), and details on bodily movements and gestures were included as much as possible both through transcription and field notes. For example, Peter repeatedly struck the table with his palm to emphasise the point he was making (and perhaps to command presence, or even intimidate; this was a difficult interview). As much as possible I recorded my own and participants’ bodily gestures and communications such as laughing, pauses and silences, blushing, clapping hands together, avoidance of eye contact or intense eye contact, and closing eyes and lowering the head, and so on.

Although I made detailed notes at the conclusion of each interview, in future research involving interviewing as an engagement of relations and affects I would aim to write a more detailed written account of the interview encounter, similar to a stream of consciousness perhaps, directly following the interview. I aimed to be aware of as many of the emotional and sensual aspects as possible experienced during the interview, and though I tried to describe these in the field notes directly following the interview, the extent of the importance of affects and relations to the study at that point were not
known. A closer examination of the interviewer’s own tensions, jarrings, flows and sensations during the interview, as well as during transcription and in detailed readings of the transcript would further expand interviewing methodologies as co-created processes between intra-acting bodies, rather than the dualistic subject-object relations that often pervade interviewing as a research method.

Willis (2006) argues that qualitative researchers need to ‘saturate’ themselves in the texts to be analysed in order to reach depth in analysis, and that transcription is a crucial first stage of this. Through the stages of interviewing and transcribing, as well as at the conclusion of data collection, I read over the transcripts at length, focusing on and attempting to make sense of what the data was ‘telling me’, noticing any particularly strong recurring themes or overall impressions within the data. This ‘incubation stage’, Willis (2006) argues, is particularly important, and should allow researchers sufficient time to ‘mull over’ their insights from the data, using creative means such as mind maps or diagrams to make connections and meanings more clear. I made extensive notes on the themes that initially seemed important, such as gender and health discourses as related to the practices of body work, along with the themes and topics that seemed most meaningful to the participants.

Using my notes on the transcripts I attempted to link some of the themes from different examples together through writing small descriptive pieces on these themes. Making rough ‘mind maps’ was also an important tool in this process. Connecting elements of theory was another aspect of analysis that came later, when I had established some more solid ideas about what the data was ‘saying’. Even before taking up Deleuzian-inspired epistemologies and methodologies, I wanted to try as much as possible to allow new meanings and perceptions of the data’s content to emerge over time.
Interpreting ‘affect’ and ‘experience’

The concept of ‘affect’ emerged as central not only to the theories being used in the research but also in participants’ descriptions of their experiences of their bodies through body work. When participants discussed how their body feels in terms of embodied sensations, or as linked with their experience of ‘self’, I interpreted this as a statement that could be linked to ‘affect’. As Fox and Ward (2008) argue, the connections between bodies and the world, such as practices of body work, are comprised by relations and affects. They argue that any statement regarding how a person is ‘affected’ by anything else can be taken as a relation or affect (Fox & Ward 2008: 1013). Like Coleman (2009: 71), I take what the participants say not as ‘signs or symptoms of something else’ such as their psyches but as ‘knowledges, understandings, experiences that can be thought through in-themselves’. I interpret the discussions between myself and participants in interviews as a set of relations that constitute a partial experience that can contribute to knowledge about bodies. Following Kitzinger (2004) it is the experience of the interview encounter that is interpreted, not the ‘experience’ a participant is telling us about. There is no direct route to another person’s ‘experience’, however data can be interpreted as engaging with the ‘discourses’ through which participants represent their experience, ‘rather than offering a direct route to that experience itself’ (Kitzinger 2004: 9). My approach to interpreting the interview data understands that the data does not reflect experience, but rather, through the interview encounter experience is being continually remade (Sandelowski 2002).

Writing as an ethical analytic practice

Throughout this process, writing was central to the analysis, and analysis in fact grew from writing in an ongoing (and perhaps even rhizomatic) way. Through writing, I was able to think through theoretical and thematic elements, and through writing I could pick apart and reassemble problems with previous ideas or impressions, and rework and strengthen others. Through this process, ‘stories’ were able to emerge and connect. Fine
et al. (2003: 185) argue the importance of paying attention to the ‘mundane details’ that appear in transcripts that do not capture our attention in the way that ‘great stories’ do. This is an important consideration in analysis in this project.

St. Pierre has also argued that writing, from a Deleuzian perspective is crucial to her own processes of analysis. She writes:

Writing is not only inscription but also discovery. It is a kind of nomadic inquiry in which I am able to deterritorialize spaces in which to travel in the thinking that writing produces. As I write, I think, I learn, and I change my mind about what I think. (St. Pierre 2002: 64)

Writing, for St. Pierre (2002) as well as in this project is a method of data analysis. Through writing and rewriting, the intensities involved in the data are able to (partially) emerge. The affective relations between bodies and body work practices of the participants in this study are extremely complex. The relations of my own body and the affects involved in the interview encounter mean that I am not separate from the data at any stage; the interview encounters are a continuing part of my life. I write and revisit the transcripts, I am continually connecting with the participants, remembering and re-implicated in the research. Through writing as a process, I have been allowing the intensities and complexities of the interview encounters, which became the ‘data’, to lead me into unexpected and uncharted territories (Holloway & Jefferson 2000). In this way, writing as a key aspect of analysis in this project has been a discovery which has enabled me to ‘travel in the thinking that writing produces’ (St. Pierre 2002: 60).

**Analysing bodies and body work**

The ‘data’ derived from qualitative interviews in my project is not approached from a humanist perspective which sees research participants as stable and individual selves, providing access to their ‘authentic’ selves of experiences (Sandelowski 2002). Post-modern feminist approaches to analysing qualitative data enables an understanding that
what participants say ‘should not be taken as evidence of their experience, but only as a form of talk…that represents a culturally available way of packaging experience’ (Kitzinger 2004: 116). A Deleuzian perspective is concerned with opening towards the multiple or the many rather than the few, and my approach to the data and analysis intends to follow this approach. Blumenthal (1999), along with other feminist researchers emphasise the multiplicity and variations within and across human identities, rather than a focus on the individual participant’s interview data as being compatible with the representation of a coherent ‘self’. This means that in my approach to the analysis of data in my project, I am concerned with opening towards the multiple and towards difference.

Working from a Deleuzian perspective, change is understood as inevitable and always already in the process of occurring, and the relations, affects and connections between bodies and entities cannot be known in advance. This means that when analysing data from this position, the whole series of events and connections that surround the body are relevant. As Bray and Colebrook (1998) argue, an analysis of the anorexic body, for example would examine the specific social conditions surrounding the body, including discourses of eating disorders, moral discourses, diagnostic frameworks and the biomedical discursive practices encountered. By focusing on these connections, the analysis ‘would consider the body of the anorexic as one productive event among others in a network of relations, not as the stage or screen on which some predetermined cultural neurosis plays itself out yet one more time’ (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 62). This example opens a space for practical analysis in this project, linking gender and bodies as concepts to gender and bodies as they are experienced through body work practices. Analysing the specific practices and events that form bodies in this study such as cosmetic surgery, weights training and a multitude of other practices, enables an analysis of what bodies can do, how they connect and affect and are affected in the context of the unstable assemblages that form them.

Deleuze’s thought invites us to engage and experiment with shifts in intensities. Merceica and Merceica argue in their research on disability that when a person with a disability states ‘this school is not inclusive’, these words bring about a shift in intensities;
something happens to the world’ (2010: 86). If this statement is recognised and approached as amounting to a ‘shift in intensities’, they argue that this creates an experience in which the researcher and researched engage with each other and both affect and are affected (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 86). The mapping out of these intensities is thus crucial to research, to enable a focus on ‘experimentation, engagement, and constant becoming’ (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 86). They argue that ‘without this the researcher and the knowledge they produce remains layered and stratified. Deleuze enables a rethinking of thought in part by his development of new concepts. These are not models for thought or research ‘but open possibilities for them’ (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 87).

Bogard argues that what can be drawn from Deleuze and Guattari is ‘a partial sociology, not in any negative sense of that term, but a montage of connections (to art, to philosophy and literature); a sociology without pretentions to unity or universality, which does not settle for a relativity of truth, but posits a truth of relativity and difference’ (Bogard 1998: 73). These examples show how the concepts drawn from Deleuze can be engaged with in qualitative, empirical research, in which a concern for and exploration of the affects, relations and intensities of interview encounters are paramount in opening up possibilities and change.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the epistemological, methodological and practical considerations involved in exploring bodies and experiences of body work. The chapter began with an extension of the ontological and epistemological groundings informed by Deleuze’s ‘ethology’ and framework for understanding the body that were introduced in chapter two. In examining the ways bodies are understood and experienced through body work practices, this research sets out to explore the ongoing intra-actions of the body and its environment, and how these mediate the body’s capacities and/or limitations. The onto-epistemological approach informing this project understands that knowing cannot be separated from being and as a result, knowledge about the world is produced from being part of the world (Barad 2007: 88). Because of this, we do not pre-exist our intra-actions
with the world (Barad 2007: 160). As a result, the body is conceptualised as an ongoing process; as formed but not determined by the relations or forces it connects or engages with; as defined by its capacity to affect and be affected. Maximising a body’s capacity for affect, for Deleuze, is an ethical imperative.

Methods of ‘rhizomatic’ research (see Merceica & Merceica 2010; St. Pierre 1997, 2002; Ringrose 2011; Hultman & Taguchi 2010; Mazzei 2011) taken up by researchers following a Deleuzian approach are concerned with exploring the intensities, relations and affects between bodies, including bodies in the research encounter (such as in interviewing, in this project). The focus of such research is on becomings, changes, possibilities for newness; seeing the body as a group of forces and intensities in place of approaches which ‘focus exclusively in terms of things and their qualities’ (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 88). The epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches explored in this chapter contribute to developing a methodology of becoming (Mazzei & McCoy 2011: 506).

In this chapter I also discussed the methodological implications of using this approach, including experience and affect and the use of in-depth semi-structured interviewing as a method of rhizomatic research. In-depth interviewing is a method that enables experiences and affects to be engaged with, and I suggest that where interviewing allows a (partial) exploration of forces and intensities, interviewing becomes a rhizomatic method. In rhizomatic research, the researcher, like the participant, is understood as in processes of becoming; of affecting and being affected. I discussed my own embodied presence in the interview encounters, and the ways my own physicality affected interviews, particularly in the example of Isabelle’s observation of my body. I also discussed the analysis of interviews through exploring the intensities and complexities of the interview encounters through writing (Holloway & Jefferson 2000). The methodological processes discussed in this chapter continue to advance new possibilities for doing research from sociological and feminist perspectives based on the theoretical frameworks and concepts of Deleuze.
The next chapters focus on the key themes that arose in interviews for how participants understood and described experiencing their bodies and body work practices. Based on participants’ descriptions and understandings of theirs and others’ bodies, body work practices connect to broader social processes such as gender, individualised health discourses and consumer culture logic. Chapter five discusses how gender intersects with body work practices, and explores how the data can be understood from a Deleuzian approach to bodies. Chapter six introduces the concept of affect in analysing participants’ experiences of how body work practices such as exercise feel, and what this means for how their bodies are lived. Chapter seven develops this approach to analysing affects and relations further, with a focus on how the intensities of practices of body work such as cosmetic surgery or being ‘addicted’ to exercise mediate the ways bodies are lived. These three chapters are structured in a way which enables a development of Deleuzian concepts throughout the chapters towards an analysis of how the relations and affects of participants’ body work practices comprise the body’s possibilities for living, and enable an exploration of what the body can do.
Chapter five: Exploring gender and body work

This chapter explores the central questions in the methodology, concerned with the knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies that are produced through body work practices. The specific focus of this chapter however is on gender, and addresses the research question of how gender intersects with body work practices, and how this can be understood from a Deleuzian perspective. The ways that gender is involved in ‘becoming otherwise’, and is involved in mediating the possibilities for how the body is lived is also engaged with in this chapter. Gender is an important frame for analysis in this project, because much body work is discussed by participants in the context of binary gender logic. Gender, where it operates as a dominant and normalising force based on binary logic, is a binary machine (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). In many cases, gender as a ‘binary machine’ structures participants’ understandings and descriptions of theirs and others’ bodies; yet many participants also problematise and complicate binaristic ideas about gender in how their bodies are lived.

I theorise gender in this thesis as a structuring category, as both materially experienced and discursively produced. Following Barad’s (2007) theorisation, I understand gender and bodies as enfolded into, and produced through, one another. In this thesis, gender is explored as a molar and normalising category, and is lived out in complex ways. I understand the intelligibility and materiality of gender as depending on ‘changing dynamics including intra-actions with particular material-discursive practices that define it’ in its local context (Barad 2007: 243). Body work practices are a central way that gender is performed and negotiated materially in the broader context of prevailing neoliberal discourses of individualistic health and wellbeing.

In this chapter I explore the ways that although gender is powerful in affecting how bodies are lived, the ‘movement of differing and the possibility of becoming otherwise’ is never excluded (Currier 2003: 332). Here I use the concepts of affect and becoming to explore participants’ possibilities for ‘becoming otherwise’. In using these concepts, what is crucial is whether there is an intensification of affect (which closes down possibilities
for becoming-other) or the multiplication of affects, which opens up, extends out and creates new possibilities for living. These negotiations are necessarily complex, but the opening of complexity enables broadened understandings and explorations of bodies and what is possible.

First in this chapter, some of the binaristic overarching ideas about bodies and gender, as discussed by the participants in this study are explored. I discuss the ways participants engage with gender, and how gender can be understood through the concept of becoming. I do not interpret the participants’ descriptions of their bodies and body work as ‘representations’ of them, or as providing access to their ‘authentic’ experiences (Sandelowski 2002). Rather, in analysis I pay particular attention to the ways they describe connecting with other bodies and social relations, and how these connections affect them. In subsequent chapters, I look at other forces that affect the body (such as health) in the ways bodies and body work are undertaken and experienced. Through a broad exploration of gender as it is conceptualised and experienced by participants in this chapter I intend to contextualise how gender is understood in relation to specific forms of body work in chapters to follow.

**Unhooking the binary machine: negotiating body work practices**

In this section I explore some of the characteristics of gender as a binary machine as described by participants in relation to men’s and women’s bodies and normative body work practices, as well as statements which ‘escape’ or shift binary logic; the ‘tiny things that destabilise the perception of a whole’ (Jackson 2010: 582): becoming.

Many forms of body work are designed to shape the body in normatively gendered ways, aligned with dichotomous understandings of men as active and thus ideally muscular, strong and powerful, and women as passive, valued for appearance and ideally slender (cf. Bordo 2003, 1999). These dichotomies framed participants’ discussions of ‘ideal’ men’s and women’s bodies; all engaged in some way with these normative, binary
categories of gender and bodies, in some cases endorsing all or some elements, or in critiquing and attacking aspects of these frames of gender and bodies.

To begin a discussion of body work practices, I asked participants to describe what they perceive ‘ideal’ men’s and women’s bodies to look like. Most participants explained that ‘ideal’ male bodies are muscular, requiring body work practices such as lifting weights; and ‘ideal’ ‘female bodies are ‘skinny’ or slender, requiring body work practices of dietary control and exercise. Although many participants did not endorse these ‘ideal’ figures, or do the sorts of body work required to ‘achieve’ these bodies, all identified them as the mainstream ideal. From a Deleuzian perspective, I understand these as molar categorisations of men’s and women’s bodies. Becoming happens in the middle of molar structures such as these. Molecular ‘escapes’, such as through the participants’ disavowals of these categories, destabilise the molar, as I will explore in the sections to come.

**Negotiating ‘ideal’ (gendered) bodies**

The following examples show how gender dichotomies frame participants’ discussions of ‘ideal’ men’s and women’s bodies. The comments below are how some participants describe the characteristics of ‘ideal’ women’s bodies:

Just like a slim toned figure, tanned, and long legs, and that sort of thing.  
(Sara, 24, dental nurse)

I think girls…they don’t want the curves. They want the shiny skinny sexy legs that they see on TV. They want that slender look, the skinny arms and not muscley but really skinny and thin, they want to look like models who look like that. (Adam, 23, footballer and student)

Tall, good body, skinny, definitely not fat. Good looking, I always picture like, long hair and all that sort of stuff. Good body means toned,
not too skinny, average size and fit, that sort of thing. (Clare, 18, VCE student)

I like, sort of, a thin, well not, thin, but sort of er…not under-thin but not large sort of a person. I think some degree of toning but not someone who’s muscley, or anything like that. (Tom, 24, firefighter)

Here, slenderness and muscle tone is emphasised as ideal. Women’s ideal bodies are described as ‘definitely not fat’, but not ‘under-thin’ or ‘too skinny’ though, either. Being ‘toned’ is described as important, but being ‘muscley’ is definitely to be avoided because of the connotations between muscleality and masculinity. Men’s ‘ideal’ bodies are described as ‘rugged’, ‘athletic’, ‘tall’ and ‘strong’.

The following are some descriptions of ‘ideal’ men’s bodies:

Someone who’s quite built, a chiseled jaw… I keep going back to what I think is attractive! Probably someone who’s relatively tall, built, not like overly muscular, but probably in between, not scrawny, toned I guess? (Kim, 24, administrative assistant)

Quite athletic, broad chest, um… yeah. I’d just probably say strong and athletic type image. (Sam, 26, nurse)

Tall. Sporty. Muscley. [giggles] (Clare, 18, VCE student)

They’ve got sort of the 6 pack [defined abdominal muscles] and the ‘V’ going [muscular torso] and the sculpted sort of body with the muscles and that. (Adam, 24, footballer/student)

Um, definitely toned! Not too big though in the arms, not too like buffed out and puffy, sometimes that looks a bit too fake, but definitely, toned stomach and toned arms, and…tall, not too tall but probably 6 foot. (Victoria, 23, marketing officer)
Being ‘built’ or having a ‘sculpted’ muscular body; along with looking ‘strong’ but ‘not too big’ (but also ‘not scrawny’) were all emphasised as characteristics of ‘ideal’ male bodies. Others also said ideal men’s bodies should be ‘definitely not fat’ or overweight, and this is a similarity between men’s and women’s idealised bodies: fat is reviled. I will return to this point in a later section of the thesis. The sorts of descriptions however between men’s and women’s ideal bodies above rely on gendered oppositions, and link more broadly to hegemonic categorisations (and oppositions) of gender (Connell 1995). Discussing ‘ideal’ bodies for men and women, Sam says:

I guess men are looking for that more athletic, muscley type of figure. Sort of harking back to the classic ‘man’ sort of thing, you know strong, make you feel safe, that sort of thing. You don’t want a guy who’s all prissy-looking. You kind of want a man to be a man. And on the flip side, I guess you want women to be petite, and dainty, and I don’t know. You don’t really want the butch, hard-looking woman that could beat the crap out of you! (Sam, 26, nurse)

Sam describes dichotomous gender ideals as ‘natural’, supported by bodily or biological differences between men and women. To exemplify his perception as how men and women’s bodies should look and how they should behave, he uses examples of the ‘prissy’ guy and the ‘butch, hard-looking woman’ as repellent, transgressive figures, in order to emphasise revered ‘classic’ and ‘natural’ versions of a man. Examples such as these have typically served to naturalise men’s and women’s bodily differences as the basis for gendered inequality (Grosz 1994). Traditional and patriarchal versions of femininity are also strongly asserted, when Sam argues ‘you want women to be petite and dainty’, and that it is his instinct to be ‘protective’ of women. These sorts of comments demonstrate the binary logic that underpins the ‘binary machine’ and molar gender categories. Few participants described gender and bodies in as strictly binarised ways as Sam. Before examining other participants’ numerous critiques and engagements with
these gender structures, I will explore the linkages of gender with another social assemblage, ‘health’.

Gender and men and women’s ‘biological’ or sexual differences strongly link with ideas about health in many of the participants’ examples, such as Sam’s. The notion of healthiness is contingent and ideological (Moore 2010: 107), as is gender, yet both operate as self-evident, natural individual attributes related to sexual difference. Studies by Saltonstall (1993) and Courtenay (2000) have also suggested that ‘doing health’ is aligned with ‘doing gender’, and that health related behaviours, practices and beliefs are a means of demonstrating and even reasserting traditional masculinities and femininities. Studies have found that men are almost as dissatisfied with their bodies as women (see Grogan 1999), and this has led some authors to conclude that cultural standards and body pressures represented in the media and advertising mean that men’s and women’s health are similarly affected: cultural and gendered images of beauty are ‘unhealthy’ for both men and women (see Grogan 1999, Bordo 1999). The body shapes represented as ideal in this context however are strongly gendered as participants in this study show, revolving around women striving to be ‘smaller’ through eating less and men wanting to be larger and more muscular (Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 9). The idealised figures which embody masculinity for men and femininity for women are paradoxically understood by some participants in this study as epitomising health, through ‘natural’ (dichotomous) gendered physicalities. As Anna explains:

I don’t know, to have quite a masculine figure for men and a feminine figure for girls may encourage people to…you know, to be healthier in a sense, to stay fit for guys and for girls to eat well in a sense, but I really, really don’t like it when it gets to an extreme point, I don’t like it when boys, you know the ultimate figure is to be huge and muscular for boys and the ultimate figure for girls is to be a waif and to be terribly, terribly thin, I think that’s definitely the wrong way to go about it when it gets to extremes, I just think the most important thing is just for people just to look after themselves in general. (Anna, 21, waitress)
Although Anna explains that the ‘extremes’ of ‘ultimate figures’ for men and women are often unhealthy, the differences in physiques between men and women are naturalised as self-evident embodiments of masculinity and femininity. They are defined as healthy and are ‘ideal’ through their ‘natural’ physical differences. Anna recommends that people should ‘just look after themselves in general’, but says at the beginning of the example that this may entail different practices for men and women, because of the implicit opposition between gender and bodies. Anna suggests that keeping fit for men is a specifically masculine form of ‘healthy’ body work, and that eating well is a specifically feminine form of ‘healthy’ body work for women. In further discussing the ‘ideal’ bodies of men and women, following on from her comments above, Anna says ‘everyone wants to look like that in a sense’, although ‘it’s not the most ideal body image that I would agree with’. This suggests that although she uses binarised gender categories to describe what she perceives as dominant images or stereotypes operating in society more broadly (that ‘everyone’ wants to look like), she does not straightforwardly endorse these images or gender categories as ‘ideal’.

**Critiquing the dominant ‘skinny’ ideal for women**

Although most participants engaged with dichotomous gender categories to describe men’s and women’s ideal bodies, many criticised what they perceived as the mainstream ‘ideal’. In relation to women’s bodies, many criticised the narrow standards of female beauty and attractiveness they perceived through presentations of ‘ideal’ women’s bodies, such as models and media personalities, and of women who are ‘too skinny’. Many described that they disapproved of this image of ‘ideal’ because it is ‘unhealthy’.

I don’t think someone has to be skinny, girls should have curves, they should have a bum, and boobs, and like, I’m a big fan of that, I’ve definitely got one so that works for me, I’m not disappointed that I’ve got curves…Um I don’t think girls need to be overly muscular or skinny, just like healthy I guess. (Steph, 21, waitress)
Others criticise the predominance of ‘skinny’ models as ‘ideal’ representations of women, advocating for a wider range of body shapes to be considered ‘ideal’ for women.

You see girls in magazines and on TV and blah, blah, blah, and you think ‘oh I want that body because she can fit into anything that she wants’. I mean, we get these girls in our life drawing classes and they’re just curvy and voluptuous, and they’re just so gorgeous. But if you put her next to the stick thin model anyone would choose the skinny girl. Like anytime of the day, but I’d rather just go for real women. And I think they’re just so gorgeous. It’s really hard for people, for them to see that I guess, because it’s like we’re brainwashed into thinking that skinny is the way to go, so yeah. It’s kind of hard to accept anything other than… (Angela, 18, graphic art student)

Angela engages with the images of women in magazines and on television, and that these images can make her ‘want that body’, to live that body. The girls in magazines and on TV are the dominant ideal images of a femininity and feminine bodies, that ‘anyone would choose’ above the voluptuous ‘real women’ in her life drawing class. Angela argues the strength of this image, saying ‘we’re brainwashed’ into wanting to be ‘skinny’, and that the power of those images mean that it is hard to accept anything else as being desirable. Through these comments, Angela problematises an aspect of dichotomous gender structures in which women’s bodies are ideally slender, emphasising that ‘real women’ are ‘just so gorgeous’.

The concept of health as it discussed by participants is clearly gendered, based on ‘natural’ sexual difference. Further complexities in participants’ definitions and described experiences of health are explored in chapter six. In the above examples, I have explored the ways that gender is involved in participants’ explanations of healthy bodies, and that although gender binaries figure prominently, they are often not wholly endorsed, or are often overtly criticised. Through Angela’s idealisation of ‘real women’ rather than ‘the
skinny girl’, she critiques and also extends the dominant standard of female beauty. Through Angela’s critique of molar images of femininity, she can be seen as involved in ‘opening up to difference’ (Fox 2002: 359), expanding the possibilities of acceptance of a broader range of bodies.

Kate’s description of women’s bodies is similarly critical of the dominant, binary standard:

With all the beauty magazines that are brought out these days, women are supposed to be a size 8 and they’re supposed to you know, be tall and slim and tanned and toned and all those sorts of things. And for me, I’m a size 6, and I sort of look at women who are really curvaceous as beautiful. I think curves are beautiful and I think people need to realise that, really everyone, everyone has a beautiful body, whether you’re a size 6 or a size 16… But for me I guess an ideal body would be, just someone who’s comfortable with their body. I just don’t think that people should be judged…it’s like, you can’t win! What is this ideal body, you know? But I guess for me it’s just someone who’s comfortable with their body. Yeah. (Kate, 24, nanny/administrative assistant)

Like Angela, Kate emphasises how limiting the narrow standards of ‘ideal’ femininity are such as those presented in beauty magazines, instead arguing that ‘everyone has a beautiful body’. Being ‘comfortable with your body’ is ideal, rather than conforming to an ideal image, as Kate describes. The possibilities for being ‘comfortable’, or accepting of one’s own body are much more open through Kate’s and Angela’s emphasis on broader ranges of body shapes as ‘gorgeous’ or ‘beautiful’. These statements expand the possibilities of how their bodies may be lived and experienced; and concomitantly, what their bodies can do.
These ‘openings’ to difference are micro, and involve the multiplication of affects regarding bodies: through broadening their perspectives on beauty and what shapes are ideal, Angela and Kate are more likely to view their own bodies in this context, and be less critical of their own bodies; to live with more possibilities for their bodies and body work practices. Angela’s and Kate’s comments could be analysed from a more traditional feminist perspective in terms of their capacity to ‘resist’ dominant standards of beauty as a result of ‘agency’. Their comments could also be used to argue that more inclusive and diverse representations of women’s bodies be used in the mainstream media. Both of these analyses would be relevant and pertinent. However, this research project is concerned not with discerning which images of women are ‘oppressive’, or which bodies have the agency to be able to resist them, or with looking for images or bodies which better ‘represent’ women, for example. As I have discussed in previous chapters through the work of Bray and Colebrook (1998), any attempts to ‘rescue’ women from negative, phallocentric representation is mired in yet another binary, where the body is the ‘other’ of discourse. Through expanding analysis to explore the intensities and molecular micro-textures that are operating to destabilise the molar, the focus shifts towards the complexities and possibilities at work, rather than following established paths of knowledge regarding women, bodies and images.

**Critiquing the dominant image of ‘muscularity’ for men**

Although the dominant image ‘ideal’ for men involves looking ‘sculpted’, muscular, ‘strong’ but ‘not too big’ (but also ‘not scrawny’) some participants (mainly women) did not endorse or reassert these images as ‘ideal’ to them. Sara, for example, described that there are few bodily differences between men’s and women’s ideal bodies, arguing ‘You want your guy to be toned, in shape. Like a woman.’ In this example, muscle tone, rather than muscle size or slenderness is described as important in her perceptions of the ‘ideal’ bodies of both men and women. In another example, Peter rather acridly critiques the muscularity he perceives as a requirement of ‘ideal’ men’s bodies:
Men’s bodies…ok muscular, lean, and always fucking tanned, right? Um… er… they always look like they’re coming from the beach, hanging out at the beach? Fuck yeah. [sarcastic] Yeah. (Peter, 27, barber)

Anna, as stated in an earlier example, says she does not approve of the ‘ultimate figure for men’ as ‘huge and muscular’:

I’m not a big fan of like huge bulging biceps or anything like that. I’m happy enough just to see a boy in skinny jeans to be totally honest with you! (Anna, 21, waitress)

A ‘boy in skinny jeans’ is an alternative ‘ideal’ male figure, outside of more traditional gender categories of tough, muscular masculinity. Similarly, Gillian says she prefers men ‘on the skinnier side’, rather than muscular:

Gillian: AFL players are a bit too muscley for me, and rugby definitely is way too big for me. I’m not really into big muscles. So, yeah. I don’t mind guys on the skinnier side than maybe, what everyone else thinks is ideal. I think in general, the ideal guy in mainstream society is maybe a little bit more muscley than what I have in my mind, or a little bit bigger.

Julia: Sure. Why do you think that is?

Gillian: I’m not sure, um…I don’t like overly aggressive men, and I don’t like macho, blokey, er…I don’t like those guys at all. And to me, I think that makes me a little bit different. Oh, not, you know, for a woman to say she doesn’t like aggressive men, that’s not different, but I don’t like er, the beer drinking, that kind of ideal masculinity, I just like a nice, quiet, decent guy. Um...yeah so, muscles aren’t, or the ideal of being protected isn’t my priority, so...yeah, not to say that muscley men are
aggressive, but muscles...are just unnecessary. Unless you’re an athlete. But for me in terms of attractiveness, I could do without big muscles. They’re just unnecessary! [laughing] (Gillian, 31, make-up artist)

Gillian perceives that the ‘ideal guy in mainstream society’ is too muscular, and that her version of an ‘ideal’ man’s body is less aligned with this traditional form located in binaristic gender structures. She likes ‘a nice, quiet, decent guy’ who is ‘on the skinnier side’, because she perceives more muscular men’s bodies as aligned with hegemonic masculinity and traits such as protectiveness or aggression. The ‘blokey’, ‘macho’, ‘beer-drinking’ is perhaps a particularly Australian description of hegemonic, binaristic masculinity. Although she acknowledges that muscular men are not necessarily aggressive, muscles, to Gillian (and many other participants) symbolise a type of masculinity which is embedded in a binaristic and dominant relation to traditional, slender femininity. Gillian’s critique of ‘ideal’ muscul arity can also be seen as a critique of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). Like Angela and Kate in the previous examples above, in proposing this critique, Gillian’s comments can be analysed as subtly opening up possibilities for masculinity other than the molar, muscular, masculinity.

In these examples participants critique the ‘ideal’ gendered images in mainstream culture. In some subtle, micro ways, they see bodies beyond their positioning in molar structure, and open new or broader understandings and possibilities of bodies to the ‘many rather than the few’ (Fox 2002: 359). In these examples, bodies in the abstract are discussed through the images of others’ bodies. The next sections discuss participants’ own bodies and body work practices.

Participants’ body work practices

The practices of body work undertaken by participants in this study varied greatly, but in many instances were structured or organised by gender. Exercise was an aspect of body work for almost all participants and included playing team sports (such as netball,
baseball and soccer); jogging; swimming; cycling; yoga and doing fitness classes at the
gym (such as ‘boxercise’ or ‘Zumba’). Only men spoke of going to the gym to lift or train
with weights however, and almost all (nine out of eleven) of the men practiced this form
of body work. Men as well as women spoke about being careful about their diet, such as
through avoiding fatty foods and eating ‘healthier’ fruit and vegetables or avoiding
carbohydrates to control their weight. Being ‘overweight’ or ‘fat’ was viewed by most
participants as unacceptable for men or women in broader society; although being
specifically ‘skinny’ or slender was understood as being more important to women’s
‘body image’ than men’s. Three women in this study spoke about eating disorders; two
(Beth and Isabelle) had suffered from an eating disorder, and Clare had a close friend
who had. Others though noted that the vast majority of those who suffer from eating
disorders are women. Cosmetic surgery was also discussed as being primarily undertaken
by women, though Isabelle said she had noticed an increase in male patients at the
cosmetic surgery day clinic at which she is employed. Isabelle and Kate had undergone
cosmetic surgical procedures. Other forms of body work included wearing makeup,
which all of the women (and no men) wore. Isabelle, Anna, Gillian, Victoria and Beth
said they wore makeup on most days, and described wearing it as generally important to
feeling ‘good’ or ‘comfortable’. Sara, Angela, Kate, Kim, Clare and Steph said they liked
to wear makeup sometimes, but also felt comfortable not wearing it, such as when going
to the gym or to the shops. Most women, and no men, also discussed ‘tanning’ (from the
sun, solarium or fake tanning creams) as a form of body work they undertake sometimes.
Hair styling was discussed by most women, and two men, Simon and Paul.

The practices that were most clearly defined and associated with gender were lifting
weights, which was done only by men; and wearing makeup, undergoing cosmetic
surgery or suffering eating disorders related only to women in this study. I will now
explore the ways in which these practices are understood as gendered by the participants
and link with broader cultural and social discourses of gender before going on to discuss
some of the paradoxes and complications involved with these seemingly rigid gendered
forms of body work. Clearly, there are aspects of participants’ body work that are
stratified by gender in this study. The ways that participants explain their body work and
negotiate broader gender structures are explored further in the remainder of this chapter, with a particular emphasis on the micro-processes that ‘escape’, since ‘there is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organizations’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 216).

**Negotiating the ‘pressures of femininity’**

This section explores how some women in this study describe their practices of body work in the context of broad structures of femininity, and links gender with other social assemblages and contemporary social contexts, including consumer culture and sexuality.

Many explained that the different sorts of body work undertaken by men and women relates to different social expectations or ‘pressures’ around men’s and women’s bodies. Men and women emphasised that women are judged more for their appearance than men, linking in with broader gender and heterosexual discourses in which women’s beauty is central in attracting a male partner. As Kate explains:

> I get caught up in ‘this is how I’m supposed to look, this is what I’m supposed to be’. And it’s really crappy. It gives you that low self esteem. And very rarely do you see men, like it’s very rare for a man to have an eating disorder… obviously the pressure for women to look really skinny, they cave under that pressure and they go ‘oh I need to go and have plastic surgery, I need to stop eating, I need to go and do all these things’. Men, not so much. You don’t really see a man who’s had a nose job. It’s not as much of a thing. But for women it is. And women I think are scared. Like ‘my husband’s gonna leave me if I don’t look younger, or if I’m not this’. It becomes less about who they are and their personality than about how they look. (Kate, 24, administrative assistant/nanny).

Kate discusses that she perceives women, like her, get ‘caught up’ in cultural and societal expectations of gender and bodies, which communicate how she is ‘supposed to
look…supposed to be’. Kate criticises the gendered expectations surrounding men’s and women’s bodies, and the responsibility women bear in relation to their bodies, and how this affects their lives more broadly. Kate describes that women perceive the need to ‘look really skinny’, have plastic surgery or a ‘nose job’, or ‘stop eating’, or ‘look younger’ because women are ‘scared’ they will lose their partners if their ‘attractiveness’ diminishes. Kate is critical of the underlying assumption that a woman’s appearance is indicative of ‘who she is’ or her personality; and argues that societally, men’s bodies do function as symbolic for their entire being in the way women’s bodies do.

Kate argues that because men are not under the same ‘pressure’ to maintain or care for their appearance they do not suffer from eating disorders or do not undergo cosmetic surgery in anywhere near the same numbers as women. (The ways that cosmetic surgery and eating disorders are discussed and experienced by Kate, Isabelle and Beth are explored in depth in chapter seven.) As McRobbie (2009: 118) has argued, ‘female body anxieties are intricately tied up with the high value which society places on spectacularly coded styles of feminine beauty and sexuality’. The ways that bodies are lived by both women and men may involve such ‘anxieties’ (as will be discussed), and many of the women, including Kate, highlight the ways they feel constrained through societal pressure to live up to such ‘spectacular’ feminine forms of beauty.

Other participants say they feel ‘pressure’ to monitor their appearance because of the broader societal expectation that women are viewed as ‘on display’ (Davis 1995):

I think the media places a lot of pressure on women to look a certain way, to be a certain way…and guys don’t really get that. (Kim, 24, administrative assistant)

Kim argues that women’s appearance, and appropriate ‘femininity’, are both communicated as a ‘pressure’ or expectation through the media. Similarly, Paul criticises consumer culture and the fashion and beauty industries for contributing to women feeling
‘under pressure’ to live up to idealised forms of femininity, creating a societal context in which there is ‘more in the world for women to worry about’:

For women, of course there’s just so much more of an industry towards women and appearance. I mean there’s make up, there’s diet, there’s clothes and whatever. From wherever that came from or whatever that’s based on, there’s definitely…more…um…more in the world for women to worry about… (Paul, 32, sound editor)

Gillian also discusses that the theme of women being under more ‘pressure’ links with popular and consumer culture including the media, advertising, beauty and fashion industries, but also extends her comments to the wider experiences and actions of men and women:

Gillian: [answers immediately] Oh definitely women, definitely [have it harder]. Yep. Oh, just the pressure. Well maybe it’s the pressure they put on themselves? Coupled with pressure from society, pressure from men. And of course, I think in the media, I think women’s beauty and physical attributes are much more, there’s much more importance placed on that than there is on men’s appearance. So. Yeah, I think definitely women have a harder time… (Gillian, 31, make-up artist)

Gillian’s view that there is more importance placed on a woman’s appearance than a man’s appearance is a key aspect of many of the other comments regarding gender and bodies made by participants in this study, by both men and women. This view links with feminist critiques of the appearances ‘required’ of women’s bodies (such as Bordo 2003, Bartky 1999 and Wolf 1999), which implicate the media, men and society broadly in the gender structures which continue to promote idealised and highly stylised images of women and femininity. Gillian also individualises her experience, blaming herself for ‘putting pressure on myself and putting ideas in my head’, despite having just criticised men’s and the media’s roles in this context. There are many factors at work in Gillian’s example which link broadly to the ways gender relations, images and the media are
negotiated (Featherstone 2010, Coleman 2009), particularly in an individualised neoliberal context in which people are encouraged to problematise and monitor their own predicaments rather than laying blame elsewhere (McRobbie 2009).

Gillian, Paul, Kim and Kate critique the context of women’s body work, and argue that because women are obliged to care more about their appearance than men, they are more likely to undertake more ‘extreme’ forms of body work such as cosmetic surgery, or to suffer from eating disorders. These critiques do not ‘free’ them or ‘liberate’ them from these contexts, but through their arguments, Kate, Kim, Gillian and Paul are involved in an opening to difference and to becoming, away from the molar organisation of gender. Through articulating some of the elements of gender discourse which often remain silent, such as the unequal requirements of beauty for women, the perception of the ‘whole’ binary machine that is gender discourse is destabilised. Jackson (2010) argues that statements which shift binary logic in ways such as those above betray the inherent instability of molar structures such as gender, and can be termed ‘becoming’. Any statement, comment or action that destabilises and undermines binary logic, no matter how small, is directed towards experimentation, difference and change, rather than what is already known. Such movement away from the molar and binary machines can be understood as becoming. In this way, through the participants’ comments and discussions of gender and body work above, gender is in the process of becoming otherwise.

In the above examples, I have explored the ways that becoming is possible in relation to gender. The binary machine also closes down possibilities for becoming however. Through gender discourses, binary relations can also be intensified. We can see the way that the binary machine of gender is intensified, rather than opened, in Isabelle’s example:

If a woman’s a tradie and she looks a bit butch, you don’t see her as feminine, so…people don’t really, women don’t really want that…Some people say it’d be easier to be a man, but I don’t wanna be a man. I like getting all dressed up, looking nice, looking pretty. It’s a lot of work but I like it. (Isabelle, 24, beauty therapist; emphasis added)
Spectacular femininity enables one to be recognised as feminine, and to be ‘visible’, but by endorsing this form of femininity, embedded in the binary machine of gender, other possibilities for femininity and bodily experience are closed down. Isabelle explains that women have to ‘do more (body) work’ than men because it’s expected that ‘women always try and look good’, and that she enjoys doing this. This must be strictly enacted however, since failure to perform this is to risk looking a ‘bit butch’, which ‘people, women don’t really want’. A woman with ‘masculine’ elements of appearance (such as a ‘tradie’ who may not be ‘done up’, ‘looking pretty’) transgresses the binarised conceptualisations of gender for a woman. This is an intensification of the gender binary: gender relations are reterritorialised and closed down. Falling outside of clear categorisations of gender and femininity carries the consequences of being labeled as ‘butch’, and embodying a figure that ‘no one really wants’, that may result in invisibility (‘you don’t see her as feminine’). The ‘cost’ of being stigmatised in these ways is evident in Isabelle’s ‘butch tradie’ and Sam’s ‘butch, hard-looking’ woman, and links with the ways that heterosexuality is implicated through gender binaries, since the label ‘butch’ is derogatory slang in Australia for female homosexuality. Isabelle and Sam’s imaginary yet maligned ‘butch’ female figures also clearly point to implied heterosexuality sustained through the binary machine, wherein heterosexuality is presumed and immutable and all other possibilities for sexuality are closed off (Butler 1993). These binaries underpinning Isabelle and Sam’s examples are crucial to the maintenance of heterosexuality as seemingly ‘natural’ and self evident, reinscribed in the binary machine.

The range of possibilities for bodies beyond the molar or binary machines depends on whether affects are multiplied or intensified. Exploring the range of possibilities available to bodies involves assessing whether affects can be multiplied or opened up, or whether affects are closed down and intensified (Fox 2002). Isabelle’s and Sam’s insistence that women must dress and behave in a ‘feminine’ way in order to be recognised as women (and humans) intensifies and reasserts the binary machine of gender, limiting other possibilities for living through gender. In this way, gender affects the body’s possibilities. Where gender is questioned and interrogated by participants, for example, it is opened to
difference and to change, no matter how micro. Understandings of gender become more open to new and different possibilities for living beyond binary organisations of gender. However, where the molar, binary machine of gender is endorsed and reiterated it is intensified, and possibilities for living gender differently are closed down. The intersections of femininity and consumer culture are explored in the next section.

**Femininity, visibility and consumer culture**

Sara, like Isabelle describes the ways that some women are more visible or noticeable than others in a social space such as a shopping centre:

Sara: If there’s a girl that’s got a lot of make up on, walking around shopping, and with a lot of make up on and really dressed up, you can tell they look after themselves? I think you can tell on some people [what sort of person they are]. I think you look at them twice because they’re so…done up so well, but it doesn’t mean I want to look like that.

Julia: Yeah. What about other things… does it go the other way, if people look the opposite of that?

Sara: Yeah, you don’t really look at them. You don’t acknowledge them at all really. Cos there’s nothing to, there’s nothing special to see, they’re just casually dressed and hair tied back or whatever. I think it’s just the people who do themselves up really nicely they sort of stand out. (Sara, 26, dental assistant)

Sara describes what she perceives to be the broader societal context of femininity in which ‘a girl with a lot of make up on, really dressed up…stands out’. This example also links in with theories which argue that social space is organised around opportunities for display and surveillance. In these social spaces, some are more visible than others. According to Featherstone, the display of consumer goods such as in
shopping centres, department stores and supermarkets, encourages voyeuristic consumption in which ‘the individual is increasingly on display as he/she moves through the field of commodities on display’ (1982: 19). Practices of body work, such as wearing make up and other techniques associated with ‘doing yourself up nicely’, as Sara says, are part of ‘an expanding market for the sale of commodities’ in consumer culture (Featherstone 1982: 19).

McRobbie argues that it is increasingly difficult to be visible and ‘to function as a female subject without subjecting oneself to those technologies of self that are constitutive of the spectacularly feminine’ (2009: 60). Sara’s example links with McRobbie’s argument, when she contrasts a ‘girl’ who wears a lot of make up and who is ‘dressed up’ and as being worthy of looking at ‘twice’, with the woman who does not display femininity in this highly cultivated way, who is dressed casually, hair tied back with ‘nothing special to see’ who ‘you don’t acknowledge at all really’. McRobbie argues, ‘the global fashion beauty complex charges itself with the business of ensuring that appropriate gender relations are guaranteed’ (2009: 61). Sara, however, dissociates herself from this image of femininity, saying ‘it doesn’t mean I want to look like that’. Here there is a disconnection between the binary gender structure, which Sara is describing in the example in the shopping centre, and herself and the way she wants to ‘look’. The binary gender structure would assume that all women want to be as spectacularly feminine as in Sara’s example, but of course, all women do not. This can be understood as an example of a micro ‘escape’ from the binary organisation of gender.

A focus on the micro-processes of instability and change that are inherent in molar structures such as gender recognises that bodies are not contained and completely reducible to molar understandings of gender and the subject (Armstrong 2002). Exploring the instances when the broader structures of gender frame body work practices are critiqued, or not endorsed by women in this study is a way of engaging with the molecular, the ‘tiny things that destabilise the perception of a whole’ (Jackson 2010: 582). Kate, for example discusses the sorts of requirements of femininity in the ‘fashion-beauty complex’ (McRobbie 2009) that she often ‘can’t be bothered with’:
Women are expected to have their nails done, have their eyebrows waxed, have their hair dyed, have a tan, have this, have white teeth, have, you know what I mean? I get so tired [of it]. Half the time I just go ‘uh uh, I can’t be bothered waxing my eyebrows, I can’t be bothered, you know. It’s pretty, sort of…. I dunno, you wish that you could that there were more sort of natural looking women out there. (Kate, 24, nanny/administrative assistant)

Where Kate laments the amount of beauty work involved in consumer culture femininity, Isabelle in an earlier example said that similar beauty practices are ‘a lot of work, but I like it’. Similar to Kate, Angela questions why girls would bother wearing a lot of make-up:

I know a few other girls from school and they have so much make-up on and I think ‘why go to all that trouble?’ It’s like a mask covering their face, but then some girls just don’t care [about wearing make-up], like genuinely don’t care [laughing] and I like that. (Angela, 18, graphic arts student)

Angela is critical of girls who wear a lot of make-up and does not understand what would motivate them to go to so much effort. Instead, she likes that ‘some girls just don’t care’ about wearing make up. In another criticism of feminised ‘beauty work’, Kim says she sometimes feels like shaving off all of her hair to escape from the pressures surrounding femininity and beauty:

Sometimes like, I wish I could shave all my hair off, because that has a lot to being a woman, women have the long hair, and guys have short hair. There’s just so much emphasis placed on women and their hair… In an ideal world, I wouldn’t have to make an effort. I’d still look good, but wouldn’t have to make an effort. I’d love that! Yeah. I guess since leaving high school I’ve sort of understood that you only look a certain way, but that’s not who you really are… looks are nothing without brains. (Kim, 24, administrative assistant)
Kim explains that her occasional impulse to shave off all of her hair is associated with a desire to escape from the ‘effort’ and maintenance involved in feminine body work. Although she says she wishes she did not have to make the efforts required by the cultural norms of feminine beauty and body work, she says she still wants to ‘look good’, but then negates the importance of looking good by arguing that looks are not, or should not be important in ‘who you really are’, emphasising that ‘looks are nothing without brains’. Although none of these examples from Kate, Angela or Kim wholly reject or deconstruct feminine beauty practices and the broader gender relations which underpin them, they do complicate and critique, in small ways, the sorts of body work practices they undertake and relate them to broader expectations of femininity. Through their forms of body work, Kate, Angela and Kim engage with broader gender discourses. Their bodies and discursive practices associated with gender are enfolded, and produced through, one another (Barad 2007). The negotiations and intra-actions between bodies and gender structures produce both. Bodies, because they connect in this way, are inherently productive, rather than passive.

Bodies are produced through, but not determined by, their relations (Coleman 2009: 214). Understanding bodies in this way entails a focus on these connections and relations. The ways that Kate, Angela and Kim connect with binary gender structures through their criticisms of some feminine requirements of beauty can be understood as molecular, comprising a slight shift away from the acceptance and practices of molar gender structures. According to Deleuze, such comments entail the opening of new possibilities for action and productivity. Kate, Angela and Kim’s comments do not enable them to literally ‘escape’ gendered subjectification, but rather point to the micro events that have the potential to destabilise dominant gender narratives, small as these ‘escapes’ may be.

**Gender relations and the ‘visible’ male body**

The examples so far have explored the ways women’s bodies and women’s gendered forms of body work in this project are framed by broader (and unequal) social and
cultural expectations and discourses. Men’s bodies, just as the women’s, are framed by
gender, which affects their practices of body work. Gender is understood in this project as
a structuring narrative which ‘contains us within a logical evolution of molar forms and
subjects’ which we cannot simply eliminate, yet we are not trapped or reducible only to
such narratives (Armstrong 2002: 50). ‘Something always escapes’ dominant narratives,
and ‘returns to reshuffle the molar segment’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). An analysis of
the ‘in-between, of what is produced when things are brought into relation’ (Armstrong
2002: 50) is a way of exploring these ‘escapes’ or becomings; a study of both our
necessary locatedness on the molar strata and within gender structures, and of the
inevitable forces and intensities that are inherent. This section explores some of the
current contexts relating to gender structures in which the men in this study are located,
as well as the ‘individual responses to becoming’ through tiny shifts which destabilise the
gender structure (Jackson 2010: 582) and enable new possibilities in how the body may
be lived.

A particular feature of the current social and cultural context is that men too are
‘increasingly drawn into the consumer culture body image game and are becoming more
critical and vulnerable about their bodies’ (Featherstone 2010: 202). Although the
(young) female body continues to be particularly visible in the context of consumer
culture through what McRobbie (2009) terms ‘spectacular femininity’ and the emphasis
on slenderness, the young athletic and muscular male body embodies ‘spectacular
masculinity’ and is increasingly visible in popular culture and the media (Bordo 2003,
Featherstone 2010, Turner 1992, Mulvey 1975). Consumer culture is a central factor in
men’s concern for the body’s appearance as men are increasingly ‘invited to enjoy the
dubious equality of consumers in the market place’; a position which women have
traditionally occupied (Featherstone 1982: 22). Consumer culture is ‘obsessed with the
body’, as the cosmetic, beauty, fitness and leisure industries are geared towards
marketing the ever-expanding sale of commodities associated with the body’s appearance
and ‘wellbeing’ (Featherstone 1982: 2010). The body in consumer culture is involved in a
complex relationship with images, advertising and desire. These factors are central in
understanding the current concern for, and focus on the body for young men as well as women (Featherstone 2010: 197).

Along with the invitation to care about the body’s appearance and to consume products to aid in the body’s aesthetic improvement, a growing emphasis on individual responsibility for health is also central in understanding the rise in a concern for the body’s appearance in general (Gill et al. 2005, Crawford 1980). Bell and McNaughton however argue that men’s current concern with their bodies is not particularly new, and that men have not been immune to aesthetic pressures for some time, particularly surrounding ‘fatness’ (2007: 112). The configurations of consumer culture and spectacular forms of femininity and masculinity are important because they are implicated in the mediating forces which work to form the body as an event (Budgeon 2003). It is in this context of increasing attention and ‘visibility’ of the (young, athletic, muscular) male body that body work is experienced by some of the men in this project, such as Adam.

Adam is 23 years old and plays Australian Rules football professionally in the Victorian Football League (VFL), the state level below the elite Australian Football League (AFL). Adam is also a part time Arts student at University and works as a voice actor in radio advertisements. In describing the sort of work involved in attaining a ‘football body’, he says it took him about three years to ‘go from being a skinny guy’ to having the ‘sculpted body’ of a professional footballer. Adam discusses how his body shape as an athlete enables him to be ‘noticed’:

I guess before I started playing football, as an 18 or 19 year old, I wanted that body that would get the girls I guess! I’d go to the gym 5-6 days a week to work on that. That was it for me, for me it was just a lot of gym work. The more I did that the better results I would see, so that was my motivation - I want a body that gets me noticed. And that did start to get me noticed, by girls especially. That was my main objective I think at the time.

Specific male body shapes are becoming more ‘visible’: athletes such as AFL footballers and soccer players’ physiques are widely described by participants in this study as being
most attractive and ‘ideal’ for men. Although Adam’s aim is to have a body that will get him ‘noticed’ by women, the athletic and muscular male figure is also noticed as ‘attractive’ in homosexual relations, as Simon described a body like Adam’s as attractive and ideal to him. Many participants, including Simon, explain that muscles are ‘ideal’ for men’s bodies because muscles are seen to denote ‘health’ for men. In this context, as a player in the VFL, Adam understands that his physique draws the attention of women (and men) because he fits the masculine ‘ideal’.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as Solomon-Godeau has pointed out, ‘contemporary representations of masculinity, either in elite or cultural mass forms, reveal significant correspondences to older visual paradigms of ideal masculinity’ (1997: 21-2). Traditional gender relations are thus often embodied through forms of body work which are undertaken to more closely physically resemble the ideal (and opposing) physical representations of gender. The relations surrounding the increasing visibilities of men’s bodies (of a rigorously controlled shape and size) are important for understanding the ways that young men’s bodies may be experienced and lived, particularly given that masculinity and men’s bodies have often not been included in analyses of gendered experiences. As Bell and McNaughton argue, it is important to locate men’s experiences in gender relations, given that men (and particularly white, middle class men) ‘enjoy both the privilege and the curse of invisibility’ (2007: 112). Adam’s desire to be visible or ‘noticed’ for his masculinity may be a particularly new element of masculinity, linked with hegemonic masculinity through sports such as AFL.

In terms of the male body’s increasing visibility, Dworkin and Wachs note that ‘objecthood’ for both men and women becomes ‘part of the experience of idealised subjeclthood in consumer culture’ (Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 160). Dworkin and Wachs present a nuanced and detailed analysis of gendered bodies in the contexts of healthism and consumer culture, yet their analysis rests primarily on the dynamics of bodies as lived through a subjeclhood/objecthood dichotomy. This may be useful in providing a critical analysis of the discursive conditions of consumer culture, yet is limited in that it relies upon a reductive dualist ontology of bodies.
Although some aspects of visibility and the status of the male body may be changing (Dworkin & Wachs 2009), such as in Adam’s desire to have a body that will ‘get him noticed’, the politics of meaning around men’s and women’s bodies in this context are different. As Paul explains, visibility is not part of the discourse on masculinity, though it may be part of a man’s embodied experience:

I don’t know, but…I certainly don’t think about my appearance anywhere near as much as women I know. I don’t have to. I can if I want, but it sort of starts to stress me out after a very small amount of time. (Paul, 32, sound editor)

Paul can choose to think about his appearance (and he may start to feel ‘stressed’ about this if he does think about it), but is not obliged or expected to because this is not part of the dominant discourse on masculinity. Paul’s comment that when he does think about it, it ‘stresses [him] out’ quite quickly indicates that a concern for his appearance nevertheless affects him (and other men, such as Adam). There are palpable gendered inequalities however underpinning these examples of visibility due to the different social meanings attached to masculinity and femininity, and the costs associated with (in)visibility in different contexts. Gendered inequalities frame and contextualise the body work of men and women in this study, and connect to broader social and cultural discourses on gender. These are powerful in mediating the ways bodies may be lived in many contexts, but in the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the numerous complexities and similarities in men’s and women’s body work that are largely obscured by gender discourses.

In many participants’ statements, appearance and ‘beauty’ are constructed as feminine concerns. In the interviews however, a concern for the body’s appearance is not limited to women. Many men in this study also discussed feeling ‘pressure’ related to their bodies. Men are not immune to body concerns, and Bell and McNaughton (2007) argue that whilst early feminist scholarship has been invaluable in exposing the ways in which the female body has been constructed, sexualised and oppressed, there has been little
attention theorising how gender structures detrimentally affect men’s bodies too. Bell and McNaughton (2007) describe that there is a common tendency in feminist literature to overemphasise the differences between male and female perceptions of body image, despite significant evidence, such as the Mission Australia (2010) study8, that male and female body image concerns have increased in tandem over the past century (2007: 117). They also make the important point that the cultural and social dimensions of body image are part of popular discourse on women’s (and not men’s) bodies (Bell & McNaughton 2007: 118).

The participants in this study’s readiness to discuss body image and women being ‘under more pressure’ than men can be seen as linked to ways in which feminist critiques of gender and the body have become more widespread. According to Bell and McNaughton (2007: 120), the idea that being body dissatisfaction is a normative aspect of femininity or women’s experience has been taken up broadly. Following Kimmel’s (2005) argument, an approach to gender and the body in which men and masculinity are also visible is crucial. I will return to these themes in subsequent sections concerning the embodied parallels between men and women and their affective experiences of body work, which to some extent operate outside of the pervasive gender dichotomies which I have explored in this chapter so far.

**Embodying ‘ideal’ masculinity and body ‘pressure’**

Adam explains that he feels pressure to maintain and keep his footballer’s body for reasons that extend beyond his capacity to play the game of football. Even if he stopped playing football and thus no longer required the ‘muscle, sculpted body’ for practical reasons, he ‘wouldn’t want to lose that body’ for aesthetic reasons:

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8 In a survey of 29,000 Australians aged 12-24, body image was listed as a key issue of personal concern for young women and men at very similar levels. This study showed that both young women and men see body image as an important personal issue.
I think, after being at this level for a few years now, and now people, well how I think people now perceive me and us [footy players] with the muscles and that fit-looking body, I don’t wanna lose…lose that just because I’m not playing football. Sometimes I actually feel a bit of pressure to keep it because I don’t wanna, don’t want to be the guy who did have that body, who did play at that level and then let it go. I think there’s, I put pressure on myself to keep that body, to remain fit. Because I enjoy being fit, I enjoy really being fit physically and mentally, yeah I think I’d want to. (Adam, 23, VFL footballer and student)

Adam has sculpted a footballer’s body, and in doing so, now embodies what some in this study have described as an ‘ideal’ representation of masculinity. There are parallels between Adam’s statements and some of the previous examples from Gillian and Kate relating to feeling ‘pressure’ to maintain or control the body’s appearance in the context of a gendered ideal. Like Gillian, Adam identifies himself as the instigator of that ‘pressure’, although it is clearly related to broader discourses of gender and hegemonic masculinity (through the idealisation of muscles) associated with the athletic male body.

Jason, another footballer (though not professional) works in the accounting office of an AFL club. He describes AFL footballers as embodying idealised masculinity, and as having the ideal male body shape that he wants to emulate:

Jason: Well, being a footballer, I spose, er, and working in a football club, growing up, you know, you idolise your footballers, like I can admit that, like not now, that’s sort of changed, um…so…when we see those players running around and all that puts, kind of, an image in your mind, like ‘oh that’s what I need to look like’, ‘that’s how I need to be’ when you go to the gym and you go try to work out. The things that come to mind are, like, the arms, and the abs [voice gradually getting softer] and torso and pecs and all that sort of stuff, they’re the sort of ones that jump out at ya, but…

Julia: Do you mean those muscles are like, toned, defined?
Jason: Pretty much, yeah. So your body percent of fat needs to be low. So you’re always, in the back of your mind, you’re not always deliberately trying to, but in the back of your mind you’re thinking, ‘well, this is what I need to do’, so when you look at something you’re like, ‘oh I can’t really eat that’, or ‘I can’t eat that but I can eat this and this’…. (Jason, 22, accounts officer)

There is a tension in Jason’s descriptions of the ‘ideal’ footballer’s body that results from the paradox in the work and bodily care required to attain an ideal masculine appearance. In Jason’s interview, there is friction between his masculinised practices of body work and their symbolisation of hegemonic masculinity, and the ‘feminine’ concern for the body required to attain the masculine ‘ideal’. Jason names the ‘tone’ and definition of specific muscles, such as abdominal, torso and pectoral muscles and a very low percentage of body fat as being central characteristics of an ‘ideal’ male (footballer’s) body. Although these characteristics are presented as being a specifically male ideal, strict regulation and control is required to achieve this ideal, through ‘always thinking’ about diet and assessing what can and cannot be eaten at what particular time. Such focused dietary control potentially undermines normative forms of masculinity since a concern for the body’s appearance is traditionally (and often contemporarily) thought to be a feminine preoccupation (Bell & McNaughton 2007). Because of this, idealising male footballers’ bodies is something Jason has to ‘admit to’ or confess.

Jason is also hesitant to describe specific aspects of a man’s body in too much detail, and his voice became almost inaudible when discussing men’s bodies throughout the interview. He said in almost a ‘mumble’ that ‘abs, torso and pecs…jump out at ya’ as being the main characteristics that are attractive or idealised about this particular body shape or structure, but his unwillingness to elaborate suggests the discord between gender discourses that is occurring.

Similarly, Tom describes an ideal man’s body as having ‘good abs, good arms and good legs’, yet is unable to specify what it is about these body parts that makes them ‘good’. Other participants defined muscle tone or definition in these areas as being ‘ideal’. The
idea that men are not obliged to work on their bodies to the same effect as women means that body work broadly is feminised, despite the considerable body work involved in the creation of muscle for men working towards the masculine ‘ideal’. Concomitantly, men are typically not required to discuss their bodies.

As Paul implies, because he is a man, he doesn’t have to care about how his body looks. In Jason’s example however, he describes that seeing the football players ‘running around’ puts an ‘image’ in his mind. Jason explains that this image communicates to him how he should look and be: ‘oh, that’s what I need to look like, that’s how I need to be’.

Kate says this exact phrase when discussing the sorts of pressure she experiences related to images of ideal women (and ideal femininity) in the media:

“I’m trying to think of another word apart from pressure, there are such a lot of expectations on women nowadays, of all the magazines that come out or fashion television, or – it’s just all about ‘oh she’s glamorous’, and women are supposed to be into fashion, and you know, it’s sort of…it’s not fair, they don’t bring out a magazine and go ‘these are real women’! And you see celebrities, like I do it all the time, I pick up a magazine and I go ‘oh my god she’s flawless’ and you forget, this has been photo-shopped to the max! And they have no cellulite or no freckles or anything, they just look like this beautiful bronzed babe on the beach, and I’m just like ‘this is not how you look on the beach!’ I dunno, you wish that there were more sort of natural looking women out there. Because I do it too, I get caught up in ‘this is how I’m supposed to look, this is what I’m supposed to be’. (Kate, 25, administrative assistant/nanny)

There are significant parallels in Kate’s and Jason’s experiences of their bodies in relation to masculine and feminine ‘ideals’. McCaughey (1999: 121) argues that ‘we are so used to positioning women as passive dupes of sexist culture, and men as willful agents who gain meaning and material rewards from their activities, that we have missed the parallels between the two body projects’. Gender ideals affect Kate’s and Jason’s bodies and body work practices; they have particularly intensive affects in their relations
with the ‘gendered ideal’ bodies they see. Deleuze’s concept of ‘becoming’ can be used in the context of these examples, even when participants like Jason and Kate associate their bodies and body work with dominant discourses or structures.

Kate’s and Jason’s encounters with ‘ideal’ men’s and women’s bodies involve a sort of repetition of gender structures in wanting to possess the physical differences of these bodies. Becoming does not mean people can voluntarily ‘become’ whatever they want, and certain becomings are repeated through the relations and affects that produce them. Becomings can often involve the ordinary and dominant conditions being repeated and remaining the same. Repetition is not the same as reproduction however. Becoming is immanent – ‘there is nothing other than the flow of becoming’ (Colebrook 2002: 125); even when dominant (binary) conditions of gender are repeated. What bodies do, and the relations and affects with which they are engaged, is what is most important from this standpoint.

The ways that ‘images’ work in the process of body work, and how bodies are understood in this context (in body work of men and women) is discussed in depth in chapters six and seven. Although the forms of body work undertaken by Jason and Kate are structured by gender, gender assemblages themselves are complex and contradictory, and inherently unstable; even though they may be lived as constraining and limiting. For this reason, the concept of becoming is particularly useful and provides a new tool for understanding the ‘ambivalent, less coherent experiences of the embodied self’ (Coleman 2009: 214).

**Opening up masculinities and bodies**

A number of participants critique and complicate gender structures and ideas of a singular, dominant masculinity in men’s experiences of bodies and body work. For example, the hegemonic masculinity embodied in the ‘muscular’, athletic figure of the football player is described as being a ‘type’ of masculinity by Ben, rather than symbolic of masculinity as a whole:
Men want to be that alpha male type. And associated with that is being big and strong. And you know, look good in a T-shirt and stuff like that. Maybe not as much as it is for women but it’s definitely still there, and increasing every year, there’s more and more pressure on them [men]. (Ben, 32, sales representative)

Ben also describes that the ‘pressure’ that is increasing for men associated with the need to ‘look good’ is not at the same level as it is for women, yet this ‘alpha male’ type of masculinity is difficult to live up to, as Ben and others say elsewhere (discussed in chapter seven). In another example, Simon describes that he avoids going to the gym altogether specifically because of the ‘macho’ environment:

I’m all skinny and little and stuff and I’d be a bit put off, feel a bit inadequate, it would make me feel insecure… Everyone would have better bodies and stuff and I think that would be intimidating… I’m happy with my body, but if I was around people [like at the gym] then maybe I’d feel a bit inadequate and a bit inferior to them. (Simon, 18, student)

Being ‘skinny and little’ would make Simon feel ‘intimidated’ by the sorts of large, muscular male bodies Simon expects he would encounter at the gym. Though he is ‘happy with his body’ anyway, he avoids the gym and the sorts of male bodies he imagines he would find there that would make him feel inadequate and inferior.

Similarly, Peter has only recently started going to the gym, and says he has ‘finally worked up the courage to go into a place like that’. The gym, for Peter is also an intimidating environment because of the particularly ‘dominating’ form of hegemonic masculinity associated with lifting weights and masculinity. Peter is caught between the desire he has had for a long time ‘to get bigger’ and ‘to be more muscular’ and the disdain he has for the ‘macho’ masculinity of his trainer at the gym:

The gym is a fucked place. I don’t understand those people. I just sort of feel that I’m doing my best to assimilate every time that I walk in there.
And I know that they know I’m not meant to be there. I have a trainer so I see him once a week, I saw him today. I kind of, I like him but he’s a real weirdo… he said to me what are my goals and I felt like, on the spot, I didn’t know what to say. So I said ‘I want to get bigger’, for some reason, that isn’t really what I want. And he’s taken that on board for how he’s trying to get me fired up and I just find that really patronising. So like when I walk in, he’ll be there scoffing a can of tuna going ‘yeah, great, there are 27 grams of protein in this!’ And he says to me, there will be him in a big group of trainer people hanging out, and he’ll see me and will call out ‘Hey Peter how are you? Ready to get massive?’ [in loud booming voice] and I’m just like, ‘yeah dude! I’ll just go upstairs and get massive with you, won’t I’ [sarcastic] and I just feel real patronised. (Peter, 27, barber)

Peter distances himself from ‘those people’ at the gym, and disavows his desire to ‘get bigger’, saying ‘that isn’t what I really want’, although elsewhere in the interview he says he has always wanted to be more muscular. Peter says he feels patronised by his trainer whose aim is to make him ‘massive’, and also feels uncomfortable because of his body: ‘I know that they know I’m not meant to be there’. Like Simon, Peter feels insecure about his physical size compared to dominant and dominating physiques of the muscular men at the gym, his trainer in particular.

I think you stick out if you’re like me, and you don’t have much, like the skinny man at the gym. Like in the free weights area, I feel like I stick out like a sore thumb. I wanted to like, you know how women have like Fernwood [a women’s-only gym franchise]? I thought it would be sweet if there was a gym just for like, skinny guys. Called Wormwood or something!

For Peter, being ‘the skinny man at the gym’ feels awkward, and makes him feel like he does not belong. He even goes so far as to joke that there should be a gym ‘just for skinny guys, called Wormwood’, to separate his ‘skinny’ body from the ‘massive’ male bodies who embody hegemonic masculinity. Peter and Simon’s examples show the variations in
men’s understandings of their bodies related to discourses of masculinity. Even though women are discussed by men and women as being subject to more body ‘pressure’ relating to broader gender discourses, there is nothing about being a man that precludes the men in this study from feeling ‘pressure’ to emulate physical gender ideals. In the binary structure of gender, narrow categories of masculinity and femininity can be profoundly limiting and difficult to live up to, and require a great deal of work to sustain (Butler 1993). Further, there is less space for men to discuss their bodies and gender as being problematic in relation to dominant discourses of masculinity, and as such, men often have the ‘privilege and curse’ of invisibility in relation to ‘body issues’ (Bell & McNaughton 2007:112).

In Peter, Simon and Ben’s examples, normative, muscular masculinity is complicated and opened up. Rather than reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, such as in previous comments made by Sam like ‘a man should be a man’, which close down possibilities for masculinities other than the dominant ‘ideal’, Simon and Peter denaturalise hegemonic masculinity by showing how carefully constructed and difficult to embody it can be. Their examples open up difference in the molar category of masculinity; they can be understood as molecular, ‘individual responses to becoming’ (Jackson 2010: 582). Becoming can involve moving away from the molar (Massumi 1992), and opening up new possibilities for understanding and living bodies. Becoming is also immanent however, and describes the process of connections that occurs between bodies and the world. This theoretical perspective on gender and bodies does not imply that Peter or Simon, for example, are actively pursuing change or a deconstruction of gender categories; rather, their examples show that forces other than the dominant are always in process between bodies and the world. Merceica and Merceica (2010) in their research on disability argue for example that propositions made by participants such as ‘this school is not inclusive’, from a Deleuzian perspective, need to be acknowledged as bringing about an alteration in the intensities not only of the person but of the whole world, and ‘it is this shift in intensities that Deleuze’s thought invites us to engage and experiment with, and explore’ (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 86). The intensities and openings towards
difference have been explored in this chapter through participants’ critiques and (micro) problematisations of gender structures and related practices of body work.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the research questions concerning the knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies that are produced through body work practices. This chapter’s specific focus has been to address another key research question: how does gender intersect with practices and understandings of body work, and what does this mean for understanding bodies from a Deleuzian perspective? I have also engaged with questions surrounding how gender may be involved or implicated in ‘becoming’, and in affecting the body’s possibilities. From a perspective informed by Deleuze, Spinoza and numerous feminist philosophers of the body (including Coleman 2009 & Bray & Colebrook 1998), although unequal binary gender structures and relations underpin many forms of body work, change is inevitable and always already in the process of occurring because of the ways that bodies and other assemblages (including gender) connect. This immanent process is termed ‘becoming’. The productive capacities of bodies through connections with other bodies and social assemblages inform the ontological understanding of the body in this project. Buchanan (2002) and Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007) suggest that although gender may feel embodied, natural, and central to the experience of the body and body work, gender is inherently unstable. I explored some of these instabilities in examples where participants criticised elements of gendered body work practices or gendered expectations and pressures relating to their bodies.

I understand bodies as unstable processes caught up in various structures or assemblages (Rose 1996) and that bodies, structures and discourses (such as gender) alike are always in process, in relation, and under re/de/construction. In this chapter I have intended to show some of the ways this is played out in relation to gender and bodies through body work. Such a perspective allows an analysis of the ways that men’s and women’s practices of body work are strongly mediated by varying aspects of gender relations,
whilst the instability of the connections between bodies and assemblages means that the outcomes of these connections are not determined and cannot be known in advance. I argue that as a result of this perspective, it is not at all surprising that there are significant parallels between men’s and women’s body concerns which do not conform to dominant understandings of gender. I conceptualise gender as a key mediating force which works to form the event of the body, part of a series of negotiations which comes to bear on the corporeality of the body. Because body work is a diverse set of activities through which the body becomes, cultural, historical and social contexts are crucial to the experiences of the body. As has been explored in this chapter, most of the participants’ descriptions of theirs and others’ bodies were stratified by gender, yet some aspects of gender and body work were also destabilised and problematised, triggering micro-processes of ‘escape’ and becoming.

The idealised physical dimensions of the body are gendered in hegemonic ways (Connell 1995) and link with traditional understandings of men and women more broadly. Feminised practices of health and beauty for women (the ‘fashion-beauty complex’) have been broadly understood in the context of gender inequality (Bordo 2003; Bartky 1995). Gender inequality can be understood as the result of the ‘binary machine’ of gender. In many cases, gender as a ‘binary machine’ contours participants’ understandings and descriptions of theirs and others’ bodies, though others problematise normative gender ideals.

In this thesis, the relationships and processes involved between bodies and gender is explored in a way that is different from existing or dominant approaches. In many studies the body is presented as something which pre-exists structures like gender, and is then organised or limited by such structures. This approach is inherently binaristic, and presents the body as an entity which is locked into a process of objectification and repression by external forces. A feminist analysis of bodies, gender, and body work practices requires frameworks which move beyond ‘the dialectics of binary oppositions’ (Markula 2006, p. 34). Accordingly, the approach to bodies pursued in this thesis does not understand bodies as prior and essential. Bodies and gender identities are
conceptualised as unstable rather than constant. One of the most important contributions of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theorisation of bodies is that identity is never determined, but is constantly in process because it is formed in a flow of connections, affects and relations. Relations and affects, in the context of assemblages such as gender, shape what a body can do, and condition of possibilities for living, but it is only through exploring the process of these connections that the body’s potential can be explored.

Through expanding analysis to explore bodies as becomings, rather than subjects or objects, the focus shifts towards the complexities and possibilities involved in relations between bodies and gender, rather than following established paths of knowledge regarding women, bodies, and images. A Deleuzian approach to bodies and gender engages with how knowledges, understandings, and experiences of bodies are produced through and become through gender and other relations, instead of analysing bodies as the effects of gender relations (Coleman 2008, p. 172).

In this chapter I have intended to show how body work practices can be understood not as the effects of gender (Markula 2006). Instead, gender can be understood as a relation bodies connect and engage with. Participants describe their experiences of their bodies related to gender in complex, paradoxical, and ambiguous ways. I argue that moving beyond the binaries inherent in many theoretical approaches to the body is crucial and enables a way to do justice to the complexity and ambivalence in how gender is embodied and lived.

In the following chapters, I explore the affective experiences of body work practices. I intend to show that affects are crucial to becoming. The affective dimensions of social assemblages including gender, health and neoliberal discourses underpin the analysis of bodies in processes of becoming in this project. The embodied sensations or affects related to body work are crucial, and it is this theme that is expanded upon in the following chapters.
Chapter six: ‘Health’, body work and affect

This chapter continues to explore the key research question concerning the knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies produced through body work practices. In participants’ explanations, health discourses are crucial to their understandings, knowledges and experiences of bodies related to their body work practices. This chapter also addresses the research question: how do discourses of health affect the body’s possibilities? The ways body work practices and bodies are understood by participants can expand and/or limit the range of possibilities for living. I introduced these concepts for understanding the data in the previous chapter on gender, and expand on this in the context of health discourses in this chapter.

Body work practices imply bodily experience, and are involved in processes relating to how the body ‘feels’. Body work practices, particularly concerning physical activity and exercise, were described by almost all participants as being central to broader meanings of the body and related to the way the body feels. Embodied identity is also strongly tied to the relations between bodies and body work practices for many participants (as in Budgeon 2003). Understandings of the body which focus on embodied sensations are crucial to analysing the participants’ explanations of experiences of body work in this context, and allow for an exploration of the affects, intensities and complexities of bodies and body work practices. This chapter focuses on how the body is described and the affects involved in of exercise practices, and explores the numerous forces and connections (in particular health discourses) in relation between the body and body work practices.

In this chapter I approach affect as both a conceptual model which frames the ontological approach of my project, and as an analytic tool exploring the embodied sensations that participants describe in relation to their bodies and body work practices. Where participants in this study make statements like ‘I feel better about myself when I have been exercising’, I have interpreted that such a statement can be explored or understood using the concept of affect. According to Deleuze, what we are capable of is directly
related to embodied sensation (affect), and it is the relations of affect that produce a body’s capacities (Coleman 2009). To affect and be affected is, for Deleuze, becoming. I use the concept of affect as a way of focusing on the connections or encounters between bodies (and assemblages) and what these encounters produce: what can a body do?

Numerous authors have noted that ‘in relation to the body and health, neoliberalism calls upon individuals to self-govern through endless examination and self-care’ (Leve et al. 2012: 124; see also Featherstone 2010, Crawford 1980). Health in this context is related to moralised, individualised ideologies associated with neoliberalism (Crawford 2006), as well as gender. These relations affect the body and what it can do. The range of possibilities that are open or available are a result of the body’s affects and relations (Fox 2002).

First in this chapter, I explore how health is discussed, defined and experienced by participants, and how health links with their understandings of bodies and body work practices. Their definitions and descriptions of health – what it is, what it feels like, and how it can be ‘achieved’ or worked towards – are complex. Participants’ conceptualisations and experiences of health can be understood in the context of discourses and moral rhetoric surrounding health. Here, neoliberal economic policies connect with consumer culture to encourage individualised, moralised forms of bodily control, linked to health and wellbeing (Crawford 2006). Whilst being linked to dominant discourses of health however, participants’ experiences and understandings of health are often ambiguous and paradoxical; they are certainly not straightforward. Opening up the concept of health to focus on the intensities and affects involved, the ‘always more’, widens our perspective (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 86). In this spirit, it is important that understandings of health explore the affective experiences of body work practices, such as exercise. The affects and relations involved here are integral for exploring what a body can do; what are its capacities and its limits?
Untangling definitions, discourses and experiences of health

Health is discussed by participants in varying ways: as a set of ideas, linked to morals and individual responsibility (when Kate says, ‘I don’t feel as healthy as I should’); as a feeling (related to affect and the embodied sensations linked to exercise); as related to identity and the experience of the self (‘I just want to feel healthy so that I feel happy’, as Paul says) and as linked to image and appearance (Victoria’s exercise helps her to maintain a ‘healthy shape’). These themes related to health – as discourse, image, affect, and relation to the self – interconnect. ‘Health’, as a conglomeration of all of these features, operates in very complex ways. Whilst some participants explained that they expect ‘doing’ exercise (a healthy practice) will lead to a more ‘confident’ and ‘happy’ self, many other participants suggested that the outcomes of body work and related ‘healthy’ practices are much less secure, and that the increased attention to the body through exercise, for example, may be limiting, constraining. This section principally focuses on the ways participants engage with discourses of health to make meaning of theirs and others’ bodies; yet in their descriptions of their experiences, health is capricious, complex and unstable, particularly in the ways practices of ‘health’ intersect with appearance and embodied sensations.

Health as discourse, ideal and set of practices

Health can be understood both as a discourse, relating to individualised self responsibility and a ‘culturally sanctioned way of being’ in contemporary, neoliberal Western states such as Australia (Crawford 1987, Featherstone 1982, 2010), as well as a set of practices undertaken in an effort to become more healthy. ‘Health’ was described by participants as a ‘goal’ and as a state of ‘being’ that can be achieved or worked towards through undertaking ‘healthy’ behaviours, such as eating a diet low in fat and sugar, and undertaking regular exercise. These practices are central in the ‘new paradigm of health’ (Moore 2010), in which ‘health promotion has prematurely exhorted the public to undertake a large number of different behaviors’ (Becker 1993: 1). In participants’
discussions however, ‘health’ as it is ‘felt’ is much more complex and ambiguous. The terms health, shape, image, appearance are often conflated in the interviews, and used interchangeably. ‘Looking good’ or attractive was often synonymous with health. To look healthy, as many described, is to ‘look good’. Health is thus deeply linked to image and appearance, and related to consumer culture in which work on the self through work on one’s appearance is an imperative (Featherstone 2010).

The moral and individualistic dimensions of ‘health’ are apparent in many instances in the interviews. Many spoke of how they felt ‘lazy’ or ‘slack’ if they have not been exercising. Health, or practices that were considered to lead to ‘health’ such as exercise, were discussed as though they were a common requirement, which, if not being met, warranted explanation and justification. In this way, body work practices are linked to the pursuit of ‘health’. The ethos of individual autonomy, choice, personal responsibility and control over one’s fate are core characteristics of attitudes towards the body in advanced liberal societies (Rose 2000: 329), in which the idealised status of ‘health’ is an individual, moral responsibility. For example, Steph discusses how her work hours have increased, and she is no longer at college where she used to play organised team sports:

Julia: Before you were saying that you would want to exercise more if you weren’t working so much?

Steph: Yeah, it’s probably a pretty shit excuse to be honest! [laughs]

Julia: What do you mean?

Steph: Oh, like everybody works and heaps of people find time to work out. (Steph, 21, waitress)

Steph says that working long hours is a poor ‘excuse’ for not exercising. In this example, individual responsibility for health is moralised. Kate also refers to health as an idealised state and as an objective standard of ‘being’ that would allow the feeling of health to be met or ‘achieved’:
Kate: I wouldn’t do it [exercise] to improve my body to get a six-pack or to get
toned. I’d do it more just to feel good…I think I focus more on looking
healthy, but as far as feeling it, I don’t think I feel it as much as I should. I
definitely should get out and do more exercise. I feel so much better when I do.

The appearance of health is not enough; Kate explains that she wants to focus more on
*feeling* healthy: ‘I don’t think I feel it as much as I should’. Here, health is assumed to be
not only a practice or appearance, but is also valorised as an embodied sensation.

‘Health’ was also frequently described as in opposition to ‘fat’. In describing why athletic
bodies are ideal for men and women, Simon reasons ‘it all comes down to health’:

> If you’re free to move and stuff, if you’re fit you can run and stuff and you
> have stamina and all those kind of skills, and stuff. Um yeah, I guess that’s
> healthy. And just not lazy I guess, I don’t know, I associate fat with
> laziness. (Simon, 18, University student)

People who were ‘fat’ or ‘overweight’ were defined as ‘definitely not healthy’ by all
participants, and as seriously contravening health as an idealised ‘state’. Participants
described those who are ‘fat’, ‘overweight’ or ‘obese’ as lazy, lacking self esteem and
self restraint, and deserving of the increased surveillance and criticism they receive. As
Dworkin and Wachs describe, ‘while the fat body remains stigmatised as lazy,
undisciplined, or as a poor member of the social body, the fit body becomes a metaphor
for success, morality and good citizenship’ (2009: 38). Even though Clare asserts that
‘people should just be happy the way they are’, this does not apply to those who are
‘incredibly overweight’, and the discursive constructions of health and individualism help
Clare to justify this:

> I think that if you’re incredibly overweight and obese you need to do something
> about it. There was a girl at my school as an example, she has dropped out now,
> but she was huge and she was always saying ‘I’m so fat, I need to lose weight, I
need to do exercise’, and we said ‘we’ll support you, we’ll help you’ and then the
next second she’d be buying cheese jaffles, a Big M and a massive Freddo Frog
for breakfast every morning at school. And it’s kind of the point where, it’s
ridiculous, you’re not being healthy, you’re not doing anything to help yourself.
(Clare, 18, VCE student)

Clare is most critical of the girl’s individual failure of responsibility to ‘do anything to
help herself’. Tom makes similar generalisations about his housemate’s lack of self
discipline, and assumes that she would like to lose weight, even though in a later section
of the interview Tom says he has never had a conversation with her about this.

My housemate, she’s overweight; she knows that she’s overweight, but she’s
lazy. Despite the effort, you know, or she wants to do something about it but at
the same time, does nothing. So, she’d be quite happy to eat what she eats in
the quantity that she does, but there’s no effort or commitment to a plan. And
no drive I suppose. Whereas, I think if you look at confident people, most of
them are probably pretty fit kind of people, fairly driven sorts of people. And
this is just generalisations as well, I’m sure there are exceptions to the rule, but
overweight people are generally, I find, more shy. Or withheld. I think it would
be true to say, to generalise again, that a lot of people that are overweight have
some self esteem issues. (Tom, 25, firefighter)

The moral implications of health are most evident in statements such as these, which
attach a negative moral judgment of ‘lazy’, or positive judgments of ‘healthy’ to specific
body shapes. As many others have argued (Gimlin 2002; Grimshaw 1999, Crossley
2006), being ‘fat’ is culturally stigmatised, and comes to symbolise a range of other
negatively inscribed aspects of self such as laziness, poor ‘self esteem’, and a ‘lack of
effort or commitment’; the opposite of successful and ‘driven’ and other characteristics
most valued in neoliberal consumer culture. Those deemed ‘fat’ are also subjected to
greater surveillance, such as when Clare lists the different sorts of food eaten by the
‘huge’ girl at her school, or when Tom emphasises the quantity of food his housemate
consumes.
Where looking or being ‘fat’ was considered ‘unhealthy’ and condemned by participants as a result, individualised self discipline through body work regimes was exalted. Adam and Victoria both equated body work, through physical exercise and maintenance of body weight with ‘respect’. Adam explains that he respects people who:

…Respect their bodies and respect their health and take it seriously. I think everyone should be able to make time to be healthy. (Adam, 23, VFL footballer/University student)

This example demonstrates the connections between individualistic and moral aspects of ‘healthism’ (Crawford 1980). The moral and symbolic order underpinning Adam’s respect for others who ‘respect their own bodies’ through undertaking ‘healthy’ activities is gendered, classed and racialised (Dworkin & Wachs 2009). This marginalises corporeal forms which are not white or middle class in particular. Adam’s view that health is something that can be achieved by ‘everyone’ negates the significant costs of time and money required in the pursuit of health. The expectation that ‘everyone should make time to be healthy’ obscures the classed aspects of health and body work. ‘Health’ and forms of body work required to ‘achieve’ health are available to the more privileged middle or upper classes with more available disposable income and free time. Dworkin and Wachs argue that the primary consumers of health and fitness products such as magazines are ‘white and middle class’, and that the constitution of emphasised masculinity and femininity (Connell 1987) through body work practices of this dominant group intersect with class and race privilege (Dworkin & Wachs 2009: 162-3). These factors are important in understanding and contextualising participants’ descriptions of health and body work practices.

Exploring boundaries of ‘health’

Health was often described in interviews as a set of practices, activities or performances that involve the body. The practices most related to ‘health’ were mainly described as centering on dietary and physical exercise aspects of body work. The actual practices
associated with ‘health’ undertaken by participants were highly varied as we have seen, although eating a ‘healthy’ diet and physical exercise activities were mentioned by all participants as being ‘healthy’, regardless of participants’ own practices. ‘Health’ was articulated as the objective result or outcome of these ‘healthy’ practices. Angela describes what she thinks is involved in achieving a ‘healthy body’:

I guess eat regularly, like six small meals, just even go for a walk like three times a week. I don’t think it would take that much effort to keep like a pretty healthy body. Just as long as you don’t over-indulge in everything all the time. I don’t think it should be that hard to maintain a healthy body weight. (Angela, 18, Visual Art student)

Angela’s idea of health is less rigid than many other participants’, many of whom emphasise the importance of intensive fitness regimes or strict control over eating different sorts of foods and in specific quantities. Clare for example is much more detailed in her description of health and healthy practices than Angela, particularly in relation to food and what constitutes ‘healthy eating’:

I do eat quite healthily… but I eat a LOT. I love my food and stuff like that, so, you know, I’d have a couple of packets of chips and some popcorn, like air popped, and then for lunch I’d always have veggies, my capsicum, cucumber and carrot and an apple, I had, like, a veggie patch in my lunchbox! I’ll usually indulge on a Friday because I’ll have four and a half hours of dancing coming up that night, where I know, whatever I eat now I’m going to work off, just as long as I keep it in small doses and I exercise in healthy doses, not unhealthy doses. (Clare, 18, VCE student)

Clare lists the food in her lunch box in a way similar to a ‘confession’, ‘admitting’ to the ‘unhealthy’ foods such as packets of chips and popcorn as well as listing the many vegetables and fruits she eats. The ‘confession’ is one of the ways that people present themselves in the context of authority, related to physiological norms of truth (Rose 1996). In Clare’s example, the particular authority in how diet connects with health
shows how ‘personal life’ is linked with broader health discourses, which comprise a ‘particular form of power’ (Rose 1996: 96). In Clare’s example, exercise and eating particular foods are the ‘healthy’ practices. In describing eating and exercising practices being undertaken in ‘healthy’ doses, Clare extends the boundaries of ‘health’ as a concept. Practices such as ‘healthy’ eating habits and exercise are not straightforward, and have limits or boundaries. The dose of these practices is crucial. Clare suggests that health is not contained in one set of practices, but rather has the potential to exceed or extend beyond these practices, to become something else. In another example, Clare discusses the ‘full on’ physical exercise of her after school dancing class:

We do very intense warm ups and everything to get everyone going. The other night everyone was just sweating and disgusting! It’s very full on and they make sure we stay healthy at the same time.

The intense physical exercise accomplished in Clare’s dancing class does not constitute ‘health’ alone, although similarly intensive physical exercise is widely considered a ‘healthy’ practice by participants. Indeed, Clare’s assertion that health is ensured by her instructors ‘at the same time’ as the intense exercise strongly implies that such exercise is in danger of exceeding its status as a ‘healthy’ practice. Health, then, is not contained in ‘healthy’ practices. Health exists as a state of being (or becoming) through a series of practices such as diet and exercise. Health, however is also capricious and as a result, must be monitored and regulated to ensure that it does not slip into ‘becoming dangerous’, or exceeding what is ‘healthy’.

Health as ‘becoming dangerous’

Clare clarifies that a specific ‘healthy’ practice, such as exercising, has a limit, and may tip over into being ‘unhealthy’ if done excessively, or as the result of an ‘incorrect dosage’. In Clare’s example, excess is referred to in paradoxical ways: first in the dangers of ‘indulgence’ in the context of food, which is acceptable as long as it is a ‘small dose’; and second, in exercise to ‘work off’ the ‘small dose’ of indulgence, which too has the danger of becoming something that can be undertaken excessively, which would lead
exercising towards becoming unhealthy. Clare, unlike most others in the study, problematises and complicates ‘health’ and practices that are generally understood by others as ‘healthy’. A reason for this is Clare’s former best friend’s experience of suffering anorexia. It is this which Clare describes as the central example of what can happen when seemingly ‘healthy’ practices of eating ‘healthily’ and exercising can be taken too far and ‘become dangerous’:

One of my, um, she used to be my best friend, we’re not close any more - she got anorexia this year through stress and just, very bad treatment - like, she’s very fit and healthy but all she ever did was exercise. And she, she ate, all I’d ever see her eat was lettuce. And she got to the point where she was becoming too healthy and it was just becoming dangerous. (Clare, 18, VCE student)

Here, the notion of health as being straightforwardly positive is unsettled; health has the potential to become dangerous. Clare describes that the practices themselves are not essentially ‘good’ and may become problematic if they are done ‘too much’. Here, ‘health’ as practices can be just as dangerous, if not more so, than ‘unhealthy’ practices. ‘Unhealthy’ practices were particularly typified in Clare and others’ examples of people they knew who were ‘very overweight’, who ‘eat a lot of junk food and don’t exercise’. Clare describes ‘healthy’ practices as doses of ‘health’, but the practices in of themselves are not healthy, since they can be taken in the wrong ‘dosage’. Others, including Gillian and Paul also refer to healthy practices as a ‘dose’. For example, Gillian says, ‘I think a healthy dose of exercise is necessary to keep the body in shape’. The notion of health as something to be practiced or administered in ‘doses’ supports arguments that health is increasingly medicalised (Crawford 2006). As Suissa (2008) has argued, medicalisation of behaviour can have particularly strong individualising effect, as problems which are primarily social are tested and treated as medical or pathological.

Clare views ‘health’ as existing beyond the boundaries of so-called ‘healthy’ practices. She conceives of health more holistically than most other participants, as being a physical and mental state:
If you’re fit, if you do the right thing to your body, then that’s good, within reason…. [but] I think to be healthy you’ve gotta be happy as well, you’ve gotta be happy in yourself at least.

Practices of health, as will be further explored, are often conceptualised by participants as leading to being ‘happy’ in oneself. Clare suggests, however, that happiness may not be an outcome of the practices of body work. Rather, Clare observes that the state of health implies that contentment or happiness in oneself exists first. Clare says, ‘to be healthy, you have to be happy’; whereas others such as Anna, Steph and Paul intimate that body work practices directed towards health enable greater happiness or confidence, also linked to the body’s appearance. Clare’s example is unusual since she emphasises that being ‘happy in yourself at least’ does not necessarily result from the disciplinary techniques of body work, and disturbs the ‘look good, feel good’ logic within consumer culture (Featherstone 2010). The causal link between health (and ‘healthy’ practices) and happiness is particularly problematic.

Health as an image and experience

Health, where is it linked to visibility, is problematic. Visible ‘health’ as an image or appearance may be misleading, and has the potential to become ‘addictive’ or ‘dangerous’, as Clare explained. Many other participants, however, argue that health can be visibly represented, and that health can be ‘read’ off others’ bodies, as in the examples above regarding the specific body shapes that garner respect and others, such as those who are ‘fat’, which are repudiated. Many participants made comments along the lines of ‘the best way you can look is if you’re healthy, I think’ (Steph). Isabelle, however, points out that physical or visible health can be misleading. Some participants, who described the ‘ideal’ woman’s body as resembling a ‘supermodel’, criticised their shapes as ‘unhealthy’, and described a ‘curvier’ figure as being more healthy for women. Others such as Isabelle idealised such slender figures. Isabelle, however, nonetheless criticised
the idea that to be skinny is to be healthy, although she says many of the people she knows equate being ‘skinny’ with ‘health’:

Some people would see the skinniest person and go ‘oh they must be so healthy’, but they might not even eat. Like my friend, she doesn’t eat and she’s so slim, like she looks good, real skinny, but she looks a bit sick. People tell her ‘oh you look really healthy’, but she’s got really bad bulimia. She doesn’t eat much at all. (Isabelle, 24, beauty therapist)

The ‘skinny’ body shape that is considered ‘ideal’ and ‘healthy’ (for women) is problematic on a number of levels. Isabelle’s friend, whom others assume ‘must be so healthy’ because of her frame in fact ‘hardly eats anything’ and actually has ‘really bad bulimia’. Isabelle further demonstrates the complexity of this situation when she says her friend ‘looks good’, at the same time as being so skinny as to look ‘a bit sick’. The overlap between appearance, health and illness is apparent here.

To further complicate the ways that ‘health’ as an image or appearance can be misread, Kate is frustrated that others’ judge her body as ‘too skinny’ and assume she strictly controls her diet to the point of being ‘too healthy’ (similar to Clare’s example), though Kate does very few of the ‘healthy’ practices which are intended to control weight. Kate explains how she feels when people, such as her boyfriend’s mother tell her she is ‘fading away to nothing’:

I wish I could put on weight. No one gets it. I don’t like my bones sticking out! It’s so frustrating. I cook dinner every night, and he has to watch what he eats and I’m like putting heaps of butter in the mashed potato! I don’t really watch what I eat. I definitely could eat healthier. I love beer. I order jugs when we go out, and if I go to the footy I’ll go hot dog, beer, chips. I’m hoping I’ll get like a beer gut or at least put on weight somewhere! (Kate, 24, nanny/administrative assistant)
Kate’s appearance has very little to do with health practices, and she worries she does not feel as healthy as she ‘should’, even though, as she stated previously, she ‘looks’ healthy. Paradoxically, some other participants would potentially judge Kate’s body as ‘too skinny’, (or ‘too healthy’, as Clare might say), as her boyfriend’s mother does. Health, as a set of discursive practices gets tangled with misreadings and misperceptions of bodies as they look in comparison to how they feel, related to how health is conceptualised and moralised.

‘Health’, where it is imagined by participants to be an objective state that can be ‘achieved’, is limited, and does not enable an exploration of the complex and multiple meanings and experiences of participants and their bodies. ‘Health’ as it is felt or experienced extends far beyond its imagined boundaries, as conceptualised by participants, and is contentious, complex and ambiguous.

Paul’s comment below surmises the paradoxical and difficult relations between health and image intersect:

There are a lot of women out there doing drastic things to themselves to maintain this unrealistic look. I think the worst thing about it is that people don’t feel happy being a healthy weight. If their healthy weight is not super skinny they shouldn’t feel compelled to have to shed those pounds. (Paul, 32, sound editor)

Isabelle describes feeling compelled to do just that, explaining that ‘Even if you’re at your goal weight, it’s still not enough’. Health, along with numerous other discourses (gender in particular) frames participants’ explanations and meanings of body work, but the way they explain their experiences of health and gender are far more complex. Although in Paul’s example he discusses only women ‘doing drastic things to maintain this unrealistic look’, alluding to dieting and cosmetic surgery, many men in this study describe similar ‘drastic things’, as I will explore further. I will now consider the embodied sensations or affects of health as described by participants related to body work practices in greater depth.
Exercise and embodied sensations

Exercise was described as a particularly important aspect of body work for most participants. Almost all (20 out of 22) of the participants made specific reference to physical activities as impacting how their body feels, which I analyse as the embodied sensations, or affects, related to their exercise. Many echoed very similar descriptions of how exercise contributes to feeling ‘good’, or ‘better’. Their descriptions of how the body feels in relation to these practices in many instances link with broader social processes, such as the ‘new paradigm of health’ (Moore 2010). The practices discussed under the category of ‘physical exercise’ include an array of activities: running or jogging, swimming, cycling, going to the gym (to lift weights or take part in a ‘group fitness’ class such as aerobics or ‘Zumba’), boxing, taking dance classes, power-walking, doing ‘strength and toning’ exercises at home, attending sports training (such as football or netball training) and kung fu. In most cases, I did not ask participants about specific practices of exercise, but let participants define exercise related to their own experiences and understandings.

Most participants broadly agreed that their ‘exercise’ practices linked to the way their body feels. For example, Anna discusses how she used to play in team sports at college but no longer does because her circumstances have changed: she has finished her undergraduate University degree and is working full time hours as a waitress to save money to travel overseas. She says:

I normally feel, like, a lot better if I have been exercising, but just, like, little things if I do them now I’m like, ‘phew! That was a bit of a struggle! That’s a bit embarrassing!’ But um, yeah I generally do like it when I am exercising a little bit more. Although a lot of the times I can’t really be bothered but I know, you do, you do feel a little bit better if you know that you’re doing something, but I have been very slack the last couple of months. (Anna, 21, waitress)
Comments such as Anna’s were common throughout the interviews, and many participants agreed that doing exercise equated with ‘feeling good’ or ‘feeling better’ in some way. As Anna explains, ‘I think you just generally feel better for it [exercise] because you don’t feel like you’re lazing around and being a bit of a couch potato’. Exercise here has a moral dimension in ways similar to those described in the previous section, and enables her to feel moral satisfaction related to physical activity; though there are numerous times she ‘can’t really by bothered’. ‘Knowing you’re doing something’, related to exercise specifically is also an important aspect of body work.

Similarly, Victoria explains that she really enjoys her routine of going to the gym three or so times a week. She says, ‘I like going. I feel good’. In explaining this further, Victoria says her main motivations for going to the gym regularly are:

Victoria: To keep fit. Probably to maintain a good shape really.
Yeah. And be yeah, healthy, and maintain a healthy shape.

Julia: So it’s sort of about how you outwardly look?

Victoria: Um…yeah mainly how I look. Yeah. And how I feel inside. (Victoria, 23, marketing officer)

Appearance is a key motivator for Victoria’s body work, and physical exercise affects how Victoria feels on the ‘inside’ as well. Examples from other participants suggest that this ‘inside’ feeling is linked with their outward appearance. In Victoria’s example, she explains that she enjoys physical exercise because it enables her to ‘maintain a healthy shape’ and that achieving this, or at least ‘doing something’ about it, is what feels good on the ‘inside’. As Victoria explains it, the process of exercise for appearance ‘feels good’, yet although this may seem straightforward and simple, this is complicated in numerous other participants’ descriptions of their experiences.
As in examples from Clare, Kate, Anna and Victoria, the embodied sensations of ‘exercise’ practices of body work were related to ‘feeling better’ about themselves, or in how they look. Paul also explains what it is that makes him ‘feel good’ after doing yoga:

After a yoga class I walk out feeling more limber, and yeah, you know, just healthier, generally happier, because blood and oxygen has gone to all parts of my body, my muscles are all warmed up, I’m walking straighter, I have less sore joints and whatever it is…I sleep better. It’s a general psychological and physical improvement, all over.

Julia: Ok. So it’s like feeling better on the inside…and the outside as well?

Paul: Er, yeah, there’s a degree of that? Knowing that I’m taking care of myself, and I dunno. I guess that might partly have something, [some] insight into why healthy people look better. Definitely there’s – I feel better about the way I look when I’m not putting on weight, when I’m losing weight, my body’s a bit better and …yeah. Also I’ve got really bad posture so when I’m healthy I stand straighter and present better and feel more confident I guess.

(Paul, 31, sound and film editor)

Here Paul explains the connections and associations between the kinesthetic elements related to his body resulting from yoga, such as feeling ‘limber’ with ‘warm muscles’, and his sense of feeling ‘generally happier and healthier’. Paul’s body ‘feels better’ after yoga because the embodied sensations associated with blood oxygenating his organs and warming his muscles make him feel ‘healthier’ and thus ‘happier’. The bodily sensations he associates with ‘health’ make him feel ‘happy’, and he also relates the feeling of health with appearance: ‘healthy people look better’. Looking ‘better’ involves not putting on weight, or losing weight, and he feels better when he is achieving this – through doing things like yoga. Feeling ‘better’ is very much related to how the body
looks in Paul’s example, but also extends beyond this to the bodily sensations associated with the specific practices of stretching and breathing involved in yoga.

In a similar way, Kate explains what health ‘feels’ like. As has been discussed, for Kate, exercising and ‘health’ is not only related to her appearance, and is more about how she ‘feels’:

Kate: I don’t think I feel it [health] as much as I should. I definitely should get out and do more exercise. I feel so much better when I do.

Julia: Do you mean you feel more confident or have more energy, or something…?

Kate: Both. A bit of both. Like, if I run around The Tan [the Botanical gardens in Melbourne] and come home and have a shower I’m like ‘ooh I feel really good’. You’ve stretched out your legs and got some fresh air and got your heart rate up and everything like that. And when I eat healthy too, I guess when you’re feeling inside ‘I feel really healthy today’ I think it shows on the outside, do you know what I mean? You’ve got more of a glow about you, same as if you’ve got a lot of rest, I make sure I get about 8 hours sleep. (Kate, 24, administrative assistant/nanny)

When Kate describes what ‘feels really good’ about exercise, the feeling she describes after running is kinesthetic, embodied. Like Paul, she mentions her organs (heart rate), legs (which have been ‘stretched out’) and oxygen (fresh air) in explaining what ‘health’ feels like. The numerous kinesthetic, physical and mental connections involved in this ‘feeling’ mean that the way health is experienced is complex and multiple. Using a Deleuzian understanding of bodies, Fox (2002: 360) argues that the affects associated with health are ‘dynamic and continually multiplying’ depending on the connections and relations between bodies and the world. This perspective enables a way of understanding
the contradictions and complexities of participants’ descriptions and experiences of ‘health’.

Health is not only confined to its embodied sensations on the ‘inside’, but as something that can also be visibly present. ‘Looking healthy’ is not enough, as Kate describes; she does not ‘feel’ it as much as she ‘should’. Further, ‘healthy’ practices (such as dietary controls, jogging, yoga) which purportedly lead to the sensations of ‘health’ (such as increased heart rate, warm muscles, inhaling ‘fresh air’) ‘show on the outside’. The practices of health are explained by Kate as leading to the feeling of health, which in turn lead to the appearance of health: ‘you’ve got more of a glow about you’. Whilst the practices, feelings and appearances of health are very closely connected, they do not always function in the straightforward way that Kate explains. For many participants, health and appearance are more complicated. For many others, the affective experiences of the body involve the connections between the ‘appearance’ and image, and are associated with the experience of the ‘self’ and identity.

Exercise, health and the self: ‘inhabiting my flesh’

Some participants explained that their experiences of body work and the embodied sensations involved relate directly to their experience of self or identity. More specifically, exercise and discursive practices of health link into the participants’ understandings and experiences of their bodies and selves. Rose (1989: 214) has argued that the body has become central to ‘transformation of the alienation, repression and fragmentation of the self in modern times’. In more recent work, Rose conceptualises the relations and connections between ‘the capacities of the human subject and the practices in which he or she participates’ (Rose 2000: 325) as a series of continuing modulation; part of the rhizomatic flows characteristic of liberal control societies (Deleuze 1995). In this way, practices of the body and self, such as forms of body work related to health, can be understood in the context of the particular set of circumstances in which individuals
are ‘obliged to be prudent and responsible for their own destinies’; to take control of their ‘selves’ (Rose 2000: 324).

Work on the self through body work practices was described by many participants as related to ‘feeling comfortable’ with their body and ‘self’. To a large extent, the practices of exercise, and ‘health’ were explained as the means towards this:

I want to maintain a good shape, a good body, just to feel comfortable in my self. (Clare, 18, VCE student)

Similarly, Kim explains ‘I feel more comfortable in my skin’ when she has lost weight as a result of jogging and doing yoga. Paul also terms exercise as contributing to the way he ‘inhabits [his] flesh’:

Paul: I’ve always gone to the gym a little bit. Mostly just to, you know, stay active and feel better…about…I mean partly physically, but…partly the way I look, but also partly the way I feel about inhabiting my flesh. These days I’m doing less weights and I’ll swim a couple of times a week and I’ve started running with my girlfriend, just started a program with that, and riding my bike. I think just staying…maintaining the exercise these days is as much about keeping my mindset positive as it is about…I mean I don’t like it when I’m not exercising when I’m overweight…I do have a tendency for my weight to blow out…quite easily…um, and I don’t, really don’t like the way I look, my clothes look when I’m like that; the way I feel, etcetera. And I prefer it when I’m doing something about it. But I’m not after, I’m not, I don’t have an image of myself in mind, I’m not going for rock-hard abs or, you know.

Julia: It’s just more of an overall sort of, um, self care or something?
Paul: yeah. I just wanna feel healthy, in some sort of, within some sort of level of a solid, good fitness so that I feel happy and…yeah. (Paul, 32, sound editor)

Paul does not like the way he feels when he has put on weight. This feeling relates not only to his appearance, but the way he inhabits his ‘flesh’. Involved in this process are numerous elements: physical, mental, affective, kinesthetic sensations all contribute to his experience of the ‘flesh’, and what it is like to ‘inhabit’ his body. As Paul explains, his ‘self’ is constructed and experienced in the context of all of these factors, and is an ongoing process. Paul’s relations to his ‘self’ through forms of body work take place in a context in which individuals are encouraged to take a critical investment and approach to the ‘self’ in its entirety, through work on the body and attention to thoughts and ‘state of mind’ (Rose 1996). The particular relations Paul is involved with when describing what it feels like to ‘inhabit his flesh’ occur in a context in which self-analysis is encouraged. This in turn is related to numerous social influences including psychology and confessional ‘self-help’ trends. As Dworkin & Wachs (2009: 13) note, ‘the practices of seeing, telling, listening, marking, defining, judging and changing behaviours is well integrated into the fabric’ of Western, neoliberal consumer societies such as the USA and Australia. Further, as in some of the other previous examples, Paul equates feeling healthy with feeling happy. According to Paul (as well as Kate and others), ‘happiness’ can be achieved through body work practices in a linear, straightforward way: as Paul says, ‘I just want to feel healthy, so that I feel happy’.

Exercise, health and happiness

The entanglement of ideas about health, happiness and appearance as they relate to the way the body is experienced is shown in numerous other examples:

You don’t have to be thin to look good, but I don’t feel very healthy at the moment. When I am exercising regularly, even if my weight hasn’t shifted at all, I just feel that little bit better about myself. I’m not an
overly showy person, I don’t think if I was skinnier, I’d get my legs out more, it’s just… I don’t know. You’d just have a little bit more confidence about yourself. It’s not…I wouldn’t get fit so that I could show off my body, I’d get fit so that I could be happy. I don’t know, just if anyone did see it I wouldn’t be worried about it. I don’t know, I’m not a big fan of, I don’t even think I’ve been to the beach these holidays, I get really nervous when I have to get down to a bikini and stuff. Um…yeah, just, it’d be just one less thing to worry about I guess. If you’re just a little bit skinnier or a little bit whatever it’s just one less thing to worry about. I don’t know. (Steph, 21, waitress)

Exercising regularly with the goal of being ‘a little bit skinnier’ as Steph explains would mean she has ‘one less thing to worry about’ and enable her to ‘feel that little bit better’ about herself. Again, exercise, appearance (in looking ‘skinnier’) and the experience of the body relates to the self. Further, the connection between body work and ‘happiness’ is demonstrated: ‘I wouldn’t get fit so that I could show off my body, I’d get fit so that I could be happy’. There are affects and connections involved in Steph’s idea of ‘happiness’ centering around the body as it is felt, and as it is seen by others, such as at the beach. It is interesting that Steph makes a specific point that she would not display her body more if she lost weight (through wearing revealing clothing) or ‘show it off’. For Steph, her priority is that ‘if anyone did see’ her body, she would not have to ‘worry about it’. Although the body’s public visibility in the context of consumer culture has been explained by some theorists as paramount (Featherstone 2010), in Steph’s example, visibility is not the most important aspect of her body work. More complexly, Steph imagines that exercise has the potential to form a new and improved experience of the self in which would be ‘happier’, through being ‘skinnier’.

Anna echoes Steph’s words, and explains that exercise is the solution to feeling ‘self conscious’ about her body, and a way of having ‘one less thing to worry about’:

I think, you know, you have a tighter, toner, slightly slenderer body you can feel more confident, because sometimes you can feel a bit, self conscious, like ‘oh’, the old cliché, ‘does my butt look big in this’, or ‘is
my stomach, does my stomach look huge in this’… I guess if you’re in
tip-top shape then I guess it’s just one less thing that you have to worry
about. (Anna, 21, waitress)

Steph and Anna describe that monitoring of the body (‘does my stomach look huge in
this’) and feeling ‘self conscious’ only happens when they are not exercising. They both
envisage ‘very fit people’ as ‘happy’ who do not suffer from insecurity about their
bodies, and who do not need to monitor or ‘worry about’ their bodies any more. However
as other participants who exercise more intensely explain, their exercise practices do not
cause them to worry less about their bodies, and may even form an ongoing series of
relations between body work and the self that may limit possibilities for living the body
in other ways.

**Body work as ‘liberating’ and constraining**

Unlike Steph and Anna, Gillian does a significant amount of exercise, and carefully
monitors what she eats. She explains that these practices enable her to ‘feel better’ about
her ‘self’. Gillian’s physical body work practices involve running, doing yoga and
carefully controlling her diet. She runs ten kilometers two or three times a week, does one
yoga class a week, and her job as a server at a restaurant is also ‘very active’. Gillian
explains that not eating at the end of a long shift at work ‘makes a massive difference’ to
not gaining weight, despite often being ‘exceptionally hungry’:

Gillian: I’ll often do a six, seven, eight hour shift with no breaks and
it’s very active, high stress work, and I’ll get to eat beforehand a little
bit and often there’ll be food left over at the end of the night that I can
eat. So, um…when I’m trying to eat healthier I don’t eat the food at the
end of the night, because I find that makes a massive difference to me.
When I eat that food I put on weight, when I don’t I actually take off
weight… I’m kind of, kinder to myself in the morning. If I want to eat
French toast for breakfast out or something, like, I actually really don’t
care. Because I know with the day that I’ve got ahead, it’s probably irrelevant, I’ll burn it off somehow.

Julia: Sure. So on those days that you say you don’t wanna eat the leftovers at the end of your shift, are you hungry at that point?

Gillian: Yeah, yeah, often I’m exceptionally hungry! [laughing] Sometimes not. It’s often 12 or 1 o’clock at night and I really don’t wanna be eating like these creamy, fatty foods at work, because often that’s what it is for some reason, all butter…and yeah…

Julia: So will you just not eat anything at all or will you have something when you get home or…

Gillian: No, I’ll try to not have anything at all, because I know myself, once I start to get a little taste of something, I’ll just keep going! But if there’s a bit of fruit out at work I’ll just have one or two pieces of fruit and that’s it. Yeah. Yeah. I don’t - in theory I don’t believe in denying myself, but…it’s just, I dunno. (Gillian, 31, make-up artist)

This example shows how important the control of her diet, what she eats and when, is to Gillian’s sense of self and way of living. Although ‘in theory’ Gillian does not believe in ‘denying’ herself food (even if she is ‘exceptionally hungry’ after a strenuous shift), she explains this is necessary in maintaining her desired weight: ‘it makes a massive difference to me’.

In ways similar to those which Anna and Steph imagine, Gillian explains that exercise, through jogging and yoga provide a way of ‘liberating’ her self and body from ‘feeling bad’ - feeling physically unattractive, and inadequate:

I’ve gotta make the best out of what I’ve got, and so I think when I’m doing yoga or jogging, it’s my way of liberating myself, instead of feeling sad about myself because…I feel attractive, if I do, you know,
if I’m in a fit state, or if I’m taking good care of my body, healthy, um… in shape, I feel like, then I don’t think ‘oh why can’t I be like this, why can’t I be like that’. I guess that’s my way of liberating myself from that constant battle in my head, where you feel bad about yourself. Because as long as I’m fit and at a healthy weight, a decent weight… I don’t feel that. I actually do feel quite attractive even though I don’t have those long legs that I used to want to have; even though I don’t have the big breasts that I used to want to have, then I can still feel attractive anyway? Yeah.

Although these practices make Gillian feel ‘better’ and more accepting of her body, her feeling ‘better’ is contingent on these practices which means that she must uphold her ‘fitness’ in order to be ‘liberated’ from feeling ‘bad’. In this way, Gillian’s body work, which requires so much dedication, attention, thought and time, operates as a great constraint, yet she describes these practices as enabling her to feel ‘liberated’. Although this is paradoxical, Gillian’s body work practices are clearly central to her positive experience of self. There are numerous other dimensions to Gillian’s comments here, including notions of ‘attractiveness’ in a gendered context and definitions of health, as discussed in depth in the previous chapter. Gillian describes that body work (through exercise) ‘liberates’ her from feeling insecure about not having ‘long legs’ or ‘big breasts’ - physical characteristics that Gillian says are considered ideal in women, and characteristics that ‘men like’. Being in a ‘fit state’ enables her to negate this feeling of inadequacy and ‘unattractiveness’, to ‘make the most’ of her body as it is, rather than, as she says, resorting to cosmetic surgical procedures such as breast enlargement surgery. Gillian explains that whilst she is ‘at a healthy weight, a decent weight’, she is ‘liberated’ from ‘feeling bad’ about herself. This situation is precarious however, as Gillian’s positive sense of self and identity hinge on her body work practices.

The concept of affect, understood practically as ‘something which affects something else’ and as ‘the experience of intensities’ (Featherstone 2010: 195) can be used as a way to think through Gillian’s comments here. In this context, Gillian’s body work practices, including a strict regulation of what she eats after work, doing yoga and jogging affect
her body and what she can (or cannot) do. Whilst these practices make her ‘feel better’, the affects related to these body work practices are limited. Where body work practices such as these are framed as her only way of freeing herself from ‘feeling bad’, other possibilities for experiencing and living her body are removed.

Affects can be understood as producing ‘styles of life’, or ways of living. Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007: 3) explain that:

> Styles of life and modes of evaluation that are shaped by resentment, judgment and negation tend to reduce and close off bodily possibilities and potentials for change. By contrast, those which affirm life and its positive capacity for difference, enhance our range of powers and potentials.

Gillian’s body work practices are described as integral to her being able to feel good in her body and self, and Gillian explains that feeling good about herself without these practices is unimaginable. The affects associated with Gillian’s body work mean that her ‘style of life’ is shaped by negation, and reduces her potential to live her body in other ways. That Gillian may feel comfortable or content with her body and in herself without undertaking those practices of body work is a potentiality that is not currently available to Gillian. In this way, the embodied sensations surrounding body work which affect her body constrain her and limit the range of possibilities available for living her body.

Fox (2002, Fox & Ward 2008) uses Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the body without organs to further describe this process and can help to explain how affect may be useful in approaching Gillian’s experience of her body and body work practices. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) understand humans and other bodies as actively connecting and engaging with the world through ongoing ‘experimentation’, and the body without organs is the concept which describes the locus of these encounters. Social and cultural assemblages (such as gender, in the previous chapter, and health ideologies in this chapter) affect the body. The affects and relations of a body include the psychological, emotional and physical attachments produced in encounters between the body without organs and other
Assemblages. This process conditions what the body can do. Assemblages, through relations and affects, ‘define a person’s capacities and his/her limits’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1009).

As I have argued in the previous chapter, becoming involves the ‘opening up to difference, to the many rather than the few’ (Fox 2002: 359); the opening of possibility. This occurs through the ‘multiplication of affects, not the intensification of a single affect or relation’ (Fox 2002: 359). A body without organs which is involved in this intensification, rather than a multiplication of affects suffers a ‘territorialisation that cannot easily be escaped’ (Fox 2002: 359). Where Gillian’s ways of ‘liberating’ herself from ‘feeling bad’ require the ongoing practices of body work, we can begin to see how Gillian’s body (as a body without organs) is involved in particular affective relations with health and gender assemblages (of the slim, feminine body), which close down other possibilities for living her body. This does not mean, however, that Gillian’s body is incapable of ‘becoming-other’; through multiplying the affects and relations between her body, body work and connecting assemblages, Gillian may find numerous other ways living beyond the imperative of body work practices.

At this point I think it is appropriate to re-emphasise one of the most important aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s theorisation of bodies as I use it in this project: that identity is never determined, but is constantly in process because it is formed in a flow of connections, affects and relations. Relations and affects, in the context of assemblages such as gender and health discourses (as above), shape what a body can do, and condition of possibilities for living. Even when becoming-other is inhibited by the intensification, rather than the multiplication of affects, this inhibition is never foreclosed from the outset but may develop through the particular processes of relations and affects. It is only through studying the relations and affects of a body that a body’s potential can be explored.

These theoretical points are particularly important for studying practices of body work in the context of consumer culture and neoliberal ideologies of health, which promote the
belief that improving a person’s life can be enhanced through improving their appearance (Featherstone 2010). Steph and Anna envisaged that exercise would enable them to form a new, more open experience of the self in which, through being ‘skinnier’ or ‘fitter’, they would have ‘one less thing to worry about’ and would be ‘happier’. Many other participants had similar perspectives and understandings of their own and others’ bodies through the ‘look good, feel good’ logic prominent in advertising and popular media portrayals of youthful, healthy bodies (Featherstone 2010). Through using Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts in this project I understand that the relations and affects between bodies (body without organs) and assemblages mediate what bodies can (and cannot) do, which cannot be known in advance.

Steph and Anna, if they follow a similar line as Gillian in using body work practices to slim their bodies as a way of ‘feeling better’, may be closing down the possibilities for other ways of living their bodies; or in the process, they may become involved in relations and affects which define what their bodies can do differently, away from molar femininity which emphasises slenderness, for example.

In this section, Anna, Steph, Paul and Gillian described body work as central in their (positive) experience of the self. Most participants in my study discussed exercise as being a positive aspect of their lives, enabling a set of relations between the body and self associated with feeling ‘good’, ‘better’ or ‘happier’. Paul suggested ‘fit people tend to look better’ (where looking better to him equates to feeling better), and Anna and Steph perceived that ‘fit people have one less thing to worry about’. I argue that the affective experience of the body, involving the connections between the ‘appearance’ and feelings of ‘health’ can be understood as a complex process involving the affects and relations between bodies and other assemblages as impacting what bodies can do, and how they feel. Whilst those participants who classified themselves as ‘fit’ emphasised the merit of their body work for their experience of the self, such as in Gillian’s example, the significant work involved in maintaining an appearance that makes them ‘feel good’ about their bodies serves to perpetuate their body work, closing down possibilities for living their bodies in other less regulated ways.
Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed the central research question which is concerned with how health is implicated in the knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies that are produced through body work practices. Through an exploration of the complexities of participants’ descriptions of their embodied experiences of body work practices, mainly focusing on exercise, discourses of health emerged as crucial to their practices of body work and broader experiences of bodies. As in the previous chapter on gender, discourses of health were also central to participants’ experiences and explanations of their practices. In this chapter, I intended to show the complex and multiple definitions and explanations of health as explained by the participants. These explorations of health as a concept, discourse and lived experience as they relate to body work practices, are important in contextualising what bodies can do and the possibilities for living that are open to them.

Because key discourses surrounding health and bodies specify the link between health and appearance (look good, feel good), health is prioritised as a key aspect informing how bodies are worked on, and how they are lived (‘I just want to be healthy so that I feel happy’). I have intended to show in this chapter that health as a concept and discourse is much more complex, and is lived out in surprising ways, such as in Clare’s friend whose anorexia was explained as ‘becoming too healthy, and it was just becoming dangerous’. Similarly, when Steph and Anna discuss their intentions to become ‘healthier’ or improve their fitness, they imagine that the body work practices involved will make them ‘skinnier’, which will in turn enable them to be ‘happier’, or to have ‘one less thing to worry about’. However, as I intended to show in Gillian’s case, the affects and relations of body work can become intensified, and difficult to open out into other ways of experiencing the body positively. The practices of body work cannot be known or understood outside of the relations and affects involved, however.

In contemporary sociology, analysts of consumer culture identify appearance, body shape and physical control as having become increasingly central to people’s sense of self
identity (Shilling 2007). Body work practices have been conceptualised in sociological approaches as central to the modern, Western individual’s ‘project’ of self-identity, and a key way that self identity is ‘accomplished’ (Giddens 1991, Shilling 2003). The relationship between individuals and their social context is crucial here. Established or dominant sociological approaches theorise this relationship as a tension between social structure and individual agency. As Bray and Colebrook (1998) have argued, a dualist ontology of the body underpins debates on structure and agency, which problematically understands the body as prior to society or representation. A Deleuzian approach to bodies enables analysis to move beyond the dualisms which are often implicit in sociological approaches to the body. Rather than falling back on oppositional categories such as structure and agency as informing analyses on society’s effects on the body, in this study the affects and capacities of bodies are foregrounded in exploring the practices, meanings and experiences of body work. This approach also differs from analyses which would focus on the capacities of individuals for agency in their practices of body work, or analyses of the degrees to which bodies are structured, limited or repressed by the cultural environment in which their body work practices are located. This approach to bodies – as not fundamentally subjects or objects existing prior to society or representation - can assist understandings of body work practices and health as embodied processes involving affects, and aid in opening up understandings of the complexities in how the body and ‘health’ is experienced.

In this regard, affect and the body without organs are useful conceptual tools for exploring bodies and body work practices. The body without organs is the site of connection between assemblages, affects and relations, and defines what a body can (and cannot) do. In other words, the connections and encounters of the body, which are conditioned by affect, influence the possibilities for how the body can be lived. I have explored the affects related to health discourses and body work practices, and in doing so, addressed one of the central research questions of this project relating to the ways discourses and assemblages such as health and gender in the context of body work practices condition the body’s possibilities. As I have shown in this chapter, the possibilities for living that are available can be understood as organised through the
processes of relations and affects. I expand on this point in the next chapter, with a focus on other forms of body work such as cosmetic surgery.
Chapter seven: The limits and possibilities of bodies through body work practices and affect

The previous chapter explored the complex dimensions of health and exercise practices in the experience of the self. In this chapter, the central research questions are explored further, centering on the knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies that are produced through body work practices, and the ways that discourses of health and gender, through body work practices, affect the body’s possibilities. In this chapter, I extend the previous chapter’s focus on health and exercise to include other body work practices that are described by participants as related to ‘obsession’ or ‘addiction’; practices such as intensive weights training and cosmetic surgical procedures. I continue to draw upon Deleuzian concepts such as affect in analysis to explore the ways body work practices are understood by participants in my study.

One of my central aims here is to explore how affect is implicated in the ways body work practices are lived, and connect with broader social assemblages and discourses. Such a focus involves examining the processes and relations between bodies and assemblages. As I have shown in previous chapters, discourses of gender and health, along with an emphasis on individual responsibility and other neoliberal ideas are strongly implicated in participants’ understandings and explanations of their experiences related to their bodies. Gender structures and the contemporary emphasis on individual body practices aligned with ‘health’ were engaged with by participants to frame their experiences of their bodies. In this study, I understand bodies as the unstable outcomes of the assemblages within which they are caught up (Rose 1996: 184). Following this, I understand gender and health as assemblages that shape and create the ‘conditions of possibility for identity, establishing the psychic substrate that both defines a person’s capacities and his/her limits’ (Fox & Ward 2008: 1009).
Body work and the limits of ‘health’

As I explored in the previous chapter, the ways participants define and describe their experiences of ‘health’ show that health as a concept is profoundly contingent and complex. For some, specific practices of body work become essential to the (positive) experience of the self, wherein the body cannot be experienced positively without these practices. In Gillian’s example in the previous chapter, her practices of body work were organised around her body looking healthy and being a ‘healthy shape’ and weight, enabling her to ‘feel attractive’. For Gillian, ceasing body work (due to injury or life changes) may have profound repercussions for the way her body is experienced and lived. Other participants describe the ways they undertake some forms of body work as being like an ‘obsession’ or ‘addiction’.

Sara and Daniel, among others, referred to body work practices as being potentially ‘addictive’, though not in their direct experience, saying ‘people can get obsessed with it’. In Sara’s example, she makes a clear distinction between health and people who practice ‘exercise’ routines ‘every day’:

Sara: Men and women can both become, like almost obsessed with it [working on their bodies], and do their routines every day and exercise and eat well and all that sort of thing, sure.

Julia: So…you're saying that people can get obsessed with going to the gym and things like that? Do you know people like that or…?

Sara: I know people like that, and I know people who you know, how guys can use steroids or drugs to make themselves look better, and I’ve heard stories that once they start doing it, it becomes addictive and they have to do it every day… Like, you can look good but you don’t have to, it doesn't have to be an obsession, you can work out twice a week and be healthy. You don’t have to go every day.
Julia: So you think that’s the better way to be?

Sara: Yeah definitely, do it, like, healthily. (Sara, 26, dental nurse)

There is ‘nothing wrong’ with wanting to ‘look good’ in Sara’s opinion, so long as this is done in a ‘healthy’ way: ‘you can work out twice a week and be healthy’, but steroids transgress the boundary of health, she argues. Others, such as Daniel, Clare and Anna similarly link health and appearance, arguing that ‘people should just be healthy’, yet since ‘health’ is highly contingent and complex, such statements are ambiguous. The multiple understandings and definitions of health mean that ‘health’ is not confined in any set of practices, nor simply a state of ‘being’ to be worked towards or attained. Whilst most participants pinpoint particular ‘limits’ of what is or is not considered a ‘healthy’ practice or activity, as we have seen, the boundaries of health are shifting and understood differently by different participants in the contexts of the relations between theirs and others’ bodies. Many used other’s bodies to define these limits, such as overweight acquaintances (a girl Clare knew at school, or Tom’s housemate), steroid users (men Sara knows through her partner, or men Ben sees at the gym), women who do not eat enough (Clare’s friend at school who suffered from anorexia, or Paul’s criticism of idealised women’s bodies in the media) or people who over-exercise (in Adam’s description of the women he sees running endlessly on the treadmill at the gym). As we will see, ‘caring too much’ about appearance or body work may also be defined as unhealthy.

Tom explains how exercise for him is similar to an ‘addiction’, because the consequences of not ‘keeping it up’ regularly translate into ‘feeling shit’:

Tom: I don’t know exactly what it is about it, and I suppose you could talk about hormones that get excreted with exercise, but it is addictive. You get addicted to exercise. People do. If I’m really thinking about, if I’ll say ‘I’ll do some exercise today’, that’s because I’ll feel really shit if I didn’t. Not feel shit, as in, I’ll be happily sitting on the couch and doing
nothing, but just mentally, I’d be disappointed with myself. So that’s where the motivation starts to come from.

Julia: Did you feel that today?

Tom: Yeah! That’s why I need to go and do some [exercise] later [today] I think! I’ll do something. You do, you get a bit addicted to it. And I’ve gone through phases where you get really into it and you get through that barrier, and your body starts to crave to do something.

Although the word ‘addiction’ typically has negative connotations and would not commonly be associated with health, Tom (and others) describe how they feel addicted to exercising, a practice which is defined as ‘healthy’. Further, Tom’s ‘bad feeling’ as a result of not doing exercise is complex. He says he will be ‘happily’ relaxing on the couch, but ‘mentally’ his compulsion to exercise motivates him to avoid feeling ‘disappointed’ with himself. The affects associated with exercise compel Tom to continue the particular practices of body work. Here, we can understand that Tom is in a particular set of affective relations with his body work practices and sense of self. If he does not exercise for one day he will ‘feel really disappointed’ with himself. Through the concept of affect, I will further explore similar embodied sensations of other participants’ practices of body work relating to ‘addiction’, including the most complex and confounding forms such as cosmetic surgery and eating disorders.

**Affect, ‘addiction’ and body work**

Ben, a former professional baseball player, describes how he ‘can’t get out of the habit’ of doing the training he did when he was a professional; that he ‘can’t bring’ himself to *not* go to the gym for more than two days:

It’s funny, I can’t really get out of the habit of still doing a lot of training. I don’t get to do as much specific baseball stuff. But I can’t bring myself
to go for more than two days without going to the gym. I’ve sort of built up a reputation for being, like a big strong guy, and even if I get on the scales and weigh myself and I’ll still be the same weight, I feel like if I don’t go for a few days I feel not as strong, not as confident. I have to keep going and doing it. [I feel] a lot of pressure on that. I’m 32 and I wonder how long I can keep that up for. (Ben, 32, sales representative)

Ben’s exercise of lifting weights is something he ‘has to keep going and doing’; he ‘has to keep it up’. This description is very similar to Tom’s description above, and to the dictionary definition of addiction, as the ‘state being enslaved to something…that is habit forming…to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma’⁹.

Ben’s body work practices contribute directly to his identity and sense of self, and how others see him (‘as a big strong guy’). He worries he may not be able to continue in this identity for much longer. Body work, for Ben, has significant repercussions that extend beyond discourses of health and masculinity, though both of these discourses are implicated in the meanings of his body work. Body work practices to do with exercise and lifting weights go towards shaping both the physical body and (hegemonically masculine) sense of self. As a result, body work practices are powerful in how the body is experienced and felt. This also means that if the practices of body work are not ‘kept up’ for whatever reason – through circumstances associated with injury, age, or other life changes such as increased work or family commitments – the embodied consequences and impact on sense of self may be profound.

In a similar way, Adam discusses the tension involved in deciding to not continue training during the off-season of football. Although he ‘really enjoyed’ being free from his demanding training regime, discontinuing his body work had unintended consequences for his sense of self and identity:

Actually last year between seasons and before training started I was like, ‘Oh, I’m really enjoying not training’, and I let myself go for awhile, and letting myself go was actually putting on about four kilos and it wasn’t anything to do with muscle weight, it was just me enjoying life and not having to do that vigorous routine, of all those sessions, and actually it made me feel pretty crap. People were still saying to me ‘oh you look fit’ but I felt actually very unfit and felt like I was putting on weight and none of it’s muscle and I’m not actually keeping myself fit, and so after about a month and a half of not doing much at all – I enjoyed it, not doing much – but I also felt pretty terrible at the same time, I could feel myself slipping, down into the, ‘Oh I’m unfit, I don’t feel good about myself, I’m losing that body image that I worked so hard for,’ and even after a month and a half, nothing too much had happened, but I felt like I was losing control…of who I was, almost. (Adam, 23, VFL footballer and University student)

There are numerous, complex connections in this example between Adam as he senses himself and sees his body. Despite others telling him he looks ‘fit’, and as well as ‘really enjoying’ not training, the visceral experience of his body changed dramatically. Adam describes that soon after he stopped training he began to feel very unfit, and felt anxious about gaining weight that is not muscle weight. For Adam, feeling unfit very quickly equated to feeling ‘pretty terrible’. Adam’s sense of self is so entwined with his body being fit and muscular that stopping training for only a few weeks made him feel as though his identity and positive sense of himself was slipping, and that he was losing who he was. Adam and Ben’s relations with body work practices are intensely affective. A focus on their affective experiences enables the visceral, embodied complexities of their bodies to be foregrounded. These examples, from the perspective of affect enable us to see the infinitely more complex ways bodies (body without organs) are defined by their relations and affects, opening up or closing down possibilities for the embodied self (Fox 2002: 351).
Others also experience their bodies and body work having a significant impact for how the self and body are lived. In the following examples, Jason and Tom detail the addictive aspects of their body work and what this means for their sense of self. Jason explains the way he goes about his football training as an ‘addiction’ that compels him to ‘keep it up’, and that there are numerous affective consequences involved if he cannot train. Recent injuries (including extensive leg injuries from a severe boating accident, and a shoulder reconstruction due to a subsequent mishap) have meant he has spent lengthy periods of time in rehabilitation, unable to train with weights or to run. The consequences of this extend beyond the pain of the injuries themselves, and impact upon how he feels about his body and his sense of self on a deeper level.

It is only in weeks directly prior to the interview that Jason has been able to resume training. He describes his exercise regime as relating to how he feels about and within his body:

I probably do some sort of exercise, five or six times a week. Sometimes even twice a day. It’s a bit over the top, I know, I dunno. But…you get an addiction I think? Um, and as soon as you start to fall behind, or you start to stop going you start to look at yourself differently like you go ‘Oh, what’s going on here’ [examining body, stomach], like a little bit [laughs]. So, yeah. You get a bit addicted to it. I don’t know if that’s a good thing, but…oh well…there are addictions in life I s’pose…it’s probably one of the better ones to have! [laughs] …Yeah, you kind of look at yourself a little bit different, like, you go, ‘oh hang on, I’ve stopped, I haven’t done this for a little while’ and you start maybe noticing a little bit, but it’s not actually changing, you’re just, you trick, you’re playing tricks on your mind to say ‘yep, it’s changed’. You look in the mirror and go ‘Oh, look at that’, but really nothing has [changed]. You can’t change from [missing] two sessions, or two weeks even. Um, that’s probably the addiction part of it [laughs]. And I dunno, you feel like…you just feel a little bit different. (Jason, 22, accounts officer)
The relations between Jason’s body and the practices of body work (football training, weights and cardio-vascular sessions) involve ‘addiction’ because, as he describes, ‘as soon as you stop going and doing it, you start to look at yourself differently’. Although Jason jokes that compared to other ‘addictions’ his training is ‘probably one of the better ones to have’, the affects associated with his body if he has to stop training are significant and intensive. Through his affective relations between his body and training, Jason perceives his body as being ‘a little bit different’, despite that nothing in his appearance has ‘really changed’. Jason, like Adam, perceives himself differently, and sees his body in a way that is not realistic: ‘you look in the mirror and go ‘Oh look at that’ [gesturing to his biceps, implying they are smaller in size] but really nothing has changed’. Adam too said he saw himself differently in the mirror and feels differently about himself, and like Jason had the similar experience of his image ‘playing tricks’ on him.

Featherstone (2010: 197) argues that in consumer culture, which is obsessed with bodies, ‘images do complex work’, and extend beyond the ‘look good, feel good’ advertising tag-line which invites individuals to care for their appearances and corresponding experience of self. Featherstone insists that images are not merely visual, and are felt as a sense of energy, force or intensity: they are affective (2010: 199, emphasis added). The affective body, (such as Jason’s or Adam’s) in contrast to body image, ‘is a body without a clearly defined image’. This means that the affective body is more processual, and ‘can convey and receive a range of affective responses, intensities which are palpable, but difficult to decipher and articulate in language’ (Featherstone 2010: 201).

Jason’s description of his image in the mirror ‘playing tricks’ on him points to the complex connections between his mirror-image and his affective, embodied sensations. From a Deleuzian perspective, the affective body is understood as ‘open and incomplete’, and as a result can be ‘open to misreading’ (Featherstone 2010: 200). A Deleuzian approach does not attempt to foreclose or define the body as subjected to the ‘purposive rational instrumental’ perspective, as driven by the mind (Featherstone 2010: 200). This way of understanding bodies enables a broader analysis than popularised psychological accounts of negative body image caused by images in the media, for example. From a
traditional psychological analysis, Jason and Adam’s descriptions of appearing different in the mirror would be typically associated with body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). This is a medicalised and pathologised condition related to a ‘dysfunction of the brain’ and classified as a somatoform disorder in the DSMIV (Didie, Kuniega-Pietrzak & Phillips 2010). Some participants in fact make reference to body dysmorphic disorder in relation to theirs’ and others’ bodies, which suggests the dominance and popularity of psychologised explanations of the body and body image. For example, using strikingly similar language to Adam and Jason, Isabelle describes the mismatch between her image in the mirror and ‘reality’ as body dysmorphic disorder:

I can notice [when I have lost weight], with my clothes and stuff. But I think I can…it’s like a bit of body dysmorphia, I might think I look the same but then I weigh myself and look at myself again in the mirror I’m like, ‘Oh no, I look really big’, if I’m heavier. It’s like your mind is playing tricks on you a little bit.

Both Isabelle and Jason refer to their mind ‘playing tricks’ on them with their image in the mirror, and their perception of their bodies is contingent on numerous factors concerning how the body looks and feels in relation to body work. Analyses which locate body concerns as psychological ‘disorders’ close down a range of alternative ways of understanding the body in the context of the numerous processes and relations it is involved with, and through which it is continually ‘becoming’ rather than static and foreclosed. As has been examined in the previous chapters, the specificities of body work practices and the correlations with experience are quite diverse and difficult to predict in advance.

For example, where Steph and Anna anticipate that ‘very fit people would have one less thing to worry about’, numerous examples show this may be far from the case. Appearance and body image do not always follow the ‘look good, feel good’ logic as we have seen; and many varying relations between the body and self (through body work practices) ensue. We need tools to understand these ambivalent, less coherent experiences of the embodied self (Coleman 2009). Using affect as a concept engages with an
ontology and epistemology capable of understanding the body in continuous movement and negotiation and involved in a complex set of relations, ‘rather than a thing with a fixed or determined image’ (Featherstone 2010: 208), as in pathologised accounts of BDD.

**Body work, gender and similarities of affect**

In the following example, Ben discusses the ways his body work (and image in the mirror) are closely linked with his felt sense of self, and are particularly intensive. He repeats many of the same comments regarding ‘looking different’ in the mirror as made by Jason and Adam, and goes so far as likening his experience to ‘reverse anorexia or something’:

Ben: [If I haven’t been to the gym for more than a couple of days], it seems like I almost look different to myself in the mirror. Um, yeah, I can’t explain it. You know, I guess it's sort of opposite to anorexia or something like that. They always think that they’re fat. But you have a couple of days off and you're thinking ‘Oh, maybe you’ve lost a bit of something around here’, [motioning to shoulders] and just in your head, it sort of, keeps building up. [voice softer] So yeah, I guess, it’s sort of like a reverse anorexia or something…there’s no real logical thing behind it. I know logically that not going to the gym for two weeks I’m not going to even really lose anything. Still, for some reason you can’t get past it.

Julia: So what sort of, what’s your motivation for doing all of the work you still do? You mentioned to be strong?

Ben: It’s probably just to maintain the image that I’ve built up over 20 years I guess amongst friends and the baseball community and stuff. They nicknamed me Hercules… so that’s a lot to live up to. So you’ve sort of gotta live up to that all the time, and that’s probably the reason...
why I still do it. Um, I dunno, I could say it was for the health benefits and everything, but… I don’t eat that healthy. I can’t really say that’s the main reason for it. I think it’s just for, sort of, the purely egotistical type thing.

Like Adam and Jason, Ben contrasts ‘logic’ and ‘reality’ with how he sees himself in the mirror. If he has been unable to train, he looks different to himself in the mirror. In likening his condition to anorexics who ‘think they’re fat’ when they are not, he demonstrates that he realises that his perception of how his body looks is skewed. The intensive affects involved in Ben’s experience of his body and body work may share numerous affective similarities with those who suffer from eating disorders due to the intense bodily scrutiny and discipline involved in each set of practices. Binaristic gender structures are an important element here too, since the figure of Hercules that Ben is attempting to ‘live up to’ is emphatically masculine, and his concern about losing muscle size is the ‘opposite’ to ‘feminine’ conditions such as anorexia. The intensities of affect between slimming bodies and muscling bodies, however, are very similar.

As a previous chapter explored, many aspects of bodies and body work are framed by dichotimised gender categories, emphasising slenderness for women and muscularity for men. These gender categories are embodied and literally lived out by some participants, such as Ben in his focus to retain a muscular body and Gillian in her commitment to body work practices which keep her body ‘slim’. Gender is important to the ways participants frame and contextualise their bodies and body work practices with broader social and historical forces, yet the ways their bodies are lived exceed such reductive binaristic categories. In fact, the affective intensities associated with the body in the mirror for women and men are profoundly similar, despite being moderated by gendered dimensions of physicality. As Armstrong (2002) has argued, gender does not fully stratify embodied experience. Gender can be theorised as a structuring narrative which ‘contains us within a logical evolution of molar forms and subjects’ which we cannot simply eliminate, but neither are we wholly trapped or reducible to such narratives (Armstrong 2002). Exploring the body’s affective capacities related to gender enables a way of seeing
the ways gender both structures, and does not determine, embodied experience. A focus on affect signals the inherent potential of bodies, and the inevitability of micro-processes of ‘escape’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

Ben’s ‘image’ as a ‘big strong guy’ has formed a cornerstone of his identity for the past twenty years, the majority of his adult life so far. The nickname ‘Hercules’, given to him by his teammates and friends is ‘a lot to live up to’, however, this is becoming more difficult as he grows older: ‘I’m 32, and I wonder how long I can keep that up for?’

Throughout the interview, Ben seems to be renegotiating his approach to body work. It is significant in this example that Ben actively disconnects notions of health from his body work: ‘I could say it was for the health benefits and everything, but…I can’t really say that’s the main reason for it.’ He notes that health is available as a discourse to help him to justify or explain his body work, but admits that health has not been an important goal in his body work or in his attitude to his body.

Similar to examples in the previous chapter involving the separation between image and health, Ben’s body could be read by others as exemplifying a healthy ‘masculine’ body (as some participants in the first chapter said it is ‘healthy’ and ‘natural’ for men to be muscular). A focus on image though, as separate from health, is defined by other participants however as an ‘unhealthy’ preoccupation or even ‘addiction’, for example, when Sara discusses that men who use steroids to ‘look better’ overstep boundaries associated with body work and ‘health’. Ben says when he was younger he ‘would have done anything, steroids, anything to make [him] a better athlete’, but there is a sense that his focus on his body in terms of image only is changing, as he is beginning to consider his body differently as he grows older. Towards the end of the interview, he says he is becoming more focused on ‘inner health’ (such as moderating his cholesterol levels and reducing blood pressure through making changes to his diet), as opposed to his ‘image’. Through body work practices, the body may be worked on towards a desired ‘image’, yet the body is ‘not a thing with a fixed or determined image’ (Featherstone 2010: 208). It is no wonder that Ben finds it so difficult to ‘live up to’ a static, fixed image or identity. A central element of Deleuze’s theorisation of change and difference is that ‘the only
constant in time, the only same, is the power of not remaining the same’ (Colebrook 2002: 60). The possibilities open to Ben for living his body are changing beyond his identification with ‘Hercules’, towards a notion of ‘health’ disconnected from appearance; as internal (through lowering his cholesterol and blood pressure), rather than visible.

Rather than analysing Ben as having an individual pathology related to misperceptions of his body and its features in the mirror, a focus on affect allows us to understand Ben and others as experiencing particularly intensive affects. I understand these affective relations as connected (but not reducible to) dominant images of masculinity, and the current prevalence and idealisation of male musclebility. The affects and processual relations between bodies and broader forces are central in understanding the indeterminacy and complexity of bodies as they are lived. This point is particularly relevant to the following section, which explores other forms of body work which complicate the elusive boundaries of health; practices which are linked to relations between body work, the body and self, and extend further to an ‘addiction’ or ‘obsession’. As we have already seen, practices associated with exercise and going to the gym have the potential to ‘slip over’ into relations which profoundly affect the experience of the self. Cosmetic surgery and relations with food are other body work practices which involve affects similar to those discussed in the examples above, and involve particularly intensive affects which are meaningful for the ways the body is lived - its capacities and becomings. I explore these themes in the remainder of this chapter.

Cosmetic surgery, affect and the (feminine) body

The intensities and affects involved in exercise and cosmetic surgery practices may be similar in terms of how they feel. Practices of exercise, where they are undertaken primarily to alter the shape of one’s body or ‘image’ are similar to cosmetic surgical interventions of the body insofar as both are understood as having the potential to change the way the body is lived. As we shall see though, this is just one possible outcome
among many. Cosmetic surgery, along with other interventions such as weight-loss and exercise regimes that were framed by participants in the context of ‘health’ are marketed in consumer culture with an ‘over-simplistic’ logic that such practices have transformative potential that ‘will result in a more positive and acceptable body image’ (Featherstone 2010: 213). The way the body is lived in relation to these practices, however, can have many other more ambiguous and problematic outcomes, such as those I explored above in the context of exercise and lifting weights becoming ‘addictive’ and shaping a static body and image that is extraordinarily difficult to ‘live up to’. The ways these complexities are experienced in the context of cosmetic surgery are explored through Kate’s and Isabelle’s examples below.

Kate’s experience of cosmetic surgery: ‘now I can just really live my life’

Kate is 24, and lives south of Melbourne with her boyfriend. She works part time as a nanny and administrative assistant. Three years ago, Kate had cosmetic surgery to enlarge her breasts. In Kate’s example, cosmetic surgery is linked with ‘obsession’, and she discusses the way she felt about her body prior to the surgery as logically justifying her need for it:

It’s like you become obsessed with something that you want to change. And you’re just obsessed with it to the point that you talk about it all the time. And I used to say to people ‘I’ve got no boobs’, I’d say it before they’d noticed it so they’d know that I knew that I don’t have boobs.

To Kate, the decision to have her breasts surgically enlarged was difficult and significant, ‘a massive thing’, but necessary in negating her ‘obsession’ with changing her breasts. Kate recounted in detail the factors and considerations related to her decision to undergo the surgery, emphasising the necessity she felt in undergoing the surgery. Kate says she defied advice from friends and family, and was adamant that the surgery was imperative:
All my girlfriends were like, ‘Don’t do it’. So you’re making a decision and you’re going against everyone else. And it’s a massive, it’s a massive thing. But over time, you can’t put a price on being happy with your body. I’ve never once looked back and regretted my decision. And over time, I’ve had so many moments where I just feel... like I don’t have this feeling in my stomach where I’m worried about wearing bathers… Not stressing about summer, and enjoying your life, and just really living it. And like, yes it sounds crazy, like ‘why would she care that she has no boobs?’ but you do, you just do. (Kate, 24, administrative assistant/nanny).

Kate describes the positive impacts her breast enlargement surgery has had the way she experiences her life, in contrast to the ‘self conscious’-ness and embarrassment she suffered as a result of her breasts, which she argues were ‘non existent’ (‘I had nothing! I had nipples!’). The decision is undertaken in the context of feeling she has a right to be ‘happy with’ her body. Razer argues that popular discourse on body image in Australia holds that there is an ‘urgent need to boost the body image of everyone, particularly women’, and that positive body image is presented as a right, and an index of mental well-being (Razer 2012). This discourse coincides with the health, beauty and cosmetic industries, through which positive body image is presented as available for purchase.

A range of affective intensities surround Kate’s relations with her body (breasts) and others. Kate describes the humiliation she endured at high school when she was teased about her body:

The boys used to say, ‘Oh Kate, hey we’re going to the beach; we could use you as a surfboard!’ and I was just like ‘Oh my god, I’m the girl with no boobs!’ It was so, so, oh...in summer I just wouldn’t go to the beach, I wasn’t living my life because I was so self conscious about it.

For Kate, having breast implant surgery was about transforming the way her body was lived (Davis 1995, Budgeon 2003). She describes that previously she felt so self conscious about her breasts it was stopping her from ‘living her life’. She contrasts this
with after the surgery, where she is ‘enjoying life, really living it’. Kate was emphatic about the ways her decision to have silicone surgically implanted into her breasts has altered the way her body, and her life, is lived. Kate struggles to articulate how intensely positive her breast enlargement surgery has been, and how it has impacted upon her life as a whole: ‘there are so many moments when I just feel…’ She contrasts this with the ‘feeling’ in her stomach of anxiety, worry and ‘stress’ when prior to the surgery she would avoid social situations which involved her body being commented on by others, such as at the beach or pool at school. The affects related to Kate’s cosmetic surgery have extended her capacity for affect, for new ways of living her body, and new possibilities for what her body can do.

When I asked Kate whether there would be anything else she would get ‘done’ (referring to cosmetic surgery) to change her body, she replied:

Nup. I’m me forever now. And that’s what people do, they look at me and go, she’s had the boobs done, what else had she had done? And there’s nothing else! And I know that people get to the stage where they do their lips, their nose, Botox… Yeah, like my friend who had the nose job, I think that was it for her too. I don’t think she’d have anything else done. It’s just that one thing that you feel really…self conscious about, and it just eats away at you, and you’re just like ‘eurgh’. Like I don’t think I would change anything on my face, I wouldn’t get Botox or anything as I get older. I just want to grow old gracefully. Um, for me it [breast enlargement surgery] was just about being able to try on a dress. And my friends say ‘If you’d had small boobs Kate you wouldn’t have done it’. And I’m like, if I’d had any boobs I wouldn’t have done it!’ Just any boobs, an A [cup], I would’ve been happy with that! I don’t think, for me – I don’t think there would be anything else I’d change. If I was to change anything on my face I’d look in the mirror and go ‘Oh I don’t look like me anymore!’ It’d be weird!
Kate argues her need for the surgery by arguing that if she had ‘had any boobs at all’ she would not have felt compelled to have surgery. Despite telling the surgeon she only wanted to have size ‘A’ breasts (the smallest cup size available in standard Australian bra sizes), she was convinced to have size ‘C’, larger implants:

When I went to the surgeon I said ‘I just want to go a size A, I just want to have an ‘A’ cup’. And he was like, ‘An A cup? I think that would be a waste of your money Kate!’ And my mum said, ‘I think you should go bigger than an A’ and I was like, I just wanted boobs, any boobs!

Kate’s explanation of her ‘need’ for breast implants is similar to many in Davis’s study who did not want to have surgery to ‘enhance’ themselves, but to ‘be like everybody else’ (Davis 2003: 16). Now that she no longer ‘looks different’, Kate feels that she is complete and nothing else requires alteration - ‘I’m me forever now’. This statement illustrates the way that cosmetic surgery may be experienced as an intervention into embodied identity, in which Kate can ‘renegotiate her relationship to her body and construct a different sense of self’ (Davis 1995: 113); a self that Kate says would not consider any other surgical changes as she grows older: ‘I just want to grow old gracefully’. Kate is adamant about the power of the negative feelings associated with feeling really ‘self conscious’ about an aspect of the body; that this ‘obsession’ can ‘eat away at you’.

In another example, she argues that the only way to ‘get over it’ (feeling awful about a part of the body) is to change it, ‘otherwise you just keep going with it’ (the bad feelings). Kate also uses the example of her friend who was ‘obsessed with her nose’ who had cosmetic surgery to change it and now lives her life in a much more positive way that does not require any further surgical intervention (‘that was it for her too’). Kate argues that if someone already has a life-affecting preoccupation with a particular aspect of their body, they should be able to change it and not be ‘judged negatively’ for it, since it is how she experienced surgery. She says, ‘I’m all for things like cosmetic surgery, if it makes you feel better’. Importantly however, there is nothing intrinsic about cosmetic
surgery as a set of practices that does in fact lead to the body and self being experienced in a way that ‘feels better’, even though this was how Kate experienced it.

These body work practices too are particularly individualised, and this means that if the practices do not succeed, the brunt of body (image) failure is borne by the individual alone (see McRobbie 2009). Cosmetic surgery is also a particularly drastic intervention that relate to female bodies in particular; for ‘enhancing femininity’ (Davis 2003: 17). As we saw in previous examples, some forms of body work can become ‘addictive’ and self-perpetuating, leading to an affective experience of the self that is to an extent trapped within these practices since the positive experience of the self depends on them. Gender, undoubtedly, is heavily implicated in this process.

This logic, that the self, through the ‘body image’ may be more positively lived through the elimination of ‘flaws’ through transformative techniques, is a component of both health and consumer culture discourses. In Kate’s example, she describes that the embodied sensations associated with cosmetic surgery and sense of self have in fact occurred in a relatively straightforward, simple way (though Kate has given the broader meanings of her surgery, in relation to peers, family and others a great deal of thought) aligned with the ideology that improving one’s appearance is linked with ‘happiness’ or ‘feeling good’. As we will see in other examples though, the affects and relations associated with the body, body work practices and self may occur in much more complex and problematic ways that cannot adequately be explained by such straightforward understandings of bodies and images.

A focus on the affective relations of body work such as cosmetic surgery problematises Kate’s view (also found in consumer culture marketing) that ‘transformative techniques will lead to a more positive and acceptable body image’ (Featherstone 2010: 213). As I explored in previous examples from this and earlier chapters, this logic over-simplifies the complex, highly contingent and ambiguous experiences of the body through body work; particularly regarding the more invasive, painful and risky technologies of cosmetic surgery (Leve et al. 2012). Since cosmetic surgery is perhaps the most
‘transformative’ intervention of the body, the focus on affect and complexity is particularly important. A focus on the affective relations between Kate’s body and the surgery enable the complex, highly contingent and ambiguous experiences of body work to be explored beyond the binary of ‘cultural dope’ or ‘subject possessing agency’. The affects related to Kate’s cosmetic surgery extends new ways of living her body, even if she is repeating or emulating ideal physical femininity. Like Kate, Isabelle had breast enlargement surgery to negate ‘feeling bad’ about an aspect of her body; to ‘feel more comfortable’ in her appearance. For Isabelle though, no amount of body work is ‘ever enough’. A focus on the affects related to cosmetic surgery, rather than the practice of surgery itself, enables a more complex and nuanced understanding of the ways cosmetic surgery is experienced by Kate and Isabelle.

**Isabelle and cosmetic surgery: ‘when will it stop?’**

Isabelle is 24 years old and lives with her mother and sister in a suburb in Melbourne’s south-east. She is employed as a beauty therapist at a cosmetic surgery day clinic. Administering a diverse range of body modification, improvement and ‘maintenance’ practices are part of her daily working life. Like Kate, Isabelle has had cosmetic surgery to have her breasts enlarged, and is ‘obsessed’ with changing aspects of her body she feels ‘self conscious’ about, such as her upper arms, hips and thighs, and face as it ‘ages’. Isabelle’s affects and relations associated with her body, body work and self are quite different from Kate’s, and follow a different course. For Isabelle, no amount of body work is ‘ever enough’. When describing what women would have to do to get the ‘ideal’ woman’s body (in the context of her work as a beauty therapist at a cosmetic surgery centre), Isabelle says:

> I think it’s, it’s too hard to be honest! Like, you’d never get there. You want an ideal body but even if you’re at your goal weight, you still don’t, it’s still not enough.
Isabelle has undergone a number of cosmetic procedures. She has had breast implants to make both breasts the same size (one breast was two cup sizes larger than the other), ‘to make them look normal’; Botox\textsuperscript{10} injections in her forehead; and she plans on having Liposuction\textsuperscript{11} on her upper arms and outer thighs. Isabelle’s body work is central to what her body can do, and how it is lived and experienced by her. The affective relations involved in her body work practices are crucial and define what is possible for Isabelle in how she lives her body. The affective intensities related to changing Isabelle’s body through cosmetic surgery are different from Kate’s, and mean that her body is lived differently through these body work practices.

Isabelle explains that having breast enlargement surgery was undertaken ‘to feel comfortable, to feel normal, because they [her breasts] looked a bit funny’. Other aspects of Isabelle’s body work not related to cosmetic surgery, such as wearing make up or dieting to lose weight, are also undertaken with the same goal - to ‘feel comfortable’, or to feel less self conscious about her appearance. The technologies of cosmetic surgery are approached by Isabelle as a way of correcting a flawed aspect of her body; however, the body-altering practices and procedures have not achieved this for Isabelle. Although Isabelle says she is ‘a lot happier’ after having her breasts enlarged because now ‘they look nice’, she also explains that afterwards she began thinking of other procedures she could have:

\begin{quote}
The more I keep doing… like I had my boobs done and I was like

‘Right, what else can I do, what can I do next?’
\end{quote}

The intensities of affect which produced the relations between her body and having breast surgery, rather than having the simple ‘result’ of a ‘more positive and acceptable body image’ (Featherstone 2010), remained and intensified. Isabelle, after having breast

\textsuperscript{10} Botox, or Botulinum toxin is a substance which, when injected into the face, blocks muscular nerve signals and ‘diminishes wrinkles’ (see http://www.plasticsurgery.org/cosmetic-procedures/botulinum-toxin.html).

\textsuperscript{11} Liposuction is a procedure which involves the fat being suctioned out of the body with a surgical vacuum while the patient is under anesthetic (see http://www.plasticsurgery.org:80/cosmetic-procedures/liposuction.html?sub=Liposuction%20procedure%20steps).
surgery received free Botox injections at work (‘the nurses needed someone to practice on’), and also plans on having Liposuction on her upper arms and outer thighs because she explains she has ‘more fat cells there’. Isabelle senses, however, that there is something inexorable about her plans and motivations towards cosmetic surgery. She says, discussing her plans for further procedures:

I do wanna have Lipo at work. Because we get it for free at work. One of the nurses had it and she looks good. [voice softer] But you think, ‘When will it stop?’ I don’t know.

When I asked about the limit or endpoint as to what she would do, and which practices if any she would continue or add to in the future, Isabelle answers:

Isabelle: Oh, as I get older, I’ll have everything done. I don’t wanna get, I don’t wanna look old and wrinkly. I’d have a facelift when I’m older. I’ll do everything. My boyfriend’s like ‘no, you should just age gracefully’ cos his mum’s like that but I’m like ‘nah’. Cos my mum’s like that too. She’s had a tummy tuck and a breast reduction, and she got a lift done the other day, and she’s had her eyes done, and my dad’s had lipo… yeah so I suppose it’s expected in my family. I watch all the plastic surgery shows. I’ve got them all on DVD. I’m too obsessed with looks. I think, I like my nose, but if I had a bad nose I’d change it.

Julia: You say you’re too obsessed with it –

Isabelle: [interrupting] But I like it.

Julia: Yeah. Is that because you think other people will say you’re too obsessed with it?

Isabelle: I think so, yeah probably. I’ll still do it though.
Isabelle’s experiences of body work have more in common with those who say they are ‘addicted’ to exercise or going to the gym (such as Ben, Jason and Adam, and perhaps Gillian) than Kate who has undergone one of the same cosmetic surgery procedures (breast enlargement surgery). Gorbis (2004), a clinical psychologist has argued that sufferers of body dysmorphic disorders do not benefit from cosmetic surgery procedures aimed at ‘correcting’ their perceived flaws. Gorbis (2004: 2) goes on to link cosmetic surgery with ‘addiction’: ‘It seems as though people with BDD get addicted to plastic surgeries’. This makes sufferers of BDD ‘perfect consumers’, since their demand for cosmetic services is endless (Gorbis 2004). Although in the context of this thesis it is not helpful to analyse Isabelle as suffering from body dysmorphic disorder, Gorbis’s arguments highlight the complex nexus between individualised consumer choice and the intensifying demand for cosmetic procedures. Kate’s experience of cosmetic surgery follows the beauty, health and cosmetic industry logic of ‘look good, feel good’, however, unlike Isabelle, Kate is not the ‘perfect consumer’ since she no longer requires the technologies of cosmetic surgery for her positive experience of self.

These examples show that the meanings associated with how the body feels as a result of body work extend beyond the practices themselves, and impact on the experience of self - the way the body is lived, and the range of possibilities that are available. The intensity of the affects associated with the practices of body work connect the experiences of Isabelle, Ben, Jason and Adam particularly, who explain their experiences of body work in the most complex ways. Their examples complicate the simplistic discourses of health, gender and how images are supposed to ‘feel’ (such as in the ‘look good, feel good’ adage) most comprehensively. This perspective also enables an understanding of body work practices as not intrinsically good or bad; rather it depends on the affective relations surrounding these practices and whether life is restricted or maximised through the affects associated with those practices.

As Fox (2002: 358) argues, ‘the intensification of affect can lead to a becoming which reterritorialises and inhibits further lines of flight…a body without organs which has become (rather than being in the process of becoming) has suffered a reterritorialisation
that cannot easily be escaped’. As I argued in the previous chapter in the context of Gillian’s slimming body work practices, the affects related to Gillian’s body work practices were limited, and limited the range of possibilities for living her body as a result. Where body work practices are positioned as the only way of freeing herself from ‘feeling bad’, other possibilities for Gillian living her body (in terms of other ways it may feel or be experienced) are not immediately available. Becoming is understood as the multiplication and proliferation of affects and involves ‘opening up to the many rather than the few’ (Fox 2002: 359). In the examples of body work practices from Isabelle and others (Ben, Adam and Jason), however, their affective relations between their bodies and body work practices are intensified, rather than multiplied. Isabelle can only imagine one possibility for her body as it ages: ‘I’ll have everything done’. Where Kate’s cosmetic surgery enabled a multiplication of affects, ‘there are so many moments now where I just feel… now I can enjoy my life, just really live it’, Isabelle’s breast surgery intensified her affects, ‘what can I do next? When will it stop?’ Cosmetic surgery, like other body work practices, may also reterritorialise the body and a person’s ‘styles of life’ it in a way that cannot easily be escaped.

**Differences in descriptions of post-surgery pain**

The carnal, corporeal experiences associated with dramatic body modification are often omitted in mainstream discussions of cosmetic surgery (Tait 2007; Leve et al. 2012). Kate and Isabelle had very differing descriptions regarding the pain of undergoing breast enlargement surgery. Kate says that after she woke up from the operation, ‘it really hurt’:

> Whenever other girls ask me about it, [wanting to have breast enlargement surgery] I tell them it’s probably the most painful thing I’ve ever experienced. Um and it’s…it’s an emotional thing too because you wake up and go, ‘Oh my god, I’ve changed my body’. It’s definitely painful for, like three days.

In contrast, Isabelle says:
It wasn’t that painful actually, it’s made me a lot more confident with my boyfriend especially. Like I didn’t like to wear bathers and stuff like that cos they looked funny.

Whilst Kate describes the pain as both physical and emotional, and as ‘the most painful thing I have ever experienced’, Isabelle avoids discussing pain and focuses her answer on the ‘positive’ aspects of the surgery, such as having increased confidence with her boyfriend and in wearing a bikini. Kate describes changing her body is a significant, emotional undertaking involving pain on a number of levels (physical and emotional), however, Isabelle does not want to talk about the pain at all and presents the procedure itself as ‘no big deal’ (see Leve et al. 2012). According to Jones (2008), there are cultural silences around the actual process of cosmetic surgery. In a study by Leve et al. (2012), similar to Isabelle, many participants downplayed or disavowed their post-operative physical suffering, related to the increasing normalisation of cosmetic surgery.

I understand the differences in Kate’s and Isabelle’s discussions on the pain of having breast surgery as potentially significant for understanding the other differences between their descriptions of affective experiences of the body and the resulting relations for continuing surgery (in Isabelle’s case). To discuss the pain associated with practices that are otherwise conceptualised by the participants as being ‘positive’ to their experience of the self would be contradictory, and perhaps this is why most do not emphasise or discuss pain in their experiences. Descriptions of pain illustrate yet another example of the simplistic logic that physical transformations lead will lead to a more positive experience of the self. This logic is insufficient and masks the numerous complexities related to practices of body work and experiences of the body and self.

**Affect, gender and becoming in cosmetic surgery**

The affective and intensive relations involved between bodies and body work practices guide those practices, whether they involve cosmetic surgery, exercise, going to the gym
or any other practices aimed at changing the body’s appearance. In this way, Kate’s and Isabelle’s differing perspectives and intentions regarding cosmetic surgery are not simplistically related to issues of subjection, domination, ‘insecurity’ or pathology. What guides the becomings of bodies in particular directions, such as motivating the need for cosmetic surgery, or building muscle every day through lifting weights, is dependent on the affective and intensive relations between particular bodies, which are constituted differently and involve multiple, changing, connecting forces. For example, although I understand Kate’s and Isabelle’s experiences of breast enlargement surgery as occurring in the context of the cultural requirements of femininity, the affects of appearance and femininity are much more intense for Isabelle, and guide the possibilities for living her body in a very different direction from Kate’s.

Affects related to femininity, appearance, image and consumer culture logics of transformation and self-improvement, constitute Isabelle and Kate’s bodies as assemblages, and open and close certain pathways as being potential options. This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they say that affects constitute bodies, and define what they are capable of. Gender and other assemblages shape the conditions of possibility for identity (Fox 2002). Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007: 12) explain:

Bodies enfold that which surrounds them and, at the same time, they fold out into the world to shape the spaces they encounter. A body can be understood to have many folds, and to be folded in many different ways. Bodies can develop rigid folds, which stratify them in a particular way, reducing their potential for change. They can also unfold their relations with the world; unfurling the categories of identity and habit that make them what they are.

Isabelle and Kate’s body work is aligned with molar assemblages of gender, which stratify them in particular ways. In Kate’s examples, aspects of femininity are problematised such as the unequal expectations and pressures of appearance associated with being a woman (see chapter six). Though undergoing cosmetic surgery to enlarge her breasts can be understood as conforming to (rather than problematising) broader
expectations of molar femininity, Kate’s body work practices and broader affective relations with her body and assemblages are enfolded in a way which is open to difference and multiplicity. The possibilities for how Kate may live her body and practice forms of body work are much less constrained than Isabelle’s, for example.

Isabelle’s relations with molar femininity and her body work practices can be understood as more ‘rigid folds’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 12). As Isabelle’s affects surrounding her body and cosmetic surgery continue to intensify, the limits as to what Isabelle’s body can do are continually and emphatically shaped by molar femininity, as well as through her family and occupation as a beauty therapist. Although ‘there is always the possibility for deterritorialisation’ or escape (Fox 2002), territories shaped by molar gender categories establish limits that can be particularly difficult to negotiate. Importantly though, I understand that the body is not simply determined, and from Deleuze’s perspective, ‘life is not just the progression of ordered sequences from some already given set of possibilities’ (Colebrook 2002: 57). Because the self is ‘processual, continually unfolding and becoming other’, the body’s boundaries and possibilities ‘can be redrawn, especially if one has a little help’ (Fox 2002: 360).

As I have discussed in other chapters, ‘ethological’ (rather than etiological) understandings of the body refer to a concern for the affects and relations implicated between bodies and other assemblages, rather than positioning bodies in deterministic or reductive ‘cause and effect’ models. This means, for example, understanding Isabelle’s cosmetic surgery as more than the effect of poor body image or pathologised body dysmorphic disorder, caused by narrow standards of female beauty as portrayed in the media. Affects, or ‘the experience of intensities’ (Featherstone 2010: 195) are a key aspect of bodies and body work practices, and influence the experience of body work and the self in complex ways.

The positivity, capacity and affirmation of bodies through Deleuze’s concept of becoming is implicit because of the openness and indeterminacy of becomings, when affects and relations are open to new connections and reassembling. It is when relations
‘do not ensure an open future’, when becoming is foreclosed through the ‘stopping’ of the process of affects and relations, that the body without organs can be fatal (Deleuze 1997; Buchanan 1997). Anorexia and other eating disorders have been described by theorists drawing on Deleuze to understand these practices, and have been termed ‘deadly practices of the self’ (Buchanan 1997). One way of more thoroughly analysing the ways that bodies, body work, affects and relations work together and form various ‘becomings’ is to examine these processes in the context of anorexia, through Beth’s experience of suffering from anorexia some years earlier. Buchanan explains anorexia as a process in which eating is disconnected from hunger, and the relation between food and the body is refigured (Buchanan 1997: 78). Through examining this potentially deadly refiguration, I intend to show the theoretical depth in the way affect works and can be used to understand other, less harrowing body work practices.

Beth and the anorexic body

Beth was nineteen years old at the time of being interviewed. Six years prior, Beth discusses having been hospitalised for the treatment of anorexia. Beth alluded to having previously suffered from ‘body issues’ around the middle of the interview, and when I asked her what this meant, she described having suffered from anorexia, and discussed her recovery and experiences.

Beth described anorexia as a ‘disease’, saying ‘it’s such a strange disease; it goes against everything that people are supposed to do. Like, our primal instinct is to eat always, to stay alive. But um, you know, when somebody chooses to starve…’ Here, the differing relation with food involved in anorexia is explained as ‘going against our primal instinct…to stay alive’. From a Spinozist perspective, hunger is not a ‘drive’ or an instinct but a relation between food and the body (Buchanan 1997). For the anorexic, food takes on a different relation. Spinoza and Deleuze have criticised psychoanalytic perspectives which define hunger as a ‘drive’, specifying that the theory of hunger as a drive neglects the relations in which hunger is situated. An anorexic’s relation with food
does not prompt the action of eating. Rather than experiencing the hunger-affect which induces eating, another affect is at work, prompting an alternative relation with food (Buchanan 1997). In Beth’s case, shame and guilt are the affects concerning food, which produce the relations between food and her body which compel her to avoid food. For Beth, negative, painful affects are associated with food.

In the following example, Beth describes the process of becoming anorexic in relation to her attitudes and actions towards food and eating:

Beth: …It’s just like, the minute I started to feel self conscious, like it just took over. It started with going on a diet, and then it just got out of control.

Julia: Like, once you started one thing, it just snowballed?

Beth: Yeah. Pretty much. Like, I had really healthy diet, but it was still a conscious diet. And I just started to be really unsatisfied with myself, and then, food started tasting like, just like guilt. Like, having a bowl of food would just be like eating guilt. And it was horrible. Like, it caused me pain, like, emotionally, to eat. And…like… I just didn’t want that, that feeling, the shame and everything. And then I stopped eating, and I got really skinny. And, I seemed to think that if I ate anything, I’d put all of the weight back on. So I didn’t eat at all. I didn’t eat at all for 6 weeks. Um, and then I got hospitalised shortly after that.

Beth is clear in her description of food producing a particular affect far removed from the hunger as a ‘drive’. Beth’s relations with food are not restricted to ‘hunger’. Rather than hunger, Beth’s affects related to food are guilt and shame. For Beth, eating is not associated with nourishment, but with ‘physical pain’. To avoid the affects of shame, guilt and pain, the relation between the body and food have to be altered: eating is problematic, but this can be resolved through ceasing to eat. The affects related to food (guilt, shame, pain) required an alteration to the relation between the body and food.
Buchanan argues that because anorexics cannot change what food does to them, they must change themselves, which demands that new ways of being be found, ‘which effectively means a new way of becoming’ (1997: 79). Because Beth could not change what food does to her (affects of guilt, shame, physical emotional pain) food was required to be confronted differently; and demanded an attempt towards a new way of being (or becoming). If affect is the capacity of the body to form specific relations (Buchanan 1997: 80), the affects described by Beth pertaining to food and eating can be understood to produce the relations between her body and food which required her to avoid food and eating.

Buchanan argues that ‘the problem for the anorexic, and this is the danger of all self-motivated becoming, is that far from accelerating becoming, what he or she actually does is deform it’ (1997: 87). Buchanan summarises Deleuze and Guattari’s ethics of the body, and delineates the ‘healthy’ body from the unhealthy body: ‘those relations which ensure an open future, which is to say, those which promote the formation of new compounds, are considered healthy; while those relations which lead to the decomposition of old compounds and are not accompanied by the elaboration of new ones are considered unhealthy’ (Buchanan 1997: 82). In other words, Beth’s affects of shame and guilt produced particular relations between her body and food that prevented her from being able to eat without feeling physical pain. This relation prevented the formulation of new affects surrounding her body and food. If the body is understood as a multiplicity of forces defined by the affects it is are capable of, then Beth’s relations with food signal a reduction in her body’s force. The anorexic, like the masochist or the alcoholic, reduces his or her capacity of affection through their activities, and in doing so, reduces the force of the body (Buchanan 1997: 88; Deleuze & Guattari 1987). When new connections are not able to be made or to enter into new compositions, these relations become deadly (Buchanan 1997: 88). Where I described Gillian’s ‘slimming’ body work in the previous chapter as being involved in the intensification of affects relating to slimming practices, Fox suggests that anorexia may be an extension of the affects of the slimming body ‘gone critical’ (Fox 2002: 358).
The affects involved in Beth’s suffering of anorexia are even more restricted and intensified than Gillian’s and Isabelle’s in their affective relations with body work. The most important aspect guiding these examples is not the practices of body work themselves, but the relations of affect involved. These define the body and its possibilities; what it can and cannot do.

When Beth was hospitalised she was fed through a nasal tube, and she describes her recovery as predominantly focused on gaining weight, rather than psychological support. Beth’s recovery can be likened to a ‘line of flight’, an intensive deterritorialisation or escape (Fox 2002) which refigured the relations of affect between her body and anorexia, when she says ‘one day I just decided…’:

It’s like I made myself, and then I was born again. Like, one day I just decided, I’m going to be the person I’ve always wanted to be. And I had to… like almost kill the old me and just start over again. And it’s like, there’s no place for those memories in my new life. So, I try not to think about it, but if I didn’t try to consciously avoid those memories, maybe I would think about it.

Julia: So how is it then, talking about it now? Is that…does it feel like a tension between the old and the new?

Beth: It sort of feels like I’m talking about somebody else. Like, a memory that happened in a past life sort of. Like, I’m so removed from it. It’s just like talking about a dream I had. Well, it’s like a nightmare, that happened while I was sleeping. Yeah.12

Beth explains that she had to ‘kill’ the self that she had ‘made’; the anorexic self. Buchanan argues that because anorexics cannot change what food does to them, they must change themselves; but Beth did not just change herself in this process, rather, she

12 Beth insisted to me that she was happy to discuss her experience of anorexia, and did not want me to arrange for her to speak to a counselor after the interview. See chapter four for further discussion of the ethics surrounding Beth’s interview.
‘made herself’ entirely. Changing herself and her relation with food amounted to remaking herself; such were the intensities of the affective relations between her body and food.

Buchanan (1997) also argues that this perspective makes it possible to thoroughly reconceptualise problematic explanations of anorexia such as psychologistic ‘body-image’ accounts, to instead see the thoroughly active elements of anorexia, and to see the ways these elements operate more fully. Theories of affect, relations and becoming may be even more relevant in the contemporary neoliberal context wherein the individual is required to seek new ways of becoming, to be ‘self made’ and self responsible. These concepts may provide particularly strong analytic tools in this context. Beth describes deciding to ‘become the person I’d always wanted to be’, which required ‘killing off’ her old, anorexic self, and to a certain extent, repressing the memories of that self and dissociating from that way of being. Beth’s examples highlight the force and violence that can be implicit in becomings, and exemplify how central they may be to the way a body, and a life, may be lived. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) theories do not only assist in building a more detailed understanding of anorexia and other ‘deadly practices of the self’ such as drug addiction, alcoholism and masochism. Their work on anorexia also serves to show the ways that these concepts may be comprehended and used as tools in analysing how ‘what a body can do’ is negotiated through the ongoing relations and affects of bodies.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed and extended the central research question for this project concerning how knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies are produced through body work practices. As I have intended to show, the knowledges, understandings and experiences produced through various body work practices are affective, and profoundly important for how the body is lived, and what possibilities for living are available based on the relations and affects between bodies and other forces.
The varying intensities of affect, resulting from different relational processes, mean forms of body work culminate in different becomings for different assemblages (bodies).

Where many participants in this research viewed body work practices as having the potential to contribute to life being lived in more positive ways and making them ‘happier’ (such as exercise and fitness practices for Anna, Steph, Gillian and Paul, and Kate’s experience of breast enlargement surgery), body work practices, for many others, involved the body and self being bound in a set of relations associated with body work practices in ways that were termed ‘obsessive’ or related to ‘addiction’. Kate and Isabelle’s very different relations with cosmetic surgery illustrated these complexities, as did Ben, Adam and Jason’s descriptions of exercise and lifting weights. Working with Deleuze’s concepts of becomings and intensities of affect can help to explain and further understand the complexity of their experiences.

Rather than reducing the body to its functions, Deleuze and Guattari make the question of what a body can do constitutive, refiguring the body as ‘the sum of its capacities’ (Buchanan 1997: 75). The more a body is opened to difference and multiple possibilities for affect, the more force it has; the more it can do. This point is particularly relevant to analyses of forms of body work such as cosmetic surgery, since many critiques of these practices have previously centred on the pathologies of the individuals (usually women) who undergo cosmetic surgery, or is theorised in terms of its function in binaristic relations of oppression and liberation (Davis 1995). Instead, what a body can do is understood as constituted through the affective events which go on to form the body as an ‘event’. The affective relations involved in anorexia affect what the body can do; just as the affective relations involved in exercise practices or cosmetic surgery affect what the body can do. The ‘constitutive relationality’ through which bodies affect and are affected by their relations mean that because bodies are produced through relations, they cannot be known prior to their relationality: the outcomes of their affective relations cannot be known in advance (Deleuze 1992).
This chapter engages with one of the most dominant themes framing how the body is popularly understood: body image. ‘Body image’ is a predominantly psychological term which refers to the thoughts, emotions and perceptions a person has of their own body. Have a ‘poor’ or ‘unhealthy’ body image is understood as a psychological issue; but one that also has some societal causes through media representations of thin femininity (Bray & Colebrook 1998: 51; see also Davis 1995). Poor body image is linked with body dysmorphic disorder which can lead to eating disorders. Unhealthy body image and body dysmorphic disorder are also said to underpin many women’s decisions to undergo cosmetic surgery (Gorbis 2004). The etiology of these ‘pathologies’ are widely said to be media images, or more accurately, the narrow standards of female beauty represented in these images. In much popular feminist work, both mainstream and academic, media representations of thin femininity are understood to by the primary cause of eating disorders and cosmetic surgery. However, the ontology underpinning the view that bodies and body image are the effect of media images relies on a number of dualisms which work in restricted and deterministic ways.

In popular commentary as well as government policies, bodies are understood as vulnerable to the effects of images. This theorisation of bodies as passive ‘objects’ holds women would be able to ‘reclaim their agency’ through more ‘authentic’ representation. In the previous chapter I argued that it is problematic to conceptualise bodies as existing prior to representation or as separate from structures in debating the relationship between structure and agency. This same argument also relates to the relationship between bodies and images in the case of ‘body image’. Rather than an ‘entity’ which is primarily conceptualised as the ‘effect’ of culture or social forces, the body is understood as a process that is continually being formed and reformed through its relations and connections to other bodies and forces. The concepts of affect and body without organs used in analysis in this chapter engage with an ontology capable of understanding the body in continuous movement and negotiation and involved in a complex set of relations.

These concepts enable the indeterminacy and complexity of bodies as they are lived to be explored.

The particular social and cultural context of body work practices in consumer culture can also be understood through Deleuzian theory as a component of the ‘control society’. Cosmetic surgery, along with other interventions such as weight-loss and exercise regimes that were framed by participants in the context of ‘health’ are marketed in consumer culture with an ‘over-simplistic’ logic that such practices have transformative potential that ‘will result in a more positive and acceptable body image’. Yet, as I explored through Isabelle and others, some forms of body work can become ‘addictive’ and self-perpetuating, leading to an affective experience of the self that is to an extent trapped within these practices since the positive experience of the self depends on them. A feature of control societies is that ‘you never finish anything’; concepts such as ‘lifelong learning’ in education exemplify this (Deleuze 1995: 179). The control of the body by participants can also be understood as a continual process which is never finished. As Isabelle asks, ‘when will it stop?’

Neoliberalism is deeply embedded in control societies, and the growth of the health, cosmetic and beauty industries suggests that attention to the body is more profitable than ever. As men are increasingly invited to participate in practices which attend to the body’s aesthetics, gender relations which associate bodily concern with femininity will no doubt be renegotiated. Here there is the potential for greater equality, but also the potential for binarised gender ideals to be renewed. For example, body work regimes may increasingly emphasise the ‘natural’ sexual differences between women and men and relate these to a host of gender stereotypes which do not favour women. However, as St Pierre argues, control societies comprise a complex fold of forces in which ‘even a small, local act of resistance can be revolutionary’ (2011: 387). Further, recreation of the same is not understood as the same as reproduction of what has been; gender is a process that cannot be known in advance of its engagements and connections.
The ways that becoming occurs in the context of social forces such as gender and health structures (as have been explored) is conceptualised as a process of ‘folding’. A myriad of social and cultural assemblages – of which gender and health are only two – shape the possibilities for identity, and define the limits of bodies (body without organs), and what they can do. Bodies can develop rigid folds which reduce the potential for change, or can unfurl, often in micro-processual ways, the categories of identity and habit ‘that make them what they are’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007: 12). This perspective can help us to understand the contexts in which some (Isabelle, Gillian or Adam for example) are caught up in rigid folds – the affects and resulting relations between their bodies and body work are connected to their sense of self, which, where it is bound up in a ‘rigid’ fold, is less likely to change. Others however are ‘unfurling’ through practices of body work, and are more open to becoming different (Kate, Ben). This chapter has explored the knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies that are produced through body work practices, and the ways that affects and relations between bodies, body work practices and social and cultural assemblages are constitutive of what the body can do.
Chapter eight: Reflections, conclusions and future directions

This chapter discusses the implications of this thesis. I have focused on the affective dimensions of body work through conceptualising the engagements and intra-actions between bodies and discursive practices of health and gender, and the ways these engagements are lived as powerfully embodied sensations by participants.

At the outset of this thesis I posed the following questions:

How are knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies produced through body work practices?

How do social relations intersect with body work practices, and what does this mean for understanding bodies from a Deleuzian perspective?

How do social relations and body work practices affect the body’s possibilities?

These questions are related directly to the epistemological and ontological approach I undertake drawn from Deleuze that I have outlined throughout this thesis. Below I provide a summary of the key arguments in the chapters of this thesis, and discuss the ways I have addressed these research questions.

In chapter one, I introduced the social, cultural and economic context surrounding contemporary understandings of bodies and body work practices; including sociological and feminist approaches to theorising the body.

In chapter two, I outlined the theoretical approach I use to explore how bodies are understood and experienced through practices of body work. I explored prominent feminist philosophies which have informed many theoretical approaches to the body in sociology, such as Butler’s theorisation of materiality and performativity (1993). Using contemporary insights from Barad (2007) and Bray and Colebrook (1998), I explored the ways that materiality, discourse and subjectivity can be extended to conceptualise the body differently, beyond dualisms, through the philosophical concepts of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza. I introduced the key concepts of this framework, and the
implications for advancing understandings of the body and society. The cornerstone of this approach is that bodies are understood not as objects upon which culture writes meanings (Budgeon 2003), but in terms of their capacity for change and modulation. I argued that a focus on the affects, relations and connections between bodies (as relationships of force) and other assemblages enable the body’s potentialities to be explored.

In chapter three, I discussed studies of the body and body work related to gender and health discourses. I found that whilst there are a prolific number of studies relating to different aspects of the body, studies tend to focus on one specific practice of body work such as bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, or practices related to ‘health’ and consumer culture such as exercise, but rarely explore the meanings of these practices from both men’s and women’s perspectives. Whilst many studies deal with the bodies of men and women separately, few focus on broad practices of body work from a gendered perspective with both women and men. The research in this thesis engages with these gaps by exploring a broad range of body work practices from the perspectives of both women and men, and their embodied understandings of gender and health discourses. In this chapter, I also explored some of the key problems with studies of the body and body work, relating to how ‘agency’ is used in analysis and the range of other dualisms which underpin many studies’ conceptualisations of bodies. Through exploring the growing number of empirical studies which engage with Deleuzian concepts, I intended to show how new possibilities for understanding the body empirically beyond these problems can be undertaken. These studies use Deleuzian concepts of becoming and affect to explore the body related to gender identity and subject formation and exercise and health practices. They also provide a way forward to envisioning new ways of exploring the body in feminist and sociological study.

In chapter four, I explored some of the methodological implications of using a Deleuzian framework for understanding the body in empirical research. I extended a discussion of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this approach, and connected this to how research may be operationalised using these concepts as tools. I argued that using in-
depth semi-structured interviewing enables experiences, relations and affects to be explored from a Deleuzian standpoint. In this chapter, I also explored the dynamics of the interview encounters, and my own embodied experience of my body in interviews. I expand on this later in this chapter. I discussed the sampling techniques and recruitment techniques, and demographics of the participants. Ethics and data analysis from a Deleuzian perspective were also discussed. ‘Ethology’, and Deleuze’s ethics, prioritises a focus on change and possibility, rather than on what is already known. A Deleuzian approach to data analysis thus shares a parallel concern with post-structural feminist approaches which emphasise the multiplicity and variations within and across human identities, rather than a focus on the individual participant’s interview data as being compatible with the representation of a coherent ‘self’. This chapter aimed to connect Deleuzian concepts with methodology to show the ways this approach can open up possibilities and change in feminist and sociological empirical work.

Chapters five, six and seven addressed the key research questions, outlining how knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies were produced through body work practices; how assemblages (such as discourses of gender and health) intersect with body work practices, and what these assemblages mean for understanding bodies from a Deleuzian perspective. Chapter five discussed how gender intersects with body work practices, and the micro-processes of becoming in participants’ descriptions of masculinity and femininity which escaped binary and molar structures of gender. Chapter six explored how health discourses are crucial in participants’ understandings, knowledges and experiences of bodies related to their body work practices. Through the concept of affect I explored participants’ descriptions of experiences of how body work practices such as exercise feel, and what this means for how their bodies are lived. Chapter seven continued the analysis of affect in exploring other body work practices in the study, such as cosmetic surgery and ‘obsessive’ or ‘addictive’ approaches to exercise. This chapter also addresses the third research question around how discourses and assemblages surrounding body work practices condition the body’s possibilities.
In these chapters, by focusing on the descriptions by participants as to how the body feels in relation to some forms of body work practices, I undertook an exploration of the affects or embodied sensations of body work. Through examining the relations and affects between bodies and the world, there is a concern for not what the body is — whether it is objectified in this process, for example — but for what these relations and affects enable bodies to do. Asking what bodies are capable of, or what they can do, is to engage with an exploration of what possibilities are available to bodies; whether they are involved in connections which open them up to difference, or connections which reterritorialise and stratify them in molar social structures.

Knowledges, understandings and experiences of bodies are produced through body work practices through the relations, connections and affects between bodies and the world. Participants’ body work practices were particularly understood, known and experienced through gender relations and health ideologies. Throughout chapters five, six and seven, I explored the complex intersections of body work practices with traditional gender structures and discourses, consumer culture imperatives, and moralised health discourses. Participants described bodies and body work practices using these discourses, yet their understandings and experiences also were more complex and did not explain the lived experiences of their bodies. Most participants’ body work practices were largely shaped around what can be termed ‘hegemonic gender ideals’ related to gendered physicalities, in that most participants idealised muscularity for men and slenderness for women. There were significant parallels, however, in men’s and women’s affective experiences of their bodies.

A concern for the body’s appearance was argued by participants to affect women more than men, however, many statements reflected that men and women may experience similarly intense affects related to body work. Isabelle, Adam, Jason and Ben for example all discussed how they felt their mind was ‘playing tricks on them’ when they critically examined their bodies in the mirror, and they felt similar pressure to ‘live up to’ gendered bodily ideals. The experiences of body work practices thus in many ways exceeded traditional gendered knowledges about bodies. The knowledges participants described
related to health were also far more complex and ambiguous than traditional understandings. The connections between health, happiness and appearance were discussed by numerous participants, but the experiences of body work practices related to ‘health’ were profoundly contingent and precarious, such as in Clare’s comment on how practices can become ‘too healthy’ to the point of ‘becoming dangerous’ aligned with anorexia. Concepts of becoming and affect can be used as tools for aiding new understandings of bodies in their complexity, and in the context of social relations around gender and health.

Contemporary understandings of gender and health are integral in participants’ body work practices. From a Deleuzian perspective on bodies, gender and health can be understood as two ‘molar’ structures which bodies connect with, and which affect bodies in particular ways, but those ways cannot be known in advance. This immanent process of connection is termed ‘becoming’. Because participants engage with and are affected by gender and health broadly, their bodies can be said to ‘become’ through gender and health. As I have explored, social relations including gender and health in particular affect the body’s possibilities in complex ways.

What a body can do, and the range of possibilities that are available for living, are constituted through affective relations. The affective embodied sensations related to cosmetic surgery for example constitute and reconstitute the body and how it is lived. Isabelle’s cosmetic surgery for example is undertaken in the context of affective relations which seem to be closing off other possibilities for affective connections, when she says she can see no end to having surgical procedures, and that she will never be satisfied with her body and image. In a similar way, Jason and Adam, who discussed the ways they felt a loss of self if they had to stop their training, are involved in similarly intensive affects which compel their body work to continue, and which currently limit their body work to particular practices aimed at attaining, and maintaining an ‘ideal masculine’ body.

Ben also discussed the ways that he has to ‘keep going and doing’ his weights training, to ‘keep up’ his image. As we saw though with Ben, time and age are beginning to disrupt
the affective intensity related to his training, and he is in the process of coming to terms with losing his focus on ‘image’ to instead focus on his internal physical health. In this way, Ben’s body is in the process of becoming different. Deleuze has stipulated that the more ways the body can be affected, the more force it has (1983: 72). When the affects associated with body work intensify, however, they can to some extent ‘trap’ someone in a particular set of affective relations, such as those who were ‘addicted’ to their body work. For example, the intensive affects related to these practices underpinned Adam’s sense of self, when he said if he stopped training he felt he was losing who he was. If a person’s positive experience of the self rests so heavily on the image of the body and the practices required to attain or maintain it, the particular affective relations between the body, self and body work are perpetual, but not unchangeable. In this context, embodied sensations connect with the social and cultural assemblages with which he or she engages.

Opening up the possibilities of what the body can do and what is imagined as possible may not be easy: ‘multiplication of affects may not be something which can be achieved independently, we may need all the help we can get’ (Fox 2002: 359). In particular, if a person’s resources are limited, ‘escaping’ or redrawing relations may be even more difficult (Fox 2002: 359). I suggest that advocating positive ‘styles of life’, ‘those which affirm life and its positive capacity for difference’ (Hickey-Moody & Malins 2007) may enhance not only our own range of powers and potentials, but may also affect others in our relations with them. The work of Deleuze and Guattari can promote an agenda of engaging with people’s struggles and attempting to ‘open up’ the social processes which limit them. This has political implications for education, health care, and every aspect of social action (Fox 2002: 361). ‘Affirming difference’ may be relatively straightforward in our relationships with friends, colleagues and family. This approach, however, generates new questions to be engaged with in the methodology of Deleuzian approaches to empirical data. For example, how could research methodologies aim to affirm life’s positive capacity for difference, and what would this look like in our interactions (or intra-actions, following Barad 2007) with participants? The challenge of pairing Deleuzian epistemology and ontology with poststructural methodologies is being
engaged with in the work of St. Pierre (1997), Lather (2007), Hultman and Taguchi (2010) and Mazzei & McCoy (2011) in qualitative education research. It is important to continue to advance these concepts and questions in the social and health sciences to find new ways of responding to contemporary challenges of exploring the body and embodied experience.

**Reflections on theory and methodology: affect, embodiment and power**

In contemporary sociology, body shape and physical control are understood as increasingly central to people's sense of self identity. 'Body image' issues are presented in the popular media and psychology as predominantly individual pathologies, but also linked to the negative 'effects' of images. This study has shown that the embodied experiences of bodies and body work practices are highly complex, and require a different way of thinking about bodies and the relationship between bodies and society. The relationship, interplay or 'tension' between bodies and society, as well as structure and agency, has been a key focus of social and feminist theory. The need to be negotiate the embodied 'capacities of subjects' whilst recognising the 'social consequentiality of the body’s materiality’ has been established by an array of theoretical and empirical scholarship on the body (Shilling 2007: 11). Whilst the broad aim of much of this work has been to ‘bring the body back in’ and to focus on the embodied and material nature of experience, persistent dualisms have continued in conceptualisations of the body. An example of this is in Crossley’s work on embodied reflexivity. Although Crossley rejects the dualist position that the self and body are separate (2006: 2), his theorisation of reflexive embodiment holds that we reflexively ‘turn back upon and objectify ourselves’ (2001: 1). Relying on a model of ‘subjects and objects’ to explain the processes or relations between the body and the social world limits our understanding. These processes are much more complex, and must be understood outside of dualistic frameworks.
As a result, at the core of this thesis is a commitment to problematising the dualisms that are pervasive and implicit in much of sociological theory and feminist philosophy. Because ‘the body’ is central to this study, through the work initially of feminist philosophers and sociologists such as Grosz (1994), Bray and Colebrook (1998) and Budgeon (2003), I came to see the dualism of mind/body as a core problem to be negotiated in the ontology and epistemology underpinning my approach to exploring bodies and body work empirically. I understood that to negotiate this core binary along with numerous others such as representation/materiality, domination/resistance and structure/agency required a shift in ontology and epistemology, primarily facilitated by philosopher Deleuze and other scholars who have used and extended his concepts (such as Hickey-Moody & Malins 2004, Buchanan 1997 and Coleman 2009). These dualisms have been implicit in much sociological and feminist work, and it is crucial to find ways of theorising the body beyond the dualisms that have limited how the body is conceptualised.

The concepts of becoming and affect enable an embodied approach to theorising the body, and have the potential to add to existing knowledge about how bodies are lived beyond the limitations of disembodied or dualist approaches. Rethinking the body as a process of immanent, affective relations and connections means also rethinking society as involved in intra-action with the body, rather than as a structure which imposes on it. These concepts are also very useful in a practical sense for exploring the complexity, messiness and richness of the data I collected through interviewing men and women about their bodies and body work practices. I came to see the work of Deleuze as a providing a way of negotiating the core philosophical and sociological problems associated with studying and understanding the body empirically. In this regard, this study makes a contribution to advancing non-dualist sociological approaches to the body, combining feminist theory, social theory and philosophical concepts with empirical data.

What it means to study the body empirically, drawing on a theoretical framework influenced by Deleuze, is also complex. Ways of using Deleuze’s concepts in empirical
sociological and feminist research have only recently begun to be explored, and the methodological implications of this are also relatively underdeveloped.

I used in-depth interviewing as a way of exploring how young people understand bodies and body work practices, and engage with the discourses and knowledges that surround contemporary understandings of bodies, such as gender and health ideologies in particular. Following the ontological and epistemological perspectives informed by Deleuze which underpin the research, I do not approach interviewing as a method that is capable of producing a narrative of the speaking subject. Rather, the method of interviewing was approached as a way of entering into a discussion, quite literally, to ‘gather the relations and affect, those things that affect an individual’ (Fox & Ward 2008). In this, the interview encounter itself can also be understood as a process through which the bodies of both the interviewer and interviewee connect, and affect each other. The researcher and participant are both understood as in processes of becoming, of affecting and being affected. The shift that occurs is important, towards an interview encounter in which the researcher and the researched engage with each other (Merceica & Merceica 2010: 86).

However, the context in which the engagement takes place - the interview encounter - is shaped by relations of power and the position of ‘authority’ that the researcher holds. This is a crucial methodological issue to be addressed when undertaking any sociological research. I argue that although using Deleuzian theoretical approaches has particular advantages for methodology concerning ontology and epistemology, such as in Deleuze’s ‘ethics’ (see chapter three), the methodological implications regarding the method of research (interviewing) need to be further developed.

Despite being theoretically and ontologically sensitive to the importance of attention to embodiment – of both the participant and my own body – in this research, in early drafts and analysis of the interview data, my own body was absent. My analysis discussed only the participants’ understandings and descriptions of their experiences of their bodies and body work. If I had left it this way, my absence in the text would position me as the
rational, conscious, stable, unified, knowing individual’ subject of humanism (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000: 6), and would undermine the core aims of the research.

I set about addressing my own embodiment in the interview encounter, yet I found this process difficult. I was unsure as to how to write my own body into the analysis (Throsby & Gimlin 2010: 114, Young 2011). I found it difficult to articulate my own body in the interview process, since I was never involved in discussing my body as the participants were. I needed to get behind the text of the transcripts of the interview, to the details of the interview encounter. Though I took notes in the interviews directly afterwards and tried to record as much detail on my own thoughts and impressions as possible, I felt that these reflections would add little to the thesis (see Young 2011: 32). I also understood however that I was in a powerful position as a researcher in the interview encounter, and although I did not speak about my body in interviews – it would have been impractical and inappropriate to do so – I must somehow address my own physical embodiment in the context of the research. To fail to do this would undermine the core concern of the research: to explore the body and body work practices empirically through negotiating and to some extent dismantling the dualism which has defined and limited the way the body has been treated in much empirical work. I needed a ‘way in’ to discuss my own embodiment. My supervisors suggested I think about examples of when the participants were aware of me or my body.

A moment in the interview with Isabelle highlights how her awareness and comments on my physical body connect with the operations of power in the embodied interview encounter. At one point during the interview, Isabelle said that when she had first seen me she wondered ‘why is (Julia) so skinny?’ (also discussed in chapter three). As a relatively thin woman (see Bacon 2009) researching women’s and men’s bodies and their experiences of body work, I typically felt uncomfortable whenever participants mentioned slenderess as an idealised physical form of femininity. At these times I wished for my body to be invisible, since I felt that my own slenderess could potentially and unintentionally reinforce rather than disrupt dominant gender ideals. And so, when Isabelle directly labeled my body as ‘skinny’, I was horrified. I did not know what to say,
or how to react. I had so hoped that she would not notice, and would not link my physicality to her experience of her own body and pursuit of ‘skinniness’ through her body work practices. As I write this now, I realise I had dreaded being forced to acknowledge that my own body could be linked with idealised slenderness and the embodiment of successful (molar) femininity. Burns (2003) writes that in her research with women who suffer Bulimia, she would wear looser clothing to try to hide her ‘normalised’ slender body from her participants, ‘as if [her] body somehow signified an embodied complicity with the slender imperative [she] was seeking to undermine’ (Burns 2003: 233). Through Isabelle’s comment, I felt I had been exposed as being complicit in the ‘slender imperative’. Perhaps this fear of being ‘exposed’ in this way contributed to my body’s invisibility or absence in earlier drafts of this thesis.

Burns writes that ‘all research interactions…are the product of physical exchanges that occur in a reciprocal manner between the researcher and participant and have implications at the physical level’ (2003: 231). An awareness and analysis of the bodily physicality of the researcher as well as participant is particularly important in a study concerned with descriptions of the experiences of bodies and body work practices. I must address the inevitability of my own (slim) physicality, which inevitably affects the research and participants, as well as affecting my own experience of the interview. In addressing this, I become a participant in the research (Burns 2003). In the interview questions and discussions I had taken care not to reinforce, through my language, the dominant discourses surrounding the ideal physicality of men’s and women’s bodies. Through asking what they thought of these sorts of bodies, I intended to open a space beyond the straightforward endorsement or repetition of normalised and molar gendered bodies. Burns, however, argues that we must be aware not only of the discourses we deploy in interviews, but also those we embody, and the potential ‘extra-discursive effects’ of embodied discourses.

My physically slender or ‘skinny’ body was observed and commented on by Isabelle. To Isabelle, I unintentionally and somewhat unavoidably embodied a powerful subject position of ideal femininity. As in Burns’s (2003) study, Isabelle and perhaps other
participants ‘invariably deployed culturally pervasive and powerful discourses that
idealize slenderness in the interpretation of my body’ (Burns 2003: 233). Through
naming my body as ‘skinny’, Isabelle forced me to acknowledge and confront the
operations of power through discourses that idealise slenderness at the level of my own
body. In examining the operation of power at the level of my own body, I became a
participant, rather than an invisible researcher in the research. Through exploring this
aspect of the interview encounter with Isabelle, my ‘privileged’ position of power as a
researcher is dismantled. I can no more ‘transcend’ the oppressive discourses which
operate in interview settings than the participants (Burns 2003); we are both always
already implicated in regimes of power and both must negotiate these through our
interactions (intra-actions).

Whilst the method of interviewing in this project records participants’ voices and words,
interviewing and audio recording does not capture participants’ embodied dispositions.
This is a limitation of the study. The method of video recording could have enabled
analysis of the physical dimensions of both the interviewee and interviewer, and could
have meant the embodiment of both as ‘participants’ could have been more thoroughly
engaged with. More embodied methods such as video diaries or video recorded
interviews could also provide a method of getting further beyond the ‘speaking subject’
and privileging the affective rather than the discursive.

Towards a Deleuzian, feminist and sociological methodology

It is crucial to find ways of doing research which de-centre the humanist researcher as
knowing subject (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000). Barad (2007), whose theories are aligned
with Deleuze’s ontological and epistemological concerns, argues that ‘practices of
knowing cannot be fully claimed as human practices, not simply because we use
nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world
making itself intelligible to another part’ (2007: 185). For this reason, Barad argues that
knowing and being are not separate, and as such, ontology and epistemology can be seen
as inter-dependent, as ‘onto-epistemology’, defined as ‘the study of practices of knowing in being’ (Barad 2007: 185). Barad argues, ‘we don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world and its differential becoming’ (2007: 185). As Barad (2007) and numerous other feminist scholars have argued (such as Burns 2003 and St. Pierre 2002), it is crucial to translate these theoretical, epistemological and ontological commitments into practice in empirical work. This means finding ways to do Deleuzian concepts; that is, finding ways to build these commitments to openness and difference into the research design and pursuing methods which do not lapse into old humanist habits. Since the method of qualitative interviewing is originally based on the humanist notion of a stable and individual self that can be studied or revealed through interviewing, it is particularly crucial to advance post-humanist and post-modernist ways of using interviews. Sandelowski (2002) and Blumenthal (1999) argue that interview methods must make room for the multiplicity and variation within and across identities, and factor in that the ‘self’ of the researcher is also multiple and divided. The challenge of embodying feminist theory methodologically is to continue to find ways of positioning ourselves and our bodies in the research.

Attending to the affects and relations between the participants in the interview encounter is one way forward. Others working with these similar frameworks in empirical research (Fox & Ward 2008; St. Pierre 2002) suggest that a focus on non-verbal aspects of the interviews, such as body signals and other sensory elements (Sandelowski 2002) can open up the research beyond the confines of traditional methodology. From this perspective, the method of interviewing can itself be explored as a process of relations between the interviewer and participant. This means that the researcher’s own embodiment is as central to the research as the participants’, since both contribute to the meanings and knowledges produced in the interview encounter. Affect is thus understood to be a pivotal element of individuals’ acting and becoming (Albrecht-Crane & Slack 2007: 100), for participant and researcher (who are both participants).
Future directions

These points have significant implications for advancing feminist methodological commitments to ‘bringing body to theory’ (Bordo 1997: 173), as well as continuing the poststructural feminist undertaking of troubling the subject of humanism (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000: 6). Future feminist work is required to build upon methodologies and methods aligned with Deleuzian theorisations of bodies. Colebrook argues that we must see Deleuze’s work as ‘an active response to a host of problems in diverse areas, not just within philosophy’ (2002: 7). I argue that Deleuze’s concepts can thus be used in response to a range of theoretical problems in sociological and feminist empirical work, including the negotiation of dualisms, in which the body is centrally bound. It is because of the dualisms which have for so long surrounded and constrained research on the body that it is necessary to turn to other ways of conceptualising the body, such as through the philosophies of Deleuze, Guattari and Spinoza.

Methods of ‘rhizomatic’ research (see Merceica & Merceica 2010; St. Pierre 1997, 2002; Ringrose 2011; Hultman & Taguchi 2011; Mazzei 2011) taken up by researchers following a Deleuzian approach are concerned with exploring the intensities, relations and affects between bodies, including bodies in the research encounter (such as in interviewing, in this project). The focus of such research is on becomings, changes, and possibilities for newness; seeing the body as a group of forces and intensities that are continually changing and modulating. The only constant is ‘the power of not remaining the same’ (Colebrook 2002: 57). These epistemological, ontological and methodological perspectives thus contribute to developing a methodology of becoming, and present new and exciting ways of exploring the body in empirical sociological work, along with new challenges related to using these tools in methods such as interviewing.

What can these concepts do?
Throughout this thesis I have argued that bodies do not pre-exist the relations that compose them; bodies and body work practices are ‘nothing more or less’ than the relations between them (Fraser, Kemby & Lury 2005: 3). The premise that bodies cannot be known in advance of their relations, affects or encounters is powerful because this perspective emphasises creativity and the potential for newness, rather than the ways bodies are restricted and reproduced. Coleman (2009) has argued that the relations between bodies and social forces can be repeated, and that this repetition conditions rather than determines the future. Gender discourses, for example, are repeated by many of the participants in this study in ways that do not seem new or different. By understanding gender structures as repetitions of particular relations and affects rather than reproductions of a ‘determining structure’, bodies, even in the context of continuing binaristic gender discourses can be understood as produced through but not determined by their relations (Coleman 2009: 214). Put another way, bodies cannot simply become whatever they want, and certain becomings are repeated through the relations and affects that produce them. This means that becomings are not always exciting or new; becomings can often involve the ordinary and dominant conditions being repeated and remaining the same. From an ontology of becoming, however, recreation of the same is not understood as the same as reproduction of what has been. Rather, ‘it is taken on its own, immanent terms and explored, not for what it is, but for what it does’ (Coleman 2009: 217). For these reasons, becoming is a powerful concept, and enables the relations between bodies and social structures to be rethought.

The possibilities for using and advancing the theoretical frameworks and concepts set out by Deleuze and others that I have used in this thesis are vast. This study has been limited to focusing primarily on gender as an embodied categorisation of bodies and the context of consumer culture and ‘health’ discourses. Race, class, sexuality, ability and other forces which structure inequality are also crucial components that bodies connect with through affective relations, and future research could address these areas. Gender, consumer culture and health are only a few of the multiple forces which comprise bodies as assemblages (Rose 1996). To study becoming and affect is to be concerned with the multitude of connections (psychological, emotional and physical) that a body has. The
topic of study in this project meant that discourses such as health, consumer culture and gender were particularly important connections, and that the relations and affects between bodies and these forces were more central than others based on participants’ discussions. Affect and becoming can be studied in the context of any connections a body has; with other people, abstract ideas, activities and social constructs (Fox & Ward 2008). Thus whilst gender, consumer culture and health were the primary connections I explored in this research, future research using these theoretical frameworks could be done focusing on any aspect of life through exploring the connections a body has with any other forces that comprise the body as an assemblage; for example, homosexual and heterosexual relationships or forces of race and class in body work practices.

As feminist and sociological approaches continue to take up Deleuzian theory and frameworks, future work could expand these concepts for use beyond studies concerned with the body to a range of other social and cultural contexts. A full-blown Deleuzian analysis of becomings and affects may not be practicable or necessary in every project; however a commitment to the ontological and epistemological tenets of Deleuzian philosophy could underpin studies in a range of areas. Barad’s (2007) theorisation of agential realism is also likely to continue to gain prominence and use in empirical work in sociology, since the problems with ‘agency’ as a tool of analysis are well known. It is crucial to continue to interrogate the utility of such concepts, and to question how they are used. To me, it seemed absolutely paramount to find new ways to address or negotiate core problems in sociology such as how to negotiate binaries. In a study which seeks to explore the body, which has for so long been at the heart of so many other binaries, this task became imperative and framed my approach to this project. There is so much more that can be done with this theoretical approach. The theoretical and methodological frameworks I have drawn upon in this thesis generate new questions to be engaged with, not only in how sociology and feminism may advance these concepts, but also for how bodies may be lived differently.
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