

Bodies, health and gender: exploring body work practices with Deleuze

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practices using Deleuze

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report presents the results of a PhD project, exploring the body and contemporary body work practices (Coffey 2012a). Body work can be understood as any practices aimed to modify or maintain the body's appearance, including dieting and exercise. 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 with 22 women and men aged 18-33 in Melbourne, I have explored the affective relations involved in body work, including the ways that health and gender, two major 'forces' among many, affect participants, their understandings and experiences of bodies and body work practices and the impact on the ways their bodies may be lived. Using a Deleuzian theorisation of bodies in analysis can assist in opening alternative, and more complex understandings of these themes. Deleuze's theories and concepts can also provide important insights into how the body can be conceptualised and approached in empirical research.

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.

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. The key findings of the study upon which this report is based are 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.

INTRODUCTION

The body and ‘body image’ of young people is a central concern in the mainstream media, and a key focus of government policy in Australia. The National Advisory Group on Body Image was set up by the Australian Government in 2009 to find strategies of addressing the problems associated with body image. In February 2012, the first international summit on body image was held by the UN . 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 work’ is defined as practices performed on one’s own body that connects to aesthetic modifications or maintenance of the body (Gimlin 2007). Body work practices have been conceptualised in sociology (Giddens 1991; Shilling 2003) as part of the ‘body project’ associated with the modern, Western individual’s ‘project’ of self-identity. I conceptualise body work practices as ‘processes’, rather than a ‘project’, because of the poststructural ontological understanding of bodies as processes that underpins this research. Body work practices in this study include all forms of exercise such as running, walking or yoga as well as dieting, lifting weights and cosmetic surgery procedures.

Health frames discussions of body work in Australia and other ‘Western’ cultures (Crawford, 1987; Featherstone 1982, 2010). Health and working on the body are promoted as consumer choices; ‘choices’ which are essential to general wellbeing, success and ‘personal fulfillment’ (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’ (Rose 1996: 162).

The increasing importance of working on the body is reflected in the growth of the health, beauty and fitness industries in Australia. These industries are highly profitable 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). Men are increasingly targeted as consumers of body-care products, and the market for men’s ‘grooming products’ such as skin care is ‘doubling each year’ (Australian Centre for Retail Studies, 2005: 4).

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. Even though men are now argued to be moving towards 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). Body work practices are thus 'gendered' and link with traditional (unequal) gender structures. The idealised woman's body in this context is slender, whilst the idealised man's body is toned and muscular (Bordo 1999, 2003; Dworkin & Wachs 2009). The gendered physicalities of these 'ideal' bodies 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: 112) agrees that traditional ideas about gender also underpin the particular attitude to the body found in contemporary health promotion.

Theorising the body

The relationship between the body and society has long been a key tension in sociology and feminist theory. Arguments around the harmful 'effects of images' on young people's 'body image' are a contemporary example of this. 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. This 'media effects' model of body image (Coleman 2009) is problematic at the level of ontology. 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'. Bray and Colebrook (1998) have argued that there is no such thing as an 'authentic' body prior to representation, and that 'as long as representation is seen as a negation of corporeality, dualism can only ever

be complicated and never overcome' (1998: 45). Similarly, Featherstone has argued, the way images and bodies work is much more complex than a 'cause and effect' process (2010: 197). Feminist theory has grappled with these problems, and the theoretical arguments I pursue in this study 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 (1988) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to reconceptualise bodies.

The challenge or aim of this research has been to find non-dualist, embodied approaches to studying the body empirically, whilst understanding and critiquing the social conditions which frame the bodies of the participants (Coffey 2012a). 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 which constitute those bodies. This approach extends the consideration of bodies and the social beyond questions about agents who construct and are constructed. Instead, the focus shifts towards exploring what bodies are capable of. This provides a profoundly different set of possibilities for analysing how current and potential experiences of body work, for example, impact on how the body is lived. 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 Deleuzian-Spinozan concept of affect is particularly important in the analysis of bodies and body work practices. '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. Affect can be understood as 'embodied sensations'; as simply the capacity to affect and be affected. Affects mediate action, or becomings (Deleuze 1988: 256). For this reason affect can be likened to agency, but avoids the problematic aspects inherent in the term, such as its oppositional usage and does not presume the human body as prior to subjectivity (Barad 2007). 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.

There is a wealth of empirical work dealing with the body and gender in the social sciences. However, empirical work which uses Deleuzian theory explicitly in methodology and analysis is relatively new in sociological studies of the body, with the exception of studies by Budgeon (2003), Potts (2004), Hickey-Moody (2007), Fox & Ward (2008), Coleman (2009) and Jackson (2010). These studies have explored the body in relation to gender or health using Deleuzian concepts. Budgeon's (2003) study explores the ways young women construct their identities, and how their bodies are involved in their understandings of self. Budgeon (2003) demonstrates that bodies can be understood as more than the effects of representational practices, instead seeing embodied selves as processes or 'events' of becoming. Potts's (2004) study explores men's and women's experiences of sexuality through Viagra as a treatment for erectile difficulties. This study contrasts the biomedical 'healthy' body, which aims for predictability and stability, with the Deleuzian 'healthy' body, which aims to multiply its capacity for affect. Fox and Ward (2008) offer a way of studying 'health identities' through the concept of affect, and propose a methodology for a Deleuzian understanding of the body and 'self' using interviewing. Studies by Coleman (2009) and Jackson (2010) use Deleuzian concepts to explore girls' experiences of embodiment.

This study is significant in advancing new approaches to the body in feminism and sociology. Using Deleuzian concepts is a way of understanding bodies as never passive or determined, focusing on the ways that relations between bodies and the world produce particular affects which influence what the body can do. Exploring the social context of bodies with this approach enables an understanding of the current circumstances which condition or limit the range of possibilities available for living.

METHODOLOGY

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 women and men aged 18 – 33 in Melbourne, Australia. The research questions for this project are drawn from the ontology and epistemology of Deleuze's theoretical framework.

Aims and epistemology

This research aims to advance the ways bodies are conceptualised in sociology through using radical concepts such as those put forward by Deleuze. This framework aims 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 these research questions 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.

Method

I conducted 22 in-depth, semi-structured interviews between March and October 2010. These interviews lasted up to two hours, and followed a semi-structured format to explore participants' experiences of body work and broader understandings of health and gender. The participants were recruited through the social networking site Facebook, using personal contacts to distribute advertisements electronically to their Facebook 'friends' who were not contacts or acquaintances of my own, and self-selected to participate by contacting me. Participants did not need to specify from the outset what forms of body work (if any) they undertook. This allowed participants to speak about any experience of body work they had undertaken. Following Fox and

Ward (2008), I used the method of interviewing to enter into a discussion to 'gather the relations and affect, those things that affect an individual' (Fox & Ward, 2008: 1013). 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.

The participants could mostly be considered to be 'middle class', and almost all identified as 'White' or 'Anglo-Saxon', though two of the women said they had Asian heritage. One participant identified as homosexual, and the others identified as heterosexual. The bodily ideals prevalent in 'healthism' and consumer culture idealise 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. Participants' education levels and occupations were varied. 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. 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, a fire-fighter and professional footballer in the Victorian Football League. The sample in this study relates to the epistemology underpinning this thesis, and I use the data to illustrate theoretical arguments (Crouch & McKenzie 2006).

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'.

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 (Burns 2003), 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 which approaches 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 (St. Pierre 1997) 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 my 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.

FINDINGS

The body's appearance and 'health' is increasingly viewed as something to be worked on, improved and invested in. Sociological approaches to the body are frequently underpinned by a dualist ontology in which the body is 'disembodied'; understood as caught between being a subject or object; or between structure and agency in its relationship with society. This section explores that the embodied experiences of bodies and body work practices of the participants in this study are highly complex, and require a different way of thinking about bodies and the relationship between bodies and society.

Body work practices, particularly concerning 'health' through physical activity and exercise, were described by almost all (20 out of 22) participants as being central to broader meanings of the body and related to the way the body feels. Gender was also a key theme in participants' discussions of their bodies and body work practices. Understandings of the body which focus on embodied sensations are crucial to analysing participants' explanations of their experiences of body work in this context. Some participants explain 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. Body work practices undertaken by the participants in

this study ranged from 'healthy' eating and other dietary features; physical exercise (including participation in fitness classes such as Pilates, Yoga, 'Boxercise' and 'Zumba', jogging, swimming and cycling); styling and colouring of hair and applying make up; removal of body hair; tanning; tattooing and piercing; and cosmetic surgery (including Botox, liposuction and breast enlargement). Many of these practices were undertaken by both men and women, with the exception of wearing make up, tanning and cosmetic surgery, which were exclusive to the women in this study.

Gender, body work and becoming

Body work practices of participants were largely shaped around what can be termed 'hegemonic gender ideals' (cf. Connell 1995) related to gendered physicalities. However, the meanings and experiences of gender and bodies were described in very complex ways (Coffey 2012b). Most participants explained that 'ideal' male bodies are muscular, requiring body work practices of lifting weights; and 'ideal' 'female' bodies are 'skinny' or slender, requiring body work practices of dietary control and exercise (Dworkin & Wachs 2009). 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.

Women were understood as subject to more body 'pressure'. Interestingly however, most of the men in this study also described feeling body 'pressure', but did not connect this broadly to the experience of men and masculinity (Coffey 2012b). Kate and Jason used same phrasing to describe how others' bodies affect them:

There are such a lot of expectations on women nowadays, in all the magazines that come out or fashion television...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)

When we see those [football] players running around it 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', and so you go to the gym... (Jason, 22, accountant and amateur footballer)

Gender ideals affect Kate's and Jason's bodies and body work practices. They can be understood as experiencing particularly intensive affects in their relations with the 'gendered ideal' bodies they see, in magazines and on television for Kate, and on the football field for Jason. The complexities and ambiguities in Jason's language in particular extend the traditionally gendered understanding of men as unconcerned about their appearance. Featherstone (2010) argues that the intensified focus on men in advertising and consumer culture is altering this aspect of masculinity (see also Bell & McNaughton 2006 and Coffey 2011). Working on the appearance of his body is something Jason says he 'admits' doing, suggesting tension between how he experiences his body and how he understands gendered bodies more broadly.

The term 'becoming' can be used even when participants do not 'transcend' dominant discourses or structures (Coffey 2012a, 2012b). Kate's and Jason's encounters with 'ideal' men's and women's bodies involve a '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 (Coleman 2009). 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, for example, are repeated. What bodies do, and the relations and affects with which they are engaged, is most important from this standpoint (see Braidotti 2011). The relations and affects between bodies, images and gender are complex, and these concepts can provide new tools to understand these ambivalent, less coherent experiences of the embodied self (Coleman 2009: 214).

Health, body work and affect

Discourses of health which link health to appearance were prevalent in participants' understandings of bodies. The advertising slogan 'look good, feel good' and other neoliberal understandings of the self in consumer culture inform this (Featherstone 2010, Crawford 2006). 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').

The embodied experiences associated with health can be understood through the concept of affect. According to Deleuze (1988), 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. The following examples illustrate how affect and embodied sensations are involved in participants' experiences of body work.

After a yoga class I walk out feeling more limber, and 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. (Paul, 31, sound and film editor)

Paul's body 'feels better' after yoga because of the kinaesthetic elements of the blood oxygenating his organs and warming his muscles, making him feel healthier and thus 'happier'. Feeling 'better' is directly related to the bodily sensations associated with the specific practices of stretching and breathing involved in yoga. These 'health' sensations are crucial not only in how the body feels related to those practices, but more broadly affect participants' sense of self.

Similar to Paul, Steph imagines that if she was fitter, she would be happier.

I wouldn't get fit so that I could show off my body, I'd get fit so that I could be happy. (Steph, 21, waitress)

Gillian too describes that body work (through exercise) 'liberates' her from 'feeling bad' about herself.

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'm in a fit state... 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. (Gillian, 31, waitress and make-up artist)

This situation is precarious however, as Gillian's positive sense of self and identity hinge on her body work practices. 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 not immediately available.

Body work, image and affect

Paul and Steph imagine that doing body work to be 'fitter' will make them 'happier'. Gillian, however, shows that this process is fraught. The affective experience of the body, involving the connections between (gendered) 'appearance' and feelings of 'health' can be understood as a complex process involving the affects and relations between bodies and other assemblages as impacting how they feel and what they can do. Others, like Gillian, who classify themselves as 'fit', emphasise the importance of their body work for their experience of the self. The significant work involved in maintaining an appearance that makes them 'feel good' about their bodies, however, perpetuates their body work, and closes down possibilities for living their bodies in other less regulated ways.

I can't bring myself to go for more than 2 days without going to the gym. I've sort of built up a reputation for being 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 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'm 32 and I wonder how long I can keep that up for. (Ben, 32, sales representative)

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. (Isabelle, 24, beauty therapist)

Like Ben and Isabelle, Adam and Jason similarly describe 'looking different' in the mirror if they have not trained for 2 or 3 days – 'it's like your mind is playing tricks on you.' Featherstone (2010: 197) argues that in consumer culture, which is obsessed with bodies, 'images do complex work', such as Ben, Jason and Isabelle's mirror images of their own bodies. Featherstone insists that images are not merely visual, and are felt as a sense of energy, force or intensity: they are affective (2010: 199). The affective intensities associated with the body in the mirror for women and men in these examples are similar, despite being moderated by gendered dimensions of physicality. Instead of pathologising Ben and Isabelle as suffering from body dysmorphic disorder, a Deleuzian understanding of bodies enables a more complex analysis (Coffey 2012a). 'Body image', for example, can be reframed as a process of relations and connections between bodies and images; rather than a cause and effect model in which images cause poor body image (see Coleman 2009). Further, rather than understanding participants as having 'faulty reading practices' in how they view images or their own bodies in the mirror; or as understanding them as suffering from individual pathologies, a Deleuzian approach is concerned with the myriad relations and connections bodies have. From this perspective, bodies are never foreclosed or determined; they are always in process. All of the body's relations define 'what it can do' (Fox 2002: 356). As I will explore however using the concept of affect, the body's possibilities, or 'what it can do' can be inhibited.

The intensity of the affects associated with the practices of body work connect the experiences of Isabelle, Ben, Jason and Gillian particularly. Like Gillian's slimming body work practices, the affects related to Ben's weights training limit the range of possibilities for living his body. In these examples, physically hegemonic gender ideals frame their body work and bodies. Because gendered ideals of men's and women's bodies are narrow, their possibilities for their bodies and body work are restricted.

Expanding possibilities for becoming requires 'opening up to the many rather than the few' (Fox 2002). For Gillian and Ben however, the affective relations associated with their bodies and body work practices are intensified, rather than multiplied. This perspective enables an understanding of body work practices as not intrinsically good or bad; rather it depends on whether life is restricted or maximised through their relations. The more a body is opened to difference and multiple possibilities for affect, the more force it has; the more it can do (Fox 2002). Gender, in these examples, can be understood as limiting how Ben's and Gillian's bodies may be lived, since their body work practices must be continually repeated. However, a Deleuzian perspective understands that this process is not foreclosed; the relations between bodies and the world are ongoing, as is the possibility of 'becoming otherwise' as relations and affects modulate. As Fox argues, this may seem a difficult conclusion to draw, since 'opening up to difference' may not be something that can be achieved independently: 'we may need all the help we can get' in opening-up to difference and multiplying affects. In particular, if a person's resources are limited, 'escaping' or redrawing relations may be even more difficult (Fox, 2002: 359). Deleuze's work is thus inherently political, and the implications extend beyond the academy to social policy and the politics of welfare (Fox 2002).

The more a body is opened to difference and multiple possibilities for affect, the more force it has; the more it can do. 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. Affirming difference in relation to bodies on a micro level could mean the validation and 'idealisation' of all bodies which would currently fall outside of the narrow idealised physical forms. Affirming difference in this way may be relatively

straightforward in our relationships with friends, colleagues and family. In Gillian's case, opening to difference could mean expanding her focus on her own body from its aesthetic dimensions to its emotional or kinaesthetic dimensions through forms of body work which are not geared towards the body's appearance, such as some forms of Yoga, Tai Chi or meditation. Opening to difference in the examples above from Gillian, Isabelle and Ben requires the affects which are currently operating between their form of body work and their emphasis on appearance for their sense of self to be disrupted and redrawn. This is by no means easy, as Fox (2002) argues. These points however show the value of an approach to the body which sees body work and 'body image' issues as more complex than psychologised accounts; and as potentially requiring more complex therapeutic or social responses. This analysis also generates new questions to be engaged with around 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 this work and to advance these concepts and questions sociological and feminist work to find new ways of responding to contemporary challenges of exploring the body and embodied experience.

CONCLUSION

Gender and health discourses are crucial in participants' experiences and understandings of their bodies and body work. In the context of body work practices, gender and health can thus be understood as conditioning the body's possibilities. A focus on the affective dimensions of body work enables the visceral, embodied complexities of bodies to be foregrounded. Deleuzian concepts such as affect can 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). 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 fixed object (Featherstone 2010: 208) or 'project' that can be completed.

A Deleuzian approach entails examining the relations and affects between bodies and the world (Coffey 2012a). From this perspective, a concern for what bodies can (and cannot) do – rather than what bodies are – is central. This approach is capable of advancing sociological understandings of the body beyond the dualisms that have pervaded it. A Deleuzian sociological framework for analysing bodies can also be aligned with advancing feminist methodological commitments to embodying theory and creating a 'less comfortable social science' that tries to be accountable to complexity (St. Pierre & Pillow 2000: 6). Deleuze's concepts can be used in response to a range of problems in sociological and feminist empirical work; including the negotiation of dualisms such as mind/body (Grosz 1994), representation/materiality (see Bray & Colebrook 1998) and structure/agency (see Barad 2007).

The broader study from which these examples are drawn focuses primarily on gender as an embodied categorisation of bodies and the context of consumer culture and 'health' discourses. The possibilities for using and advancing Deleuze's concepts 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 has meant that discourses such as health, consumer culture and gender were particularly important connections for participants. The participants discussed above described their relations with their own bodies, body work practices, and others' bodies in very complex ways. Kate and Jason both explained that they 'get caught up in' wanting to physically resemble the dominant images of gender; Paul, Steph and Gillian explained the complex embodied sensations associated with exercise, health and happiness, with Steph

for example saying she would ‘get fit so that [she] could be happy’; and Ben and Isabelle portrayed how body work practices can become crucial to their sense of self, and how the intensity of affects related to these practices can limit the range of possibilities available for how the body can be experienced.

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, including education, health and sociology. A Deleuzian approach to bodies in context enables new, complex understandings of the relations between bodies and society, and how bodies may be lived differently.

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