

Self-harm in feminine bodily experience: a female-embodied account of nonsuicidal self-injury

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Abstract

Self-harm, or nonsuicidal self-injury, is an intentional behaviour that consists of inflicting oneself with physical injury. While this practice is increasing in the Western World, not much research has been conducted and its causes are still somewhat unknown. This essay aims to take a phenomenological approach to the problem of self-harm, claiming that this practice is a female-embodied one and that phenomenological feminist theories can explain it. First, I will go over the theories by I. M. Young, Jansen and Welhre, and J. Serrano. Then, I will analyse some qualitative research on self-harm, especially on it being practised mainly by women. Lastly, I will apply the concepts aiming to demonstrate that self-harm is a female-embodied practice and that phenomenological female embodiment theories are of great use in studying nonsuicidal self-injury.

Keywords

self-harm, phenomenology, female embodiment, control, anger, violence, objectification, abuse, abject, agency.

Autolesión y experiencia corporal femenina: una visión de la autolesión no suicida desde la in-corporación femenina: La autolesión, o autolesión no suicida, es un comportamiento intencionado que consiste en infligirse a uno mismo lesiones físicas. Aunque esta práctica va en aumento en el mundo occidental, no se han realizado muchas investigaciones y sus causas siguen siendo algo desconocidas. Este ensayo pretende abordar el problema de las autolesiones desde un enfoque fenomenológico, afirmando que esta práctica está incorporada por las mujeres y que las teorías fenomenológicas feministas pueden explicarla. En primer lugar, repasaré las teorías de I. M. Young, Jansen y Welhre, y J. Serrano. A continuación, analizaré algunas investigaciones cualitativas sobre la autolesión, especialmente sobre el hecho de que sea practicada principalmente por mujeres. Por último, aplicaré los conceptos con el objetivo de demostrar que la autolesión es una práctica incorporada por las mujeres y que las teorías fenomenológicas de la incorporación femenina son de gran utilidad para estudiar la autolesión no suicida.

Palabras clave

autolesión, fenomenología, in-corporación femenina, control, ira, violencia, cosificación, abuso, abyecto, agencia.

Introduction

Self-harm is a practice that is increasing in the Western world. While many studies are being written about it, there still exists no definitive explanation for its causes. One thing that we know for sure is that it occurs significantly more among women, but the reasons for it are still unknown.

Self-harm is regarded by society as an “adolescent thing for girls.” This statement is nothing short of a pejorative way to disregard its sufferers, who are often mistreated and misunderstood even among mental health practitioners. There still exist many misconceptions about it, as well as a lot of prejudice.

This essay aims to paint a clearer picture of self-harm. Particularly, an attempt will be made to establish that this practice is a female-embodied one, claiming that many of the reasons behind it have a lot to do with the way women relate to their surroundings and especially to their own bodies.

With this aim, I will first describe the theories of female embodiment made by Iris Marion Young, Julia Jansen and Maren Welhre, and Julia Serrano. Then, I will define the concept of self-harm and its characterisation as a gendered practice based on some articles on qualitative research of self-injury. Lastly, I will apply the concepts expounded to try to characterise self-harm not only as a gendered practice but as one that is related to feminine bodily existence.

Theories of Female Embodiment

In her collection of essays about female embodiment, Young puts the focus on the lived body as the locus of subjectivity and practice. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir’s phenomenology⁶⁹, she gives many different accounts of female embodiment, ranging from the way girls throw to menstruation. Young claims that the way women relate to their surroundings is conditioned by their situation, that is, the body is defined as a situation, as a means to acknowledge that “the meaning of a woman’s body is bound up with the way she uses her freedom.” Female subjectivity is thus conditioned by the sociocultural context in which it exists without being able to choose differently⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 12-18.

Simone de Beauvoir defined women as the Other. She claimed that women are denied, culturally and socially, the subjectivity, autonomy and creativity that are characteristic of human beings. Women thus live in a contradiction: they are a person, human, but they are denied the subjectivity that comes with that characterisation⁷¹. Beauvoir also saw the body as a burden⁷². Young draws from this statement and claims that women experience their bodies as fragile rather than a medium for action. Feminine bodily existence is an “inhibited intentionality.” From a very young age, women feel their bodies as mere things due to the objectification they are subject to, resulting in feelings of incapacity, fragility, frustration, or self-consciousness⁷³.

Moreover, Young defines feminine bodily existence as self-referred. While Merleau-Ponty claims that the body cannot exist as an object, women often feel their body as such, being their corporeal existence referred onto itself as well as onto possibilities in the world. One of the possible reasons for this is the higher degree of “body prominence” that women have. This is because women are socialised into paying significant attention to their bodies, and they therefore experience them as mere things, as things that exist as looked at and acted upon⁷⁴. As Young puts it, “to the degree that she does live herself as mere body, she cannot be in unity with herself but must take a distance from and exist in discontinuity with her body.”⁷⁵

Feminine somatic existence is also often subject to processes of normalisation. As Jansen and Wehrle state, the lived body is under the influence of structural norms that aim to normalise it. They claim that the concept of the normal body usually refers to the optimal one and that the process of normalisation passes through the production of “docile” female bodies through discipline. Moreover, they maintain that the less a woman can be a body, that is have intentionality, the more she has a body she has to worry about. In addition, they believe that due to the neoliberal ideal, women now tend to “govern” themselves and

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 29.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 34-36.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 38-39.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 44.

have individual tendencies, motivations, and preferences, impeding the formation of community and the identification of their problems as systematic⁷⁶.

Another meaningful account of female embodiment is given by Julia Serrano. She conveys her “feeling as a woman” from a trans position. Serrano claims that the feeling of otherness and the changes she sensed in how her environment related to her were the elements that started to make her feel like a woman apart from her physical experience of being in her own body. Thus, Serrano defends that being a woman is an embodied phenomenological experience that pertains to the way the world relates to a person and makes her feel observed, that is, as the Other⁷⁷.

What Is Self-Harm?

Deliberate self-harm is an intentional behaviour that produces an immediate and unambiguous injury to the body⁷⁸. While it is thought to be connected to suicide⁷⁹, its definition in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) states that self-harm, or nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI), is “the deliberate, self-inflicted destruction of body tissue without suicidal intent and for purposes not socially sanctioned.”⁸⁰ Forms of self-harm include cutting, stabbing, burning, hitting, pulling hair, poisoning, gnawing at flesh, scratching, and many more. The practice of self-harm has increased over the last few years⁸¹ and the statistics show that it is more common in women than in men, some labelling it as a gendered practice⁸².

Many different causes are found behind self-harm. Some of them are psychiatric, like having a personality disorder such as borderline (BPD), dissociative states, or depression.

⁷⁶ Julia Jansen and Maren Wehrle, “The Normal Body: Female Bodies in Changing Contexts of Normalization and Optimization,” in Fisher, Dolezal, *New Feminist Perspectives on Embodiment* (Camdem: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 38-46.

⁷⁷ Julia Serrano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007): 181-190.

⁷⁸ Gerrilyn Smith, Dee Cox, and Jacqui Saradjian, *Women and Self-Harm: Understanding, Coping, and Healing from Self-Mutilation* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁷⁹ Hilary Norman, Lisa Marzano, Andrea Oskis, and Mark Coulson, ““I Can’t Describe It and They Can’t See the Rain.” An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of Self-Harm in Young Adults who Report Difficulties Identifying and Describing their Feelings,” *Current Psychology*, vol. 42 (2023):10151-10162.

⁸⁰ Maria Zetterqvist, “The DSM-5 diagnosis of nonsuicidal self-injury disorder: a review of the empirical literature,” *Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health*, vol. 9, no. 31 (2015).

⁸¹ Norman et al., “I Can’t Describe It and They Can’t See the Rain”,

⁸² Amy Chandler and Zoi Simopoulou, “The Violence of the Cut: Gendering Self-Harm,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 18, 4650 (2021).

However, studies pose that the main reasons behind self-harm seem to be of a psychological sort. Some of these are a desire to control, having a history of sexual abuse (especially childhood sexual abuse), a form of regulating emotions, self-punishment, self-hatred or self-loathing, an indirect way of seeking help, anger towards the self or a way of expressing anger, survivor guilt, a way to replace words, a form of relief from emotional turmoil, a link to alexithymia, or even a way to limit the damage to the self, among others⁸³. Many of these reasons are linked with the experience of being a woman in the contemporary world.

Self-harm as a Gendered Practice

The DSM-5 presents 16 different studies with empirical data on the people who engage in deliberate self-harm. In these studies, the percentage of women who self-harm ranges from 50 to 86.7⁸⁴. It is a fact that women engage in self-harm significantly more than men. Attempted suicide is also more common among women, while completed suicide is more prevalent among men. The reason attributed to these differences is the preference for more violent methods among men⁸⁵. However, the cause for this female predominance is still being studied.

Muehlenkamp et al. studied the way self-objectification could lead to self-harm as a means to explain it. They claimed that the objectification theory, which states that the societal objectification of women made them internalise an outsider's view so that they view themselves as objects, could be the reason why women attacked their bodies by self-harming. However, the results of the study were somewhat ambiguous, and no clear proof

⁸³ Jennifer J. Muehlenkamp, Jenny D. Swanson, and Amy, M. Brausch, "Self-Objectification, Risk Taking, and Self-Harm in College Women," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, no. 29 (2005): 24-32; Cate Curtis, "Female Deliberate Self-Harm: The Women's Perspectives," *Women's Studies*, vol. 47, no. 8 (November 2008): 845-867; Hilary Norman, Lisa Marzano, Andrea Oskis, and Mark Coulson, "My Heart and My Brain Is What's Bleeding, These Are Just Cuts." An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Young Women's Experiences of Self-Harm," *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, vol. 13:914109 (2022); Tiffany B. Brown and Thomas Kimball, "Cutting To Live: A Phenomenology of Self-Harm," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2013); Jennifer Harris, "Self-Harm: Cutting the Bad out of Me," *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2000): 164-173; Veronica Heney, "Unending and Uncertain: Thinking Through a Phenomenological Consideration of Self-Harm Towards a Feminist Understanding of Embodied Agency," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2020): 7-21; Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, Women and Self-harm; Norman et al., "My Heart and My Brain is What's Bleeding"; Chandler and Simopoulou, "The Violence of the Cut."

⁸⁴ Zetterqvist, "The DSM-5 diagnosis...".

⁸⁵ Curtis, "Female Deliberate Self-Harm."

of their hypothesis was found⁸⁶. On the other hand, others like Curtis⁸⁷, Harris⁸⁸, or Smith et al.⁸⁹ aimed to obtain a feminist political understanding of this practice by analysing the reasons behind it from a feminist perspective.

Curtis proposes an analysis against individualist explanations. She states that women are in a continuous situation of powerlessness that makes them feel like they have no control over their own lives, and that self-harm is a way to take control. She also believes that women's lower socioeconomic status, the experience of harassment, and history of sexual abuse in some cases are risk factors that lead to a depressive state that can result in self-harm⁹⁰. The discrimination against women in patriarchal societies is the cause of many mental health problems, and self-harm is a practice that women engage in to feel in control and, as Heney points out, exercise agency⁹¹.

Moreover, Chandler and Simopoulou explain that self-harm has always been understood as a female act. They point out that self-harm was branded as "feminine" and "delicate" because "the alternative might be to accept that women could engage in 'aggressive' or 'violent' acts," adjectives that are reserved for men. One of the main problems when regarding self-harm is to view it as a violent practice when it is mainly executed by women⁹². Another reason behind this female prevalence is the expression of anger. Thomas analyses in her study how female anger works, stating that one of its main causes is the experience of powerlessness. She explains that the responsibilities women have in the household and the lack of help they receive are two of the most common stressors. Even more, when women are angry, they tend to suppress it and turn it inward, hardly ever expressing it and, when they do, expressing it passive-aggressively or in outbursts⁹³. This suppression of anger comes from considering female expression of anger as a "violation of core values" and an upset of the status quo. Suppressing anger sometimes has consequences such as psychosomatic symptoms⁹⁴.

⁸⁶ Muehlenkamp et al "Self-Objectification, Risk Taking, and Self-Harm."

⁸⁷ Curtis, "Female Deliberate Self-Harm."

⁸⁸ Harris, "Self-Harm: Cutting the Bad out of Me."

⁸⁹ Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, Women and Self-harm,

⁹⁰ Curtis, "Female Deliberate Self-Harm."

⁹¹ Heney, "Unending and Uncertain."

⁹² Chandler and Simopoulou, "The Violence of the Cut."

⁹³ Sandra P. Thomas, "Women's Anger, Aggression, and Violence," *Health Care for Women International*, vol. 26, no. 6 (2005): 504-522.

⁹⁴ Thomas, "Women's Anger, Aggression, and Violence."

Self-harm as a gendered practice has just started to be studied. While most studies focus on the female aspect just from a statistical point of view, there exist many connections between the reasons behind self-harm and the experiences that women encounter in a patriarchal society. The way women relate to their bodies and their surroundings can result in self-harm in some cases, and female embodiment can explain why this practice is significantly more common among them.

Applying the concepts: Self-Harm in Feminine Bodily Existence

Self-harm is a self-inflicted injury to the body that is present mainly among women. It can therefore be said that self-harm is an embodied practice, and one that can be particularly connected to female embodiment. Heney proposed a view of self-harm as an embodied, relational, and repeated act that considered self-harm as a frame of female agency⁹⁵. I will now explore in greater depth the conception of self-harm as a female-embodied practice drawing from Young's phenomenological claims.

One important aspect of self-harm as a mainly female practice is violence. All of the forms in which self-harm can occur (cutting, hitting, burning, scratching, etc.) are inherently violent. However, since violence is considered unfeminine, many researchers tried hard to prove, sometimes against evidence, that self-harm was not violent but delicate⁹⁶. The action of cutting, which is the most common form of self-harm⁹⁷ can be compared to a caress, a form of relating to the world that is considered more feminine since, as Young claims, touch is privileged rather than sight in an epistemology spoken from a feminine subjectivity⁹⁸. Thus, women are denied to engage in violent practice since, even when they do, they are regarded as delicate. It becomes necessary to resignify violence in the feminine bodily existence.

Violence is often linked to anger. Since women are not expected to express anger, when they show signs of violence these are considered to be caused by a man, mainly a male significant other. When women are violent, they are seen as hysterical, out of control or seeking attention⁹⁹. Women often have no way to voice their inferior situation, their experience of invisibility, injustice, and powerlessness. As Thomas says, “[i]f one has a sense

⁹⁵ Heney, “Unending and Uncertain.”

⁹⁶ Chandler and Simopoulou, “The Violence of the Cut.”

⁹⁷ Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, Women and Self-harm.

⁹⁸ Young, On Female Body Experience: 81.

⁹⁹ Chandler and Simopoulou, “The Violence of the Cut.”

that her existence is itself illegitimate, then one surely has no right to express a disruptive emotion such as anger.”¹⁰⁰

“At times I rage at the brutal existence forced on me
I want to scream and shout in protest
but it all stays inside, hurting
Furious tears struggle to flow
I prevent them in case I should lose control
Self-mutilation is an outlet
watching my blood flow, feeling nothing
Silent red tears of rage and anguish.”¹⁰¹

This negation inevitably leads to suppressed anger, hiding feelings and shame. These feelings can build up inside and women do not know how to cope. Studies show that self-harm presents itself as a way¹⁰². Translating emotional pain into physical pain can serve to express the emotions that women are obligated to suppress: “Verbalising emotions may be challenging, whereas physical pain has a common language.”¹⁰³ Self-harm can be a form of replacing the words they cannot voice¹⁰⁴.

As Young claims, feminine bodily existence is self-referred, meaning that they experience their bodies as mere things and are uncertain of their capacities¹⁰⁵. She also states that, by living as mere bodies, women cannot be in unity with themselves but must take a distance and they end up existing in discontinuity with their own bodies, as previously stated¹⁰⁶. In extreme cases, dissociative states can appear, which are common among people who self-harm, for it is a way of bringing oneself back to reality. This feeling that the body does not belong to oneself is a usual experience among women. By self-harming, one reminds oneself that one's body is theirs¹⁰⁷.

The objectification of women's body parts, such as their breasts, can lead to them attacking these body parts specifically. Some of them particularly target these parts because they feel

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, Women and Self-harm.

¹⁰² Brown and Kimball, “Cutting to Live”; Curtis, “Female Deliberate Self-Harm”; Norman et al., “*My Heat and My Brain is What's Bleeding*”; Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, Women and Self-harm.

¹⁰³ Brown and Kimball, “Cutting To Live.”

¹⁰⁴ Norman et al., “*I Can't Describe It and They Can't See the Rain.*”

¹⁰⁵ Young, On Female Body Experience: 38-39.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*: 44.

¹⁰⁷ Norman et al., “*I Can't Describe It and They Can't See the Rain.*”

these parts as connected to the sexual abuse they have suffered¹⁰⁸. Sexual abuse is an invasion of the body, the possibility of which is always present in women's corporeal existence and contributes to this feeling of not belonging to themselves¹⁰⁹. Previous history of sexual abuse, especially childhood sexual abuse, often serves the purpose of explaining why women self-harm more than men and it can become a "totally explanatory discourse" that precludes the investigation of other possible reasons. However, it leaves unanswered the question of why other women without these experiences engage in self-harm as well¹¹⁰.

Experiences such as sexual abuse, outbursts of anger, or mere thoughts of injustice can lead to guilt. Bueno Gómez identifies guilt as a form of suffering introduced by the Judeo-Christian tradition that particularly affects women, as they are responsible for the fall of man after eating the apple in the Garden of Eden¹¹¹. Moreover, she identifies in this tradition "the persistence of the culture of punishment and guilt and the attribution of redemptive value to suffering."¹¹² The desire for punishment is another cause of self-harm since women are taught to embrace suffering and feel guilty for their actions¹¹³. The catholic concepts of suffering and guilt may also be the reason why self-harm is mainly found in Western countries, although it must be said that not many studies have been conducted outside of them.

A common theme in stories about self-harm is blood. Since cutting is the main self-harm practice, people recount the way seeing blood flow makes them feel. A woman in Harris's study portrayed it like this: "As the blood flows down the sink, so does the anger and the anguish." Another said: "... and all the blood started trickling down my arm and I just watched it and it felt like it was releasing the pressure in my head, like it was releasing all the bad blood and maggots. I knew it wasn't (maggots and stuff) but it was to me."¹¹⁴ The account of a woman in Curtis's study is also illuminating: "... the cutting for me isn't just a sensation, it's also watching myself bleed and the scarring after. Those calm me down so I'll just look at them and feel in control."¹¹⁵ The appeal of the blood and the fact that all of these are women's stories could be linked to menstrual blood. Perhaps the control over

¹⁰⁸ Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, Women and Self-harm.

¹⁰⁹ Young, On Female Body Experience: 45.

¹¹⁰ Chandler and Simopoulou, "The Violence of the Cut."

¹¹¹ Noelia Bueno Gómez, *Filosofía del Sufrimiento*, (Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch, 2022): 79-81.

¹¹² *Ibid.*: 69.

¹¹³ Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, Women and Self-harm.

¹¹⁴ Harris, "Self-Harm: Cutting the Bad out of Me."

¹¹⁵ Curtis, "Female Deliberate Self-Harm."

blood is a calming feeling, a way to control the process metaphysics that is fluid, pulsing, moving, and with no definitive borders that Young identifies as female¹¹⁶. Control is one of the main appeals of self-harm, a way to exercise the agency that women are negated in society¹¹⁷. I have also reflected upon the difference between menstrual blood and self-harm blood, claiming that it is the different nature of both that makes the latter a source of relief¹¹⁸.

Young further claims that menstrual blood is a source of shame for all women, who are taught from their first menstruation to hide and conceal those menstrual processes¹¹⁹. Menstruation leads women to know themselves as shameful, “as an abject existence that is messy and disgusting.” This shame ends up being a main part of feminine corporeal existence, and combined with the fact that women are not supposed to express feelings of anger or voice the injustices they experience, women are now not only the Other but also the abject. According to Kristeva, the abject denotes “a correlate to the subject that lies just on the other side of the border of its identity and threatens to dissolve that border.” Abjection represents the fear of losing that limit between self and Other¹²⁰. As Peinado Aramendía claims, “the mutilated body lives in the infinitude,” meaning that this limit is permeated by self-harm, incorporating the abject through this act¹²¹.

If the abject is defined as “messy and disgusting,” the mutilated body must be the abject. People who self-harm must hide their scars and engage in the act when they are alone. As Smith et al. state, “they [women who self-harm] believe that what they do separates them ‘from the rest of humankind and [they] let no one or almost no one know about an act that they regard as shameful.’”¹²² Shame plays an important role in self-harm, both as a cause and a result. Many women express the mistreatment suffered by professionals in the mental health sector, often branding their self-harm as attention-seeking or manipulative¹²³. Brown and Kimball analyse how people who self-harm have encountered mental health professionals who have judged and misunderstood them¹²⁴.

¹¹⁶ Young, *On Female Body Experience*: 80.

¹¹⁷ Heney, “Unending and Uncertain.”

¹¹⁸ Paz Biempica, “03-02-2023,” [online]. *Medium* (February 2023), <https://medium.com/@plezcanobetegon/03-02-2023-c41fae45404>.

¹¹⁹ Young, *On Female Body Experience*: 106.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*: 106-111.

¹²¹ Álex Peinado Aramendía, *Cortando por lo Sano*. (Unpublished document). University of Oviedo. Oviedo.

¹²² Smith, Cox, and Saradjian, *Women and Self-harm*.

¹²³ Curtis, “Female Deliberate Self-Harm.”

¹²⁴ Brown and Kimball, “Cutting To Live.”

Conclusion

In Group, Casper doesn't like us to say cut or cutting or burn or stab. She says it doesn't matter what you do or how you do it: it's all the same. You could drink, slice, do meth, snort coke, burn, cut, stab, slash, rip out your eyelashes, or fuck till you bleed and it's all the same thing: self-harm. She says: whether someone has hurt you or made you feel bad or unworthy or unclean, rather than taking the rational step of realizing that person is an asshole or a psycho and should be shot or strung up and you should stay the fuck away from them, instead we internalize our abuse and begin to blame and punish ourselves and weirdly, once you start cutting or burning or fucking because you feel so shitty and unworthy, your body starts to release this neat-feeling shit called endorphins and you feel so fucking high the world is like cotton candy at the best and most colorful state fair in the world, only bloody and stuffed with infection. But the fucked-up part is once you start self-harming, you can never not be a creepy freak, because your whole body is now a scarred and charred battlefield and nobody likes that on a girl, nobody will love that, and so all of us, every one, is screwed, inside and out. Wash, rinse, fucking repeat¹²⁵.

Kathleen Glasgow wrote in 2016 a novel about a young girl who struggled with self-harm. With this paragraph, she expresses a feeling that every woman who has at one point engaged in self-harm can relate to. The experience of self-harm is not merely the harming of the body, it also pertains to how the form of engaging with our surroundings changes for us, especially how the world starts to treat us differently.

I believe a personal experience is sometimes illuminating when discussing certain topics such as self-harm. I believe the claims I make in this paper to be descriptive of the experience of self-harm. With this statement, I do not mean to attempt to universalise or generalise the experience of self-harm, since it is an individual practice, and a particularly intimate one. However, I do believe it is important to give an experiential account.

While it is important to define self-harm as an intimate and private practice, I believe there needs to be an account with which more people can feel identified. As Young points out about the experience of breast reconstructive surgery, “[p]rothesis offers the empty comfort of ‘Nobody will know the difference.’ But it is that very difference which I wish to affirm, because I have lived it, and survived it, and wish to share that strength with other women.”¹²⁶ Most of the people who engage in self-harm tend to hide their scars. They do not want to stand out, to be regarded as the Other, as the abject, and while it is understandable that they do, the inability to find other people who suffer as one does can lead to a strong feeling of loneliness. If we cannot or do not want to show our scars, there needs to be at least a way to talk amongst ourselves and share our experiences. Self-harm is

¹²⁵ Kathleen Glasgow, *Girl in Pieces*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 2016).

¹²⁶ Young, *On Female Body Experience*: 95.

still something shameful, but it is suffered by more and more people. Moreover, the fact that most of these people are women who encounter the same problems and experiences of inferiority, injustice, powerlessness and discrimination should be a reason for us to want to speak up.

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