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LES PEaux ENTRE TROPHÉES ET RELIQUES

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BETWEEN LEGITIMATE EXHIBITION AND OVER-EXPOSURE

THE AFTER-EFFECTS OF
SEVERE BURNS AS TROPHIES

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Résumé

Dans le prolongement des travaux de Goffman sur le retournement du stigmate, cet article montre comment la maîtrise du « récit sur soi » de personnes atteintes de stigmates cutanés opère ce retournement. Ainsi, il attire l'attention des chercheurs en science sociales sur la nécessité de prendre en compte dans leurs analyses de tels récits. Si l'article se concentre avant tout sur l'expérience vécue d'une brûlure grave, des liens sont amorcés avec d'autres atteintes cutanées qui, aussi bien à l'occasion d'une *ex-peau-sition* normale (et légitime) qu'en vue d'une *ex-peau-sition* revendicatrice, vont provoquer des réactions similaires de spectateurs-visiteurs-voyeurs. Cet article essaie par conséquent d'apporter quelques éclairages sur les manières variées des personnes atteintes pour parvenir à gérer leurs stigmates cutanés, en développant toutes sortes d'habilités interactionnelles et en utilisant certains « outils » récents, comme le recours aux réseaux sociaux pour produire des récits.

Mots clefs

peau, brûlure grave, stigmate, trophée, regard, récit, réseaux sociaux

Abstract

As a follow-up to Goffman's work of resurgence following a stigma, this article shows how mastering the « the story of oneself » of people with skin stigmas operates this resurgence. Thus, it attracts the attention of researchers in social sciences on the need to take into account in their analyses such stories. If the article focuses primarily on the experience of a severe burn, links are initiated with other skin disorders that, both on the occasion of a normal (and legitimate) exposure as well as on a claimant exposure, will provoke similar reactions from spectators-visitors. This article therefore tries to shed some light on the different ways in which people successfully manage their skin stigmas, by developing all kinds of interactive skills and using certain « recent tools », such as the use of social networks to tell there stories.

Keywords

skin, severe burn, stigma, trophy, look, story, social networks

Introduction

It is difficult today to escape the wave of “self-fulfillment” that invades all social networks and socio-technical scenes. More surprising is undoubtedly the use by major burn survivors of these same communication channels to “expose” their scars and display them as trophies. In this article^[1], we will seek to understand whether specific attempts to control the narrative about oneself, by people wearing a visible skin stigma, are in line with Goffman’s work on the reversal of stigma^[2] and what lessons can we learn from it today?

Based on the lived and singular experience of interactions narrated by about twenty major burn survivors, to which were added observations on a closed discussion group of burn survivors, as well as visual and written testimonies, this article proposes a higher level of abstraction; it hopes to underline the importance for the social sciences to highlight the control of the narrative on oneself in order to legitimize the presence of bodies which are perceived a priori and spontaneously as “not legitimate” in public places (as modified in terms of the integumentary structure) both by the person affected and by those whom the person will address.

We will first focus on the perception of people with skin disease in routine interactions, reactions to them in public places. We will then propose an interpretation given to the scars and to their legitimate display.

1. This article is based on twenty-eight qualitative interviews with people having permanent visible effects of severe burns (eighteen interviews, nine women and nine men, and ten interviews with those who agreed to meet a second time). The interview guide focused on the lived experience of interactions in which interviewees were confronted by the eyes of others. Follow-up questions allowed specification of the indexicality of situations and answering of the following questions: with whom was the interaction: intimate, unknown, other severe burn survivor, etc.; when: time elapsed since the accident, season, etc.; how: description, sequence of interactions, anchored interaction, spontaneous interaction, etc.? setting: familiar, unknown, leisure, etc.; where: private, semi-private, public, etc. (See Dubuis, 2014). A special thank you to Dominique Memmi for the constructive exchange we had on this article and to Karin Lörvall and Christopher Thullen for their careful review of the English version.

2. More specifically Goffman E., *Stigmaté. Les usages sociaux du handicap*, Paris, Editions de Midnight, 1996[1975].

The central role of “self-narratives” in the establishment of facts and on the management of the different situations to which a major burn survivor^[3][3] is confronted will also be analysed. Finally, we will seek to understand if a less conventional attitude, such as the provocative display of accidental marks, achieves the desired effects, and what questions it leaves open.

Marked and “not legitimate” skin in public

Striated, cardboard, spotted, blistered, etc., these are the factual descriptions of integuments indelibly and durably marked by serious burns. Without taking into account the particularity of the different burn survivors nor the scrambling of the body's expressions and postures caused by the after-effects, this article focuses first of all on the way others view the after-effects and how burn survivors perceive experienced interactions with others. In the everyday life, any burn survivor must quickly experiment and establish that his or her change in “cover skin” disrupts the fluidity of exchanges, that the new appearance is not self-evident, and that it requires adjustments in order to prevent too much discomfort for both the person being spoken to and the person speaking. All sorts of new interactive social skills will inevitably have to be developed. His/her presence in public is no longer necessarily perceived as legitimate. Indeed, if the after-effects are obvious, they are not necessarily identified and recognized.

They will often even be confused with a legion of others skin disorders: severe acne, vitiligo, psoriasis, eczema, herpes, atypical dermatitis, leprosy^[4]. These misinterpretations of the after-effects may lead some to fear contagion and maintain

3. The expression “severe burn survivor” is used in the singular to express the “small” struggles carried out in daily life by each severe burn survivor. If, in our work, the interest is first and foremost on the face, other parts of the body are affected and, unlike facial stigmata, the question of showing or concealing comes up.

4. Our study focuses on a particular skin condition whose etiology is caused by burns. We are aware that many people with skin diseases can have similar experiences of exposure to the looks and reactions of others (Héas, Misery (ed.), 2007).

haptonomic physical distance. This is reflected in many fictions, cinematographic and literary works that illustrate the daily life of those affected, especially those affected to the face⁵.

We see two caricatures in fiction: either the concealment of the scars that could inspire disgust or disapproving looks, or otherwise their provocative display, associated sometimes with an ounce of wickedness.

In real life situations, a major burn survivor will obviously perceive and feel the disgust they cause, *i.e.* moral or physical rejection, a distancing (Memmi, Raveneau, Taïeb, 2016), that he or she “believes” to provoke (because it is only rarely made known directly). This disgust is bound to be felt even more acutely when certain spatial contingencies require a physical proximity but also in habitual situations of contact through “interaction rites” (handshake, hug, etc.).

5. In recent examples we will mention Människor Ä., *Real Humans*, season 2, 2013; Casas Ros A., *Le théorème d'Almodóvar*, Paris, Gallimard, 2007; Le Clézio J.M.G., *Alma*, Paris, Gallimard, 2017; Cline E., *Readyplayer one*, Paris, Michel Lafon, 2018[2013]; Bec C., Jovanovic M., *Carthago 4. Les monoliths de Koubé. Les humanoïdes associés*, Los Angeles, 2014 (comic strip).

“It’s true that a person kissed my cheek on the side that was not burned. In in fact, she pushed herself. There, I felt bad (...). I thought to myself, she thought it was disgusting (...). Disgust, for me there is no [other] word.”

(Nour, 33 (30), domestic accident)^[6]

6. In the rest of the text, after each story, are mentioned an assumed name , the age of the person interviewed, the age at the time of the accident between brackets, and finally the type of accident (domestic accident, occupational accident, leisure accident, attack).

In order to avoid unpredictable and unbearable reactions, an affected person will, as much as possible, avoid situations that require too much physical proximity – cramped spaces (elevators) – and that result in disturbing visibility (swimming pool, beach, etc.). Achieving the ability to face these situations imposes in a way the need to facilitate the identification of the scars and thereby to frequently recall of the accident’s etiology, as experimented by Godard (2017). Therefore, for a major burn survivor, in the physical and cutaneous reconstruction process brought on by the burn, showing oneself with marks on the body (whether concealable or always visible) corresponds, without a doubt, to a second trial. This forces the person to rebuild interactions with others. From then on, this self-presentation takes on a variety of meanings. Once the after-effects have been identified, the body modified in its materiality indicates factually that the person withstood a violent physical ordeal and that, trivially, he or she is alive. A major burn survivor frequently perceives that his appearance arouses pity in others, that his fate appears unenviable (“*The poor person, that must hurt!*”). The scars function as a distorting mirror that inevitably send the spectator-voyeur to more personal questions: “with those marks, would I dare to face the look of others at the pool, at the beach, etc.? With such fragile skin, could I still be able to participate in certain activities?” For a woman, “Could I be pregnant with scars around my stomach?” Considering this display of scars unbearable, some people do not hesitate, for example, at the pool to request that the scars be covered with a T-shirt. It is true that, apart from a hospital setting, the general public is rarely confronted to people with skin problems, even if recent reports indicate a large number of people are concerned ^[7]. It is also interesting to note, that almost every time the media devote an article to amputees, they make sure to present pictures of the amputated limbs modified without traces or scarring (Dalibert, 2015). It is noteworthy that, despite scientific progress and current

7. The results of a major survey conducted in France show that skin diseases are very common as they concern one out of three people in France. Analyzing these results, Stéphane Héas has shown that these diseases are poorly known, have a bad reputation, and therefore have a real impact on the quality of life (Cf. Les dermatites atopiques. Eléments de réflexion sur l’enquête (Presentation, Paris, June 24, 2017 www.stephaneheassociologue.fr [accessed 15 Oct 2017];

knowledge, the skin marks and scars still disrupt interactions. Such disruptions take on an even stronger meaning when a major burn survivor has to face the reluctance of relatives involved, or even responsible for the accident, to accept the “public” exposure of their fault and all the guilt it may mean:

[My husband] he wanted me to buy only turtlenecks up to here [middle of the neck], long sleeves until there [wrist]. And then in the beginning, I did not understand. At first I said to myself, “Well, he’s very concerned that there really be no sun on it.” Then I said to myself, “But wait, you just want the scars to be hidden. But no, maybe you don’t want people to see what you are responsible for” (because I think that’s how he saw it). I said, “There’s no reason for me to hide.” Then at one point, I exploded. I said, “Look, you’re very sweet, but if I was in a wheel-chair, what would you do? Would you keep me inside at home or not?”

(Sophie, 43 (40), domestic accident).

These situations provide an overview of the underlying reactions and issues to which a person is confronted when he or she is led to reveal the damaged skin in public in some way or another. We are very far away from the idea of reducing a person to the qualification of a “marked person”, and therefore to consider him or her as a victim forced to hide scars or to avoid public places. On the contrary, we will take a “black path”^[8], the path of the relationship maintained by the affected person with his or her marks, a relationship that highlights, and is closely linked to, care of the mark and construction of meaning.

8. Reference to the title of Sylvain Tesson’s book, *Sur les chemins noirs*. Disfigured by facial paralysis after a fall, the author describes his journey through France on unused roads, out of sight.

After-effects in search of meaning

The types of perceptions, by a major burn survivor, of the reactions he provokes and some of the actions necessary to protect from them have just been briefly mentioned. As we have seen, because of the importance of the gaze of others, he can hardly forget his scars especially if they are visible at all times. Thus, they are constantly recalling and reminding him by certain particularities. The grafted skin no longer has the suppleness of the original skin and requires regular care (even many years after the accident) to soften it, to reduce itching and to lessen the achromatic process, to further and always reduce, as best as possible, the prominence of the scars. In order to work on the surface of the skin with a very altered appearance different from the soft and smooth skin presented in advertisements, a major burn survivor has the possibility, in addition to therapeutic care, to use other techniques such as permanent make-up, for example to redesign the eyelashes, areolas, nipples, etc. that were destroyed by the burn. In the same way, a tattoo may sometimes be used to cover the scars with various patterns.

The skin becomes therefore similar to a palimpsest with previous scars, tattoos, burn scars or grafts, thus contributing to a jamming of the different ways of reading and interpreting its marks. Voluntary changes (tattooing, permanent make-up, etc.) do not always bring the expected effects. Instead of reducing the prominence of the scars, they can even attract attention on them, hence the interest and relevance of being interested in the particular relationship that develops between the injured person and his scars. This aggregated skin, modified in shape, thickness and color, is gradually integrated on to the new body of a major burn survivor. Depending on the which part is affected, it will even constitute a kind of armor or clothing, albeit often skimpy, but something that can protect him from the eyes of others. But, of course, as with any sign, a gap persists between the meaning given by its carrier and that given by the spectator. In relation to the tegumentary marks, in the West,

many representations are based on assumptions inherited from various traditions (especially Christian) and always firmly rooted in the distinction between pure and impure, healthy and unhealthy:

“That is what most shocks people when they see a major burn survivor, where the skin is healthy and where it is burned. When they really see the difference”

(Samuel, 40 (20), occupational accident)

The external mark would thus reflect an internal moral disorder, shameful lifestyle, etc. Without being explicitly expressed, these representations are inevitably imagined, perceived and felt by a major burn survivor, and this, under penalty of contributing to discomfort and an uneasy interaction, requires him to somehow facilitate the identification of scars. Facilitating such identification consists first in precisely reviewing the facts and the etiology of the accident, and secondly in explaining the injury and the particularities of the severe burns. However, using an explanation acceptable to the audience (an explanation that we will call “turnkey”), a major burn survivor easily achieves a form of factual recognition^[9], but on the other hand, it is more difficult for him to bring up the consequences that are less factual, less aesthetic, but more related to the long process of care:

9. This notion emerged during discussions with Olivier Voirol. See Voirol O., «La lutte pour inter-objectivation. Remarks on the object and recognition», in Ferrarese E. (dir.), *Qu'est-ce lutter pour la reconnaissance ?*, Lormont, Éd. Le Bord de l'Eau, 2013, 166-186.

“People, they may want to know what you had, why you had it, but that’s all. So the rest, we don’t talk about it because, I think, it would make people much more uncomfortable. The treatment of burns, it lasts a while and then it’s over. There are many others things that remain behind that one never sees”

(Simon, 45 (29), recreational accident, motor vehicle)

An often painful story added to the very visibility of the scars makes the major burn survivor’s detailed explanations difficult to bear. The explanations often struggle to find the attentive ears of a “secular” audience, a term that refers precisely to the irreducible distance maintained between an observer who is often embarrassed or even confused, and a person with damaged skin. For a major burn survivor, should not the scars that could to constitute a trophy (as it took him courage to overcome his ordeal, to endure a whole series of surgical and medical tests), be self-sufficient?

In such a difficult context, it is interesting to observe the use of social networks by some major burn survivors. We are particularly interested in the situation of a young woman, very active on social networks and the media^[10]. From the outset, we can see the importance of factual recognition: the Facebook® page and Instagram® account^[11] are entitled “February twelfth”, the date of her accident. The information about the accident is recalled several times, repeated many times in the same words (Dubuis, 2015). In addition to mastering the “turnkey” discourse, a major burn survivor controls the information that he or she wants to or can transmit. The young woman

10. This woman’s experience was particularly well publicized. For example, episode “mille et une vies: coma une expérience hors du commun” (coma, an extraordinary experience), France 2, March 20, 2017; episode “Sept à Huit”, LCI, August 13, 2017, episode «Salut les Terres», November 25, 2017; episode «Sept à Huit», «l’incroyable courage de Julie, 20 ans» (Julie’s incredible courage, 20 years), April 9, 2017.

11. 214000 subscribers on Instagram® [as of 10 Jan 2019]. It should also be noted that the Turia Pitt’s Instagram account, former model and top sportswoman, burned during a marathon in Australia has 844,000 subscribers [as of 10 Jan 2019]. This woman was involved in the filming the documentary “Embrace,” which aims to highlight body diversity and tries to fight against some of the diktats of beauty: <https://vimeo.com/198614151>

consciously uses social networks as an “*interacting airlock (which) despatializes*” and desynchronizes the act of demonstration” (Granjon, Denouël, 2010, 27) which allows her to present herself publicly with her burns while protecting against the reactions it would cause if she were physically in a face-to-face situation. The use of the media allows her to thus to experiment and enhance without too many disadvantages this real self-display 1992 [1973]. However, it should be noted that, unlike what can usually be observed on social networks, where image control leads Internet users to embellish certain aspects of their lives: couple relationship, “private” activities, etc., in this case is observed the opposite tendency of wanting to stick as closely as possible to reality: the photos are not reworked, nor the scars erased; the inflicted consequences are described in detail. This can be understood as a desire to spread out what has happened without having to directly face the visitors’ eyes, and therefore above all to give them time to stare, without being caught in the dilemma between wanting to look and preventing themselves from looking out of restraint, and sometimes modesty.

Through social media, this young woman thus succeeds on one hand in making visible the long process of her rehabilitation and on the other hand to detail her progress day by day. The media becomes a window for showing, or even sometimes for showing off, all the battles fought against this new and modified body, and therefore against herself. This real quest for rehabilitation involves a reconquest of the public space through activities (sports, etc.) and travel. In writing this rehabilitation soap opera, this young woman thwarts a good number of preconceived ideas about skin fragility, pain, etc. But above all she delivers a message to the visitor-spectators about her strength in overcoming such a trial. This self-presentation is therefore of importance primarily for herself, but also, according to her own words, for others. There is a stated willingness to seek usefulness in her accident. Exemplarity is part of it. By the hyper realistic staging of her conquering re-appropriation of the public space, this woman who, for many years, had to experiment and choose concealment

of her scars, wants and even demands that other people as affected as her, finally dare to face the eyes of others and return to “normal” activities, specifically seaside activities. Finally, this clear willingness of exemplarity takes on another mission, which, at the risk of shaking up the conformism and the comfort of most, is to fundamentally change the way people look at a marked person whose presence appears at first sight less legitimate (or even, in extreme cases, illegitimate), in order to gain acceptance, far from stereotypical canons of aseptic beauty, for the right to be different. In face-to-face relationships, we also find this double dimension. Two purposes are evoked by a major burn survivor: one that could be described as a narrative for oneself and the other as a narrative for others, even if, as we will show it, this difference sometimes seems small. A major burn survivor insists first on the experience of everything that his accident finally brought him, as much in the management of his damaged body and of the inflicted pain as in the management of body stigmas in interactions with others. He also wishes that such accidents leading to serious burns will not occur any more. Speaking to children, a woman^[12] thus takes the liberty to adapt her story by insisting on the preventive dimension and by recalling the dangers of certain practices. Scars become a channel of itinerant prevention (and thus offer the possibility of entering into a form of solidarity and community). Indeed, from a more altruistic perspective, most interviewed people are considering serving a cause, so not only to show the similarities in the experiences of other major burn survivors, but also to make comparisons, to make connections with what others may be experiencing with mastectomies or other skin markings. Thus, after a first phase, which we will describe using the neologism “pyrosociality”, where exchanges focus almost exclusively on common and shared experiences of severe burns in specific discussion groups (advice of all kinds: skin care, hydration, surgery, cure, etc.), a widening of the scope follows progressively, leading to a form of “dermasociality”, to exchanges about people’s experiences with skin stigmas regardless of their etiology (illness, accident, birth). Above all, therefore, is expressed

12. Sophie, 43 (40), domestic accident.



Choir of mummies
Werner Strub
Wire masks

© Photo Giorgio Skory

A Demanding Over-Exposure

After the normal phase of display or exposure, which inevitably leads to the attestation and explanation of what happened, the case occurs not so rarely, that a major burn survivor decides to take a riskier route, that of over-exposure and eventual provocation. The boundary between a normal display and provocative display is not always clear. As we have said, seeing a major burn survivor is undoubtedly a strain for others. Without doing anything in particular, the mere appearance of his marked body risks to be perceived as a provocation. Confronted with a range of negatively perceived reactions: disgust, rejection, surprise, etc., a major burn survivor will often take some proactive measures as a preventive measure for himself and also for others. Expecting such reactions, he is somehow seeking a tacit agreement, described by Goffman: in hiding the after-effects and limiting their salience, a major burn survivor does all he can to reduce the interactive discomfort he causes. But, in exchange, he expects his interlocutor to act as if nothing had happened (Goffman, 1996 [1975], 145). However, this type of accommodation is fragile. Sometimes a major burn survivor wishes to maintain familiar signs of interaction, such as a simple handshake when he only has a stump left in place of the hand. But, thinking of putting his interlocutor at ease by a form of hypercorrection (without, for example, presenting his other valid hand), he may then trigger surprise, even if, in his view, this action should be part of normal interactions. It may even happen that even a hypercorrection is misunderstood because it is at the border between an exposure considered normal and an exposure perceived as provocative. Strictly speaking, for a major burn survivor, provocation is part of the constant struggle to show that he claims simply to be recognized as a normal partner in interactions. His appearance should, for a certain major burn survivor, in no way condemn him to discretion, withdrawal and even less to any form of exclusion. This reversal should be read and interpreted as a reversal of the stigma: to positivize a situation perceived as painful, but also to free oneself from it and claim to be a person like other, in no way diminished, nor fragile.

We will focus here on some forms of stigma reversal. The first is normalizing, i.e. speaking openly about the burn, while the interlocutors try to ignore it. A major burn survivor uses this to provoke, either by reacting to fire-related terms (and there is no lack of expressions such as: there is no fire on the lake, etc.), by describing himself as “*half cooked*”, or by saying that he “*can withstand heat up to 1000 degrees*” (Samuel, 40 (20), occupational accident). He may also sometimes highlight the carnal damage that blurs the boundary between inside and outside, between what is hidden, the flesh, and what is visible, the skin: “Even I, when I show it [arm], I say, ‘even in at the butchers they don’t want it.’ I try to take it as a joke” (Marlene, 28 (22), attack). By such highlighting, this woman reflects to others how she perceives their behaviors. This attitude places images inside each other, whose objective is not only retrospective, describing what had just taken place, but also prospective, so that in the future these people would no longer be so disturbed. The purpose of this process is to act and not to let others’ uneasiness, fantasies and representations overwhelm them.

The second form consists in making people sympathize by displaying the after-effects to see the reactions of others, with the complicity of other protagonists: friends, etc. Again, this exhibition is in the liminal zone between normal exposure and provocative exposure. Above all, the aim is to raise awareness among the surrounding people of the insistence of their looks, their remarks (if they had not yet noticed it). In the event that the fault of a third party is known, the voluntary exhibition of the scars (for example, for a woman, by a generous cleavage or by a miniskirt that displays the after-effects) takes on a special meaning; this kind of “posting” becomes an insistence on what happened, the consequences of which are tangible: “Look, I was hurt, feel sorry for me” (Sophie, 43 (40), domestic accident). This is once again a search for recognition of what actually happened and may not have happened.

The third form is used to test the others and to do a selective choice, according to the words of an interviewee. This test would in some cases even be a type of initiation: letting him judge someone by his attitude in the face of damaged skin, it would allow a major burn survivor to sort through his relational network, a choice through which he would be able to, in a way, reverse the situation.

As for the fourth form, heroization^[13], it is part of the narrative dimension. We have highlighted the crucial importance of storytelling in facilitating the identification of after-effects. Due to the often dramatic nature of the accident and the visibility of the consequences, a major burn survivor must find an acceptable form to describe the accident. This narrative, which we have called a “turnkey” narrative often remains very factual. In the construction of the discourse, the etiology of the accident, more than the aesthetic consequences, has an essential meaning. It goes without saying that surviving an airplane accident generates more interest and allows more emphasis than having resisted the consequences of a common household accident: “If I had a motorcycle accident, it’s not as fun. But a plane crash and that I’m here, it’s fun enough, well, it’s miraculous enough for me to be able to talk about it” (Luis, 63 (58), recreational accident (motor vehicle)).

Similarly, an accident that occurred in a particular professional context (firefighter, military) or in a private context, but where lives were saved, will easily benefit from a heroic charge. The meaning attributed to the stories and their purpose, however, always vary according to the interlocutors. Often reconfigured, especially after an artificial coma phase and relying above all on the comments of witnesses or from reports (police, etc.), this type of narrative is necessarily “revisited”, re-appropriated and interpreted with very personal touch-ups with the obvious aim of provoking a reaction in the interlocutors.

13. This showed more in interviews with severely burned men. It should be noted that the etiology of the accident plays a significant role in this narrative heroization.

"I told a lot of things, in the shops once again I said: 'I fell into the jungle. ' (...) From the plane in the jungle and that I was a survivor. Stuff like that. People they can't know. When I didn't want to tell my story, the truth, I told lies"

(Lisa, 62 (19), recreational accident, motor vehicle)

This heroization is similar to and rejoins to other forms, such as the fifth form, the particularity, which aims to capitalize on the distinctive sign. Instead of being a discriminating sign, it can facilitate the recognition of the major burn survivor and even increase his notoriety. This cutaneous particularity has even been exploited by major clothing brands that have featured Winnie Harlow, model with vitiligo. In this case, the skin damage is confused with colorful clothing. We are thus witnessing a sixth form, the aestheticization of brands, which is found in tattoos covering burn sequels, depigmented areas, or skin transplants.

The seventh and last form corresponds to exemplarity. Already mentioned, when active and with the expected effects, it allows the survivor to not only defend the cause of major burn survivors by highlighting the "pyrosociality", but more broadly through "dermosociality", to extend this effort to other visible skin disorders, or even with people who have experienced bifurcations due to disruptive events: divorce, bereavement, etc.

As we have seen, all these various attempts to overexpose burn after-effects are risky. Wishing, most of the time, that they could finally "move on" (Marlene, 28 (22), attack), in reality a major burn survivor no longer wants to be constantly reduced to his scars, nor to the factual nature of the accident. Behind these various forms of stigma reversal, weaves indeed a struggle against stereotypes and preconceived ideas, as well as a struggle to be recognized as a true partner of the interaction,

a partner who dares confront others. Skin damage thus acts as a “chevron”^[14] that “raises” (Javeau, 2015, 39) personally a major burn survivor above what is usually assigned to him. It must be noted, however, that this demanding exhibition returns again and always to the very specific characteristics of the effects of a burn and their visible consequences. A major burn survivor posts for example on Facebook® a picture of himself at the beach, lying on a deckchair, in order to not only to show that he is comfortable with his burns but above all to encourage others to do the same. Comments are not long in coming. They insist on the prominence of the scars. (I didn’t think you were so seriously burned). In any media exposure, a major burn survivor will not fail to receive in return remarks of a moral nature or questions that assume some personal responsibility in the accident, suggesting that he or she may not have taken the right precautions or, as is often the case, may not have turned to fire cutters or people with the secret, beliefs still very strong in the field of severe burns.

As we can see, like a tightrope walker, a major burn survivor must constantly seek a subtle balance between normal exposure and demanding exposure, between excessive visibility and lesser visibility. Thus, through routine interactive experiences but also through virtual experiences, of which the importance should not be underestimated, this balance in perpetual rebalancing is tested, exercised and, fortunately, is found.

Conclusion

With this brief article, we wanted to show the need to question the subtle and often contradictory relationships that a major burn survivor has with the after-effects to the skin. This includes an interest in the narrative that acquires a crucial importance in mastering relationships with others. Though various forms of stigmatization, it often happens that a major burn survivor is assigned a well-defined role. As a result, he often feels compelled to use a masking discourse, stereotypical and factual.

14. We choose to not translate “chevron”. In English a similar sense is a rank in military language.

Often anticipating negative reactions towards him, a major burn victim seeks in routine interactions a form of tacit agreement that would be consist, in exchange for a minimal exposure of the after-effects, of the interlocutors doing everything possible to not let the cutaneous difference impact on the fluidity of interactions. Out of such a tacit agreement comes therefore the development of unsuspected interactive skills that allow a major burn survivor to adapt them according to the contexts, to the people. These skills are sharpened with time and experience. Social networks can also offer “an interactive airlock”, a first place of a controlled exhibition of the damaged body while protecting oneself from the looks and reactions of those who are closer. To what can be considered as a management of normal and legitimate exposure, can, depending on the experiences, be followed by a form of over-exposure that some major burn survivors choose or impose on themselves. As a result, it happens that a reversal takes place: instead of being considered only as a weakness (sometimes even shameful), the injury becomes proof not only that a terrible ordeal took place, but above all that it had to be overcome by a series of treatments and surgical procedures. Thus, the scars become for a major burn survivor as a trophy for his success, the clear proof of having overcome and surpassed this ordeal. However, this trial is never surpassed once and for all, the scar exposing a major burn survivor, even with a “chevron”^[15][14], to a “perpetual reprieve”, and to a constant rebalancing between over-exposure and reduced visibility. The narrative as well as the social networks play a fundamental role in this delicate conquest of balance, which is also a quest for recognition. To paraphrase Foucault, we could conclude that a major burn survivor “substitutes for the indelible scar, the erasable, the correctable of the narrative” pronounced on digital media, both orally and in writing^[16].

15. With reference to the concept of “chevron” mentioned above (Javeau, 2015)

16. Original quote: “I substituted the scar on the body for graffiti on paper; I substituted the indelible scar for the erasable and correctable scar of writing. Perhaps I should go even further. The sheet of paper may be the body of others” (Foucault, 2011[1968]). This citation is taken up by Lançon P. in his book *Le Lambeau* which traces his reconstruction and re-appropriation of a wounded body.

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