

Natalia Shevchenko

Master's Thesis:

**“Body modifications as a gender related cultural and social
phenomenon”**



Area and Cultural studies

Master's Degree Programme in Intercultural Encounters

Faculty of Arts

University of Helsinki

April 2018



Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty Arts	Laitos – Institution – Department World Cultures	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Natalia Shevchenko		
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Body modifications as a gender related cultural and social phenomenon		
Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject Intercultural Encounters		
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Master thesis	Aika – Datum – Month and year April 2018	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 58
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract		
<p>Social and cultural interaction is a very important aspect of the modern society. Body modifications are a clear sample of this kind of interaction. The process of body modifying has been started as a cultural issue many ages ago and remains current nowadays. The thesis explores modern nature of body modifications in terms of Helsinki, Finland. Body modifications are the phenomenon that has always existed in the human civilization and it should be studied properly as any developing social tendency.</p> <p>That research covers such aspects as motivation and inspiration for having a body modification and relation of the modern society to body modified people. The research is conducted in 2016-2018 in Helsinki. I used qualitative research method in order to analyze deeper every particular case. The base of the research is ten personal interviews conducted on the same questionnaire. The respondents have different gender, age, professional area and personal background, the only common point for them is living in Helsinki at the moment of the interview. The questionnaire consists of eight questions. The first questions explore the modifications that the respondent has: the age when the respondent got the first modification, the motivation for body modifying, the meaning and kind of current body modification. The second part of the questionnaire explores the respondent's personal aspects. Facing criticism in the society, relationship with a family and friends, identity formation in terms of the body modifying and regret issues are in the list of questions.</p> <p>The interviews also divided according to gender factor. Five of the interviews are male and five are female. The gender factor has a great influence on the research. The interviews were analyzed in two groups, female and male. The results of each group were compared for the comparative analysis.</p> <p>The comparative analysis showed that women face criticism toward their appearance more often than men and stereotypes on the base of appearance are also more connected with femininity image. There is also a correlation between the gender and location, size or kind of a body modification that the respondents have. In terms of that research I explored so-called "the blue disease" that means addiction to the process of modifying body. According to the results, the age when the first body modification was made might have effect on following inclination to "the blue disease".</p> <p>For proving of my hypothesis I used other sources in the field of tattoos and gender studies. Its overview and correlation between these studies and my research helped me to clarify the data I collected from the interviews. At its broadest, we can say that society becomes more and more tolerant to body modified people though some gender related stereotypes are still exist. Body modifications develop and change. Its historical sacral and social meaning remains in some way but nowadays body modifications are more about the perception of beauty and ways of self-expression. New kinds of body modifications such as eye balls tattoo or silicone implants appear often, so the body modification phenomenon will remain current for a long time.</p>		
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Body modification, tattoos, piercing, gender, femininity, masculinity, social stereotypes		
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited The library of the University of Helsinki		
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information		

Table of contents

1. Introduction	4-9
2. The questionnaires analysis	10
2.1 Female interviews: body modifications, self-expression and facing stereotypes	10-21
2.2 Female’s perspective related studies: interaction of the society and body modified women	22-26
2.3 Male interviews: masculinity, spiritual issues and exploring boarders.....	26-36
2.4 Male’s perspective related studies: what is special about male modifications	36-41
3. General related studies (non-gender specific): first or favorite tattoo	42-44
4. Comparative analysis	45-52
5. Conclusion	53-56
Bibliography	57-58

1. Introduction

Throughout the whole history of human existence the only one thing that has stayed unchanged is a human's body. The body is the main way of cognition of the world, the first tool in self-expression; it is the cage your health, survival and physical abilities are depend on. That's why people always pay so much attention to the body and its different issues. Besides biological and physiological aspects, the body also holds an important role in social interaction. Thanks to their bodies people are able to show their belonging to a certain social group, status, profession, marriage or mature state. These nuances are created by modifications of bodies in different ways. Body modification's tradition passes through all cultures and ages and forms both humans' identity and world's history.

At the present society body modification is not an obligatory sign of belonging and self-identification anymore; it is now more about self-expression and individual perception of beauty standards. Nevertheless, body modifications are still a current phenomenon: tattoos are becoming more and more popular, plastic surgery develops constantly, new forms of implants and other surgical ways of improving the body appear every year. Only two decades ago modern forms of body modification seemed strange and unfamiliar or even were signs of criminal past. Nowadays the situation is changing:

*"Tattoos are common across age groups, genders, and races: 47% of millennials have tattoos, while 36% of Generation Xers, and 13% of baby boomers do. 31% of women and 27% of men have tattoos."*¹

Tattooed or other way body modified people may once have faced difficulties in job searching or communication but now frames have become much wider and body modifications are more frequently seen for both, celebrities and other citizens as well. Still further, body modifications are not only common, but fashionable. This

¹ Taylor, 2014, 5

phenomenon changed and passed a long way in the cultural history but saved its meaning. That's why body modifications and its place in the modern society are my deep interest and the main topic of this thesis.

The research problem is focused more on reasons which motivate people to modify their bodies. Traditions changed over time and many basic reasons made people modify bodies are not relevant anymore. Some of these reasons have been preserved and some of them are new and belong to the current era. I would like to elaborate on modern factors that inspire people to express themselves through the body and my main question is "What makes people turn to body modification nowadays, when this tradition is not obligatory?" My research hypothesis is that society has become more tolerant to different kinds of self-modifications during last decades. Body modifications nowadays are not a strange personal choice but variation of the norm.

Body modification in my research means any bodily modification which changes the natural appearance of the body using surgical or other technological modes of alteration (for example tattoos, piercing, scarification, plastic surgery). The time frame for the analysis is the last two decades. As a method for exploring the main questions I chose a form of personal interviews. For the deeper personal and psychological motivations for body modifications, I believe the best way to understand the matter was to interview the participants privately. In terms of my research I am exploring several hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1.

To a considerable extent, people have become more tolerant of body modifications though some gender stereotypes are still current. It is not a secret that women face more judgement and social expectations toward their bodies. My questions about discrimination are meant to assess both differences and similarities in terms of gender identification.

Hypothesis 2.

Tattoos seem to be losing their deep sacral meaning, as conceived in appraisals of an earlier era, and today they appear to turn on impulses about using the body as a means of self-expression. Body modifications appeared as a tool of designation a person's social or marital status, it was often strict and you could not use modifications which did not relate to your status. Now it is different and body modifications represent personal choice. How are the changes to be interpreted? This aspect I am planning to discover with "meaning of the body modification" question.

Hypothesis 3.

The age of a person when he/she first chooses a body modifying procedure might be very influential for what follows. I suppose that people who start to modify their bodies at early (before 18) age are more inclined to have more body modifications or to do more extreme kinds of body modifications. In the questionnaire I specify age of the first body modification to explore this aspect properly.

For the research I chose a qualitative research method, focusing not on the number of respondents but on the information they gave me, because body modification is a deep personal question with too many aspects that should be evaluated carefully. In the instance, this analysis is built on the basis of 10 personal interviews with the same questions. The questionnaire consists of 8 questions what may be the most important aspects of body modification.

The first question defines what kind of body modification the respondent has (it also suggests analyze what kinds of modifications are more popular in the society). The second question is about the age when the first body modification was done and factors that became an inspiration (to analyze if tendency to body modification or its certain

kinds depends on the age). The third question is about body modification's meaning. For me it is one of the most interesting questions as it has a connection with body modifications' historical and social meaning. For a better understanding of the phenomenon it is important to know if the meaning of body modifications still has some sacral issues or turn into the fashion stream only.

The second part of the questionnaire explores social relations of "body modified people" and self-awareness in connection with changing of the body. The fourth question specifies if the respondent ever faced any kind of discrimination at a professional or personal level because of his or her body modification. I also asked my respondents to specify their professional area here to define if some areas can be more tolerant than other. The fifth question is about families' and friends' relation to the respondent's body modification as it is also important to evaluate how comfortable respondents feel in their inner social circle. Family and friends can also be a reason to modify the body. The sixth question explores if the respondent has ever regretted his or her modification or otherwise remains satisfied with it. It helps to see how the relation to own body might change for the same person during the time. Then I discussed with respondents if their body modifications add something unique to identity's constructions in their opinion. Identity forming aspects become more and more important in the modern world and there are so many things from gender to self-expression forms that create identity and our perception of the world. As body modification seems one of them, its effect should be evaluated as well. The last question was if the respondent intended to make new modifications or if there would be some final point.

During the research I encountered a new thesis "the blue disease" which means psychological addiction to tattooing process. Professional tattoo masters say that it is almost impossible for many of their clients to stop after the first tattoo or other

modification and some people have real obsession while they have some clean skin left. The last question's aim is to check if this statement is close to reality or it is one of many existing stereotypes about body modifications.

The research is anonymous so I gave my respondents numbers from R-1 to R-10 where numbers from 1 to 5 are female and from 6 to 10 are male interviews. All my respondents live in Finland permanently but they have different ages, backgrounds, and professions. The respondents were chosen randomly through social networks and my personal contacts or just met occasionally in the streets of Helsinki. I tried to cover as many areas with my research as possible to deepen the analysis and to get wider results. The selected respondents include a fitness trainer, photographer, students, tattoo studio's owner, industrial worker, and a nurse. All their answers will be analyzed in turn according to the question's number and for each paragraph of the questionnaire I will define some similarities and differences which should help me to create full picture of the research.

During the research I also addressed to another sources besides my interviews. For example, to the research made by Silke Wohlrab, Bernhard Fink, Peter M. Kappeler and Gayle Brewer in 2009. Their research is called "Perception of human body modification" and presents "study a sample of 278 men and women rated images of tattooed and non-tattooed virtual human characters for perceived aggression, attractiveness, dominance, health, masculinity (male figures), and femininity (female figures)."

Other researches I turned to during my analysis are "Amateur tattooing practices and beliefs among high school adolescents" and "Tattoo or taboo? Tattoo stigma and negative attitudes toward tattooed individuals". First research explores reasons, methods and aftermaths of tattoos among Western Australia high school adolescents. The second

one is similar with my research and based on questionnaires with tattooed and non-tattooed participants who evaluated pictures of tattooed and non-tattooed targets. Both these researches cover gender and other social aspects which will be presented in my own analysis as well.

The Linda Dickson's research "To ink or not to ink: the meaning of tattoos among college students" became very important for me in terms of analyzing the data I collected from the interviews. That research is not gender related but it covers aspect of tattoos meaning that I also explore in the research and in the questionnaire. In addition Linda Dickson explored not only tattooed people but also non-tattooed in order to specify how many of them would like to have a body modification in their future. This statistic displays the growth of popularity of body modifications clearly.

On the whole, I used sources that explored the gender aspect of body modifications and showed how body modified people percept themselves and how the world see them. These sources helped me to analyze the interviews better and to qualify the aspects I would like to focus on in my own research.

2. The questionnaires analysis

2.1 Female interviews: body modifications, self-expression and facing stereotypes

Respondents' answers will be analyzed in turn depending on the question's number. First I'll build general statistics on the base of each question 1. This system helps me to gather the information according to the topic and to analyze all stages of the research clearly. The first step of the research is to define what kinds of body modification my respondents have. This is the basic in terms of the research and also this information reflects the popularity of particular kinds of body modifications. The analysis will occur on two levels – general statistics and statistics according to respondents' gender. The gender component is very important for the final conclusions as well.

So according to 5 female interviews, the most popular kind of body modification is a tattoo. 100% of respondents have this kind of body modification exceptionally or combined with other modifications. Arms and legs are the most popular tattoo location. Women often try to hide their tattoos and place them on less visible areas (for example small image behind an ear). Besides arms and legs some respondents choose back or collarbones' area for making tattoos. Female respondents are less inclined to extreme types of tattoos such as eye balls tattooing or silicone implants.

The second place belongs to all kinds of piercing. The most common type of piercing is an ear piercings, eyebrow piercing comes next. Some special types as nipples piercing are less popular. These types of piercing have only 2 respondents of 10. Piercing is the most often removable modification on the other hand. Painful senses, necessity of daily care and medical issues (surgery period) are the reasons for removal. Both men and women seem attracted to tattoos and piercing, these kinds of body modification do not depend on gender issues noticeably.

The third place among body modifications mentioned in the research take such modifications as tongue splitting: 2 of 5 respondents have them. The last place belongs to body modifications connected with plastic surgery such as silicone implants which have 1 of 5 female respondents. This fact might also relate to the modification's cost. It is much more expensive to get a big tattoo or to make a surgery.

The second aspect of the research engages the age when the respondents starting adopting body modification. I try to answer the question if certain average age for body modification exists and what is the inspiration for these changes. Is it a personal view of beauty or society's impact or just fashion or any sacral intentions? The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to 42 years so theoretically these people could have different social background and motivations. According to respondents' answers it is more common in Finland to make the first body modification after the age of 18; this age frame was mentioned by 3 people of five. Age bound 13-16 years is on the second place and was mentioned by 2 other respondents. There is strong correlation between age of first body modification and follow up developing. Respondents who made their first modifications earlier (from 13 to 16 years group) at the moment of the interview display much more modifications than respondents who turned to modifications about their 20s not depending on current age. Motivations also depend on age according to respondents answers. Respondents who made their first modifications earlier are more likely to mention their personal understanding of beauty (*"I was 10 years old and I just liked how beautiful people look like with piercings and tattoos"* – R-1) and perception tattoos and body modification in general as an art. Also both representatives of the younger age group have a lot of piercing.

At the 18+ age group respondents more often connected their interest to body modification with some special occasions in their life – specific condition (as depression) or family condition (for example the respondent who has 3 stars tattoo behind her ear associates the image with herself and two her children) or relationship. In this age group the first body modification was a tattoo for 2 cases of 3 and relation to the modification is more thoughtful, respondents are more inclined to think about their modification's meaning than in the group one.

The third question concerns body modification's meaning and it is one of the most interesting aspects for me personally. 4 of 5 respondents among the female group confessed that their body modifications have special meaning. Only one of female respondents answered that the majority of her tattoos have no special meaning and she just likes how they look and only two of them were made for some point. 2 of 5 respondents defined their motivation as keeping memories or representing life style through their tattoos. One of these two respondents uses her skin as a diary where she marks good and bad stories about her past and present (R-2).



image 1,

Plenty of small tattoos for keeping memories

R-2 is at the image 1. She has a lot of tattoos of different sizes and it is obvious that she does not hide her body modifications and she also modified her face with piercing. In my opinion her conception of the diary seems pretty clear – there is no specific connection or idea between her tattoos, but all of them are connected with some event or emotion for the respondent.

Another respondent reflects her life ideas as vegetarianism through vegetables' images on her arms (R-3).

“I did these sleeves and these vegetables as I am vegetarian and I wanted to have some vegetables images, so probably it is like my life-style reflection.” (R-3)



image 2,

Vegetable sleeves as life-style reflection

R-3 is at the image 2. She has piercing in her nose and “tunnels” in her ears and both her arms are covered with tattoos that are not easy to cover. There are garlic and eggplant on her left arm that shows others – this young woman is vegetarian. She chose those qualities that she evaluates as the most important about her own identity to reflect them through tattoos. So looking at images on the skin we can also say how people evaluate themselves.

Female respondents are likely to connect their modifications meaning with their dearest people. The R-4 made her first tattoo not only as a memory of some important life aspects but also as a sign of dedication to her best friend.

“The tattoo was made when I was 19. It was inspired by my very close friend and our mutual history. Also it has connection with my surname and some life events. I changed the surname to another which I feel like more “mine”. The tattoo reminds me that I create myself by my own. Also fox is a sign of luck and cunning for me, I want these qualities to be with me always.”

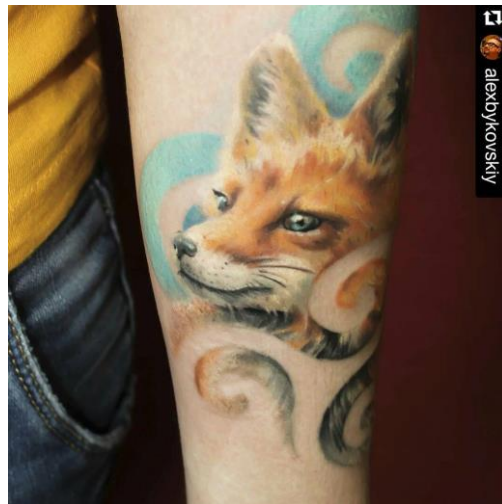


image 3,

A fox as a sign of remembrance and luck

The R-4's tattoo we can see at the image 3. The image is colorful and quite big. It is clear that the image of the fox was considered and this is not a type of simple black inked images you can find in any tattoo catalogue. This fox is something unique and it is located on a visible location that illustrates deep meaning the image has for the respondent. The respondent can see the tattoo at any moment she feels she needs it.

The R-5 who visited the tattoo studio for company got her tattoo spontaneously. Though after she gave birth to her twins, three stars image became special to her.

“There is no special meaning, I just love stars. I have it everywhere. But when my twins were

born accurate in a year after the tattoo was made, I now see that there is something special in it“. (R-5)



image 4,

three stars which symbolize family unity

As we can see at the image 4, R-5 has very small image of three stars behind her left ear. It had no special meaning before but now it symbolizes the respondent and two her sons.

One of the five respondents uses tattoos as a way to influence her life. She made a Viking rune compass on her arm when she was in depression and needed something to guide her.

“The compass has two meanings, the biggest one is showing me right paths in my life and other one is just helping me not to get lost because I am very bad in orientation. It has a really big story for me and it took time after visiting Iceland to do the tattoo actually. All runes tattoos have two meanings, good and bad, but this one is good and I know that I am safe.“

(R-1)

Another image on her skin is her guard stone so this is kind of protector for her.

“This means Jade, my charm stone, and then it is like branches of the tree again grow into different directions in my life, symbolizing that although I have many paths, there are always

new leaves at the branches. Also Jade symbolizes the sea, I do not like to swim but I like diving.

“(R-1)



image 5,

Viking rune guiding compass and guard stone

Both R-1's tattoos are at the image 5. The left side shows her first and favorite tattoo, Viking runes compass, and the right side shows her guard stone, Jade. Both tattoos are quite big and can be covered with clothes. The first one is made at a more visible location so it shows indirectly that this tattoo is her favorite and has deep personal meaning for the respondent as in the R-4's case.

According to this aspect's analysis, respondents who made their modification after the age of 18 years are more likely to connect their tattoos with some deep meaning. At the same time, respondents who started to modify their bodies at an earlier age (13-16 years) consider images on their skin just as a way of self-expression.

The fourth question is very important for the research in terms of exploring connections between gender and society's relation to body modifications. It is not a secret that women's body always had more gender related expectations but do we still have it an 2017 in Finland?

According to the respondents' answers, 3 of 5 women in the researching group faced some kinds of discrimination because of their appearance. One of the respondents (R-5) did not face it but she is the one who has the least visible small tattoo behind her ear. Another respondent (R-1) who has not noticed any discrimination immediately specified that in her daily life she wears invisible kinds of piercing "to respect people who do not like to see it" and wears some bigger jewelry or tunnels only on holidays. So she thinks about society's relation to her appearance quite a lot. It is interesting that both women who did not face discrimination belong to older age group and have a little bit less modifications compared to the other 3 female respondents. Respondents who faced judgement based on their appearance describe it in different ways but according to their answers, discrimination happens more often on the social level, not on the professional one. One of 3 respondents faced social judgement.

"People in the streets want to say what they think about me and on the internet of course. They pointing, watching, laughing, whispering to each other and sometimes they come to talk and say how awful I am." (R-2)

Another respondent describes judgement as a silent displeasure:

"In Finland people usually do not say it watching in your face, but sometimes you feel like they look at you judging. Middle aged people mainly. I think woman more often face with it because if you see a big strong man you will probably think twice before say something judging to him" – said the R-3.

The R-4 mentioned that she also faced social discrimination but at the same time she correlates this discrimination with her study field because she studies at the Medical faculty and body modifications are still not welcome in this area.

“Once I was walking in the street and a man on a bicycle was riding around and told me some disgusting things. And in the University one of my professors told me that I could be much more beautiful without a tattoo. Maybe it’s because of my study field; I am going to be a doctor. “(R-4)

During the discussion of discrimination many female mentioned that this discrimination came from men. Women’s bodies are still connected tightly with mother and wife image and tattoos for many people associate with unacceptable life style (night clubs, alcohol, parties, etc.) which cannot be described as healthy. That shows clearly existing of gender related appearance stereotypes in the modern society. It is also interesting that respondents who made their body modifications aged 13-16, mentioned facing discrimination in 2 cases of 2. Probably because of their age they started to face the criticism earlier and focused on these aspects more than older respondents.

The next question I explore in terms of the research is how respondents’ circle of social contacts (especially friends and family) relates to their body modifications. 4 of 5 female respondents mentioned that they got some comments or silent judgement from their family members or their appearance was a topic of discussions during family meetings. The respondent with the least noticeable tattoo behind the ear only mentioned that her mother was surprised. One respondent did not face any misunderstanding from family members and mentioned that her younger sister also has tattoos. 4 of 5 respondents also said that many of their friends or some family members also have body modifications. Respondents who have more visible modifications are more likely to mention that fact. Among 4 respondents who had some comments from parents, 3 cases are negative attention at the beginning from the mother’s side and 1 case is from the father’s side. There are no active conflicts mentioned, so all parents are used to their children’s appearance but at first stage the most popular comments, according the

respondents' answers, were *"do you really should have it"*, *"I hope you won't have too many of this"* or *"what if this is just a phase and you will regret about it later"*. In my opinion this stage of the research illustrates that expectations towards women and their appearance are still high and strict, especially from other women. First of all their image is connected with femininity and family often feels aware about breaking these social rules.

It is also important to know if the respondents are satisfied with their modifications or at some moment feel disappointed about their decision. All respondents said that they are satisfied with the fact of having body modifications and they would not like to change it. At the same time 2 of 5 respondents removed their old piercings for some reason (like discomfort or medical issues) but no one removed tattoos. One respondent answered that she has no regrets about her appearance at all. And two respondents confessed that they do not regret having tattoos but they would like to change something in the image one day. Or they just would choose another type of image if they could to turn it back. It is interesting to mark that regrets about tattoo's image showed respondents who did not think a lot about tattoo's meaning previously. Those of them who put sacral meaning into their images are less likely to regret about the tattoo's embodiment.

Exploring identity construction aspect is very important in terms of the research. There are many issues building the person's identity and appearance is one of them for sure. Identity forms our world view and the message we bring to the world, so body modifications are a relevant part of identity in that sense. I asked my respondents if their modifications add something special to their identity or changed it somehow. 4 of 5 respondents mentioned connection between their identity perception and body modifications. One respondent said that it does not matter because she is the same

person with tattoos or without. Among 4 respondents who correlate identity and modifications 3 respondents evaluated this correlation as strong and one respondent perceives body modification as a method of self-expression: *“body modifications help me to show my identity and for me to go to tattoo studio it is like to visit hairdresser for example”* but this tool is secondary and does not dictate who she is. 3 other respondents said that they are not able to imagine themselves without tattoos and tattoos are basic to their identity. Also among these 3 respondents 2 mentioned self-confidence. Both said that tattoos and piercing make them feel more self-confident, one of them specified that she is a little bit overweight and changing her body with tattoos makes her feel better. Another respondent (R-4) mentioned that she feels mentally better when she is looking at her tattoo because it reminds her about something important in her life.

According to this question’s analysis, respondents from an older age group (and also these are respondents who have fewer modifications) are less likely to correlate identity and body modifications or this correlation is quite secondary. Respondents who have more visible modifications and started to modify the body earlier are more sensitive about identity forming aspects. They use tattoos not only for showing their identity but also for correcting aspects they probably are not satisfied with (like overweight).

The last question in the research is about continuing body modifications. Many times I’ve heard that it is really difficult to stop modifying the body for some people, and there is even special term the “blue disease” that means an addiction to tattooing. So at this stage I am exploring if it is a stereotype or truth and if this tendency somehow correlates with gender or age aspects. These results are very intriguing. All 5 respondents are pretty sure that they are going to continue their body modifications. 4 of 5 respondents are going to continue their modifications with tattoos and one of the female respondents is also planning to turn to plastic surgery and to make elven ears.

One of the respondents mentioned that she chooses tattoos beyond piercing because piercing makes a lot of troubles in daily life. Respondents have different motivations for continuing body modifications. R-5 is waiting for suitable inspiring idea and as soon as she finds it, she is ready to think about a new tattoo. R-1 thinks a lot about her Viking rune compass tattoo and considers that it deserves much more attention from her and other people. So she is going to turn this image into half-sleeve. R-2 is just passionate about body modifications process and she wants to cover almost whole her body with tattoos. As soon as she finished, she thinks about elven ears or tongue splitting. I think it is quite clear sample of what called “blue disease”, this respondent does not think a lot about any sacral meaning for her body modifications, and in that case quantity is the main aspect. R-3 is waiting for better financial condition to continue her tattoos as big qualitative tattoo from a good master really costs a lot. R-4 has some ideas about her future tattoos is just waiting for the perfect moment to embody them.

Those respondents who belong to a younger age group are more likely to continue modifications for the sake of the process. Respondents from older age groups, who made their first modifications later, are more inclined to think again about the idea and meaning first of all. No one of my respondents answered “no, what I have is enough and I am not going to continue”, in my opinion this fact illustrates both aspiration to the perfection that almost all humans have, and spellbinding sacral nature of body modifications (though it was not mentioned often, sacral meaning tendency still works for some respondents). Our cultural inheritance still keeps this tendency and once it was awoken it is difficult just to turn this desire off.

2.2 Female's perspective related studies: interaction of the society and body modified women

Comparing my results with other related researches, there are many indicators that tattooed women are much more likely to face stigmatization or other forms of negative perception in the society.

Research "Amateur tattooing practices and beliefs among high school adolescents" on basis of personal interviews among randomly selected high school adolescents confirms that males start their modifying at earlier age than female and in general they have more tattoos and other modifications (maximum amount of tattoos were 50 for male respondents and 10 for female). Gender issues are also reflected in exploring reasons that make respondents to regret their body modifications: *"Tattoo makes you look yuk. Guys think you're a slut and don't respect you"*.² The same correlation between tattoos, gender factor and behavior expectations are reflected in the "Tattoo or taboo?" research:

*"In Canadian samples women with tattoos were judged more negatively than women without tattoos by both men and women (Hawkes, Senn, & Thorn, 2004). In Britain tattooed women were judged as more promiscuous, heavier drinkers and as less attractive (Swami & Furnham, 2007), and in France men expected that tattooed women would be more likely to have sex on a first date than non-tattooed women (Gueguen, 2013). Studies on American college student participants have also found that women with tattoos are perceived as less attractive, less caring, and less intelligent or less honest and religious, depending on the type of tattoo (Resenhoeft, Villa, & Wiseman, 2008)."*³

In terms of "Tattoo or taboo" research 142 students evaluated a series of non-copyrighted images of young men and women with or without large black ink tattoos (tattoos were removed digitally). Evaluating criteria were different, for example good/bad or safe/dangerous, strong/weak, independent/dependent. Participants' answers

² Houghton, 1996, 423

³ Broussard, 2017, 4

were also divided into two groups – answers from tattooed and non-tattooed participants. The main effect on the evaluating process was tightly connected with tattoo status and gender.⁴

Both tattooed female targets were evaluated more negatively than non-tattooed. On the other hand, tattooed women were evaluated as more strong and independent regardless of participants' gender and tattoo status. These results did not depend on participants' tattoo or gender status and even tattooed participants were no less negative towards tattooed targets.⁵ These conclusions correlate with my research where women, according to their comments, face discrimination and judgement more often than men. Respondents in my research did not mention tattoos affecting their sexual relationship but 2 of 5 mentioned judgement based on gender expectations. "I hear lot of talking about my style at the family parties" said R-2. There is certain concept of models of femininity in people minds and tattooed women who do not look like a typical good-wife-and-mother are still stigmatized even in developed countries.

Similar research "Perception of human body modification" was made by Silke Wohlrab and Bernhard Fink. They also showed their respondents pictures of female and male models with and without tattoos. All participants were requested to evaluate each figure in terms of aggression, attractiveness, dominance, health and masculinity or femininity on a 7-point scale. Gender issues of rater and rated played a big role in terms of the research. Women rated tattooed men as more healthy and dominant than non-tattooed men. No relationships were found between tattoo status and attractiveness or femininity for female characters but tattooed females were evaluated as less healthy.⁶ This difference in health related issues raised my concern about gender stereotypes again. Probably it might be because in getting a tattoo or making piercing there is always a risk

⁴ Broussard , 2017, 6

⁵ Broussard , 2017, 8

⁶ Wohlrab, 2009, 203

of infection. Women traditionally were perceived weaker than men and evaluate in terms of motherhood stereotype, so raters could think that tattooed women have a more unhealthy life style and not healthy enough to be a mother in the future. I've analyzed collected interviews trying to find some proofs of this idea. The R-3 and R-2 mentioned gender stereotypes in terms of discussing possible stigmatization:

"I think woman more often face with it because if you see a big strong man you will probably think twice before say something judging to him. And gender expectations also..."R-3

"My father took the time get used to this but now it is fine. He always said that this will be just a phase and I will regret."R-2

Women are much more likely to face pressure about their appearance though it is interesting that health factors do not influence on attractiveness evaluation. Probably perceptions of tattoos as a symbol of dominant and free nature consider as sexual attractiveness. People who express themselves through body modifications feel connection with their identity and they know how it should look like.

"You know, I have always been a rebel and I am very spontaneous person, if I want something I need to get it fast... So body modifications help me to show my identity" said the R-1.

With regard to such obvious gender condemnation, I also analyzed motivations for tattoos and other modifications removal. In my research the respondents mainly mentioned that they removed piercing because of medical or other personal discomfort. None of them removed tattoos, at least for now. Nevertheless I found interesting research in this area, "Specifically requesting surgical tattoo removal: are deep personal motivations involved?" by V. Koljonen and N. Kluger. This research was interesting for me first of all because it was conducted in Helsinki, Finland during the period between

2005 and 2011. In the research 16 patients were analyzed (Caucasian female mainly, median age of 26 years old) in terms of their tattoos size, location, reasons for removing the tattoo and general number of tattoos. All tattoos were made by tattoo artists, so images were of high quality.⁷

According to this research, the average lasting time of the tattoo was five years at the moment of removal appointment from the day it was made. Tattoos were mainly located at breasts, arms and hands and mostly considered as small (less than 30 centimeters). *“Personal life reasons composed 42, 8% of motivations and these reasons are changes in marital status, religion issues, past life (as drug addict or gang member) and pregnancy. Public life reasons composed 37, 5% and miscellaneous reasons composed 18.8% of motivations.”*⁸

It is interesting that among all analyzed patients in Finland only one of them mentioned “stigmata” as reason for tattoo removal. Two participants mentioned conservative working environment, two patients did not like their tattoos design anymore and “tattoo not suitable for adult” or “embarrassment” were also among the reasons. Women were 12 of 16 analyzed patients and at least one gender related reason as planning pregnancy and breast feeding is revealed. According to the results of that research, we can say that women are more likely to face circumstances leading to removal of body modification also because analyzed men were older than women at the moment of removal appointment (24 and 19.88 years old respectively).

Richard L. Dukes writes that though *“women have as many tattoos as men have, they are more inclined to make smaller tattoos and to make it less visible and hidden under*

⁷ Koljonen, 2011, 686

⁸ Koljonen, 2011, 686

clothes in daily life”⁹. That indirectly confirms that women probably feel more stigmatized about their tattoos while men on the contrary make their tattoos big and visible as brutality signs. Maybe that’s why regret was expressed less among female group. It is interesting that in terms of this research piercing issues also were covered. And only 10% of respondents expressed their regret about having piercing.¹⁰ In my research piercing was the most frequent form of body modifications removal. Two female respondents of 5 mentioned that they removed some piercing because of medical or personal factors. Piercing is easier to remove and to hide compared to tattoo, probably that’s why it less connected with regret – you can take it away any moment by yourself.

For getting a clear picture at all levels, I evaluated collected male interviews in terms of the same researches as women interviews for the following comparative analysis.

2.3 Male interviews: masculinity, spiritual issues and exploring borders

The questions for male respondents are the same in order to make the research fully comparative and precise in terms of gender distinctions. This chapter analyzes five male respondents. The first question is about what type of body modifications the respondent has. The most common response refers to tattoos that mentioned by all 5 respondents. Somewhat less frequently mentioned were piercings of all kinds – tunnels, nose and even nipples piercing which have 3 respondents of 5. The third place take modifications related to tongue (like tongue splitting) and scarification, 2 respondents of 5. And the last one – plastic surgery related body modifications such as subdermal implants that mentioned 1 respondent of 5. There is a strong correlation between respondent’s age at the moment of making first body modification and its following development. That

⁹ Dukes, 2016, 456

¹⁰ Dukes, 2016, 457

leads us to the question number 2 – how old was the respondent when he (she) first met the decision to undergo a body modification and what was the inspiration for this.

According to answers, I got 3 age groups among my 5 respondents. The earliest age for the body modification was 9 years old (1 respondent), then middle age is 14-16 years old (2 respondents of 5) and the last one is older than 18 years at the moment of first body modification (2 respondents also). Respondents described different sources of inspiration. Two respondents talked about their personal interest in the phenomenon of body modification. *“I’ve ever interested in body modifications, PF and IQ magazines were the first inspiration though in Finland it is hard to find them in the library they’re always “out of stock”. My generation often came to body modification by these primitive books it was like a bible in that way”* said the R-7. R-9 also specified that he was always interested in tattoos and tattooing. R-10 always felt that tattoos were beautiful and he would like to have his own one day. R-8 likes the process of changing by itself. And R-6, who is a famous rock-musician in Finland, made his first tattoos in his thirties to fit better into the image of rock-musician that the public wants to see. Respondents who did their first modifications at the youngest age (9 and 14) did their first scarification and piercing by themselves and it is also an interesting sample of the interaction with the own body. Probably this aspiration has something in common with mature aspects connected to body modifying process; it is like testing yourself and proving the ability to face trials. And the choice of modification shows it clearly. Scarification (that was first self-modification for R-7) historically was made for confirming the person’s mature status or for showing the person’s social level in the tribe (scars were made according to number of enemies who had been defeated).

Next question’s analysis “what is the meaning of your body modification(s)” looks pretty interesting for me. Four respondents of five do not think a lot about any special or

sacral meaning for their modifications. Two of them simply mentioned keeping memories. They made these images during travels in other countries or their friends made tattoos on their skin, some images these respondents describe just as “pictures in the skin”.

“Some of them have meaning but mainly it is way to keep memories. Some of them were done during travelling in different countries or, for example, in the tattoo studios where I worked before.” (R-7)



image 6,

tattoos as a personal kind of culture and self-expression

Now R-7 (at the image 6) has his own tattoo studio. He has big tunnels in his ears and many tattoos and silicone implants into his forehead (not very visible at the picture). His tattoos are not easily covered and it is clear that he likes to share his memories with the world.

One respondent said that his modifications have no meaning at all and it is just reflection of his perception of beauty. Especially in terms of plastic surgery modifications such as subdermal implants – these horns do not have special meaning but they let the respondent get closer to the image he considers as beautiful and attractive. (R-8)



image 7,

changing the identity with body modifications

The R-8 (at the image 7) has the most noticeable and extreme body modifications among my respondents. There are horns and silicone implants (into his chest) and tattoos on his eyes that are quite new and a dangerous kind of body modification. It seems like probably he does not evaluate the human body as beautiful enough (might be effect of his personal interests) and try to create himself concerning his idea of beauty.

Two respondents did not think a lot about the sacral meaning of their tattoos, but they confirm that there is some meaning in their body modifications. One of these two respondents (R-6) loves animals and his tattoos are animals' images, so it is like his life style reflection.



image 8,

tattoo sleeves as a part of scene image and reflection of the life style

R-6 (at the image 8) has similar kind of idea and tattoos as R-3: there are noticeable sleeves that reflect the main point of his life style. For R-3 this point is vegetarianism

(and vegetables images on her skin), for R-6 it is his love to animals, so we can see images of jaguar and carps on his arms.

Another respondent (R-9) answered that the majority of his tattoos have no special meaning but some of them (his son's and father's portraits) are deeply personal. In his case it is intention to have reminders about people he loves with him and probably his way to show others that he is taking care of these people.

“All of them do not have a meaning. I just love the way they look. Of course some of them have, I've got my father's and my son's portraits tattooed on me. I also have some funny memories, as friend tattoos. I look like this because I want to.” (R-9)



image 9,

tattoos for keeping memories and self-expression

The 9th image shows us the R-9 who has almost all his skin covered with images. It is obvious that compared to R-8, for example, he loves tattoos more than other kinds of body modifications: he has no silicone implants or different piercings – only tunnels in his ears. It is interesting that we cannot see those portraits of his son and father he mentioned, on this picture. In my opinion R-9 made them on the location that can be covered with clothes because of sacral and deep personal meaning of these images for the respondent. He does not want these images can be seen by strangers.

The last respondent, R-10, is the only one who mentioned a connection of his tattoos with something sacral. Perhaps this is because it fits his personal interests – he is a DJ and personal trainer but he likes to study philosophical concepts and spiritual practices.

“My tattoos are quite abstract, it’s just patterns. But it certainly has meaning for me. My tattoos are my soul’s diary. They embody my life’s philosophy and it is very spiritual thing. I continue these patterns for many years when I feel like I need to add something new, but the style is the same. My first tattoo was made when I move to another city as a sign of a new way.” (R-10)

The R-10 is at the image 10. He has almost all his upper body covered with tattoos. His tattoos look as a one big image, they are black inked and it is possible to cover tattoos with clothes but the R-10 rarely does it. It is interesting that he does not change his face, so he saves his “truly” self and the way he looks into the world, his spiritual ideas embodied mainly through the body and it looks like ancient tribal practices. His tattoos are an external illustration of internal journey.



image 10,

spiritual related tattoos

The fourth question is about facing discrimination on the base of appearance. Only 1 of 5 respondents mentioned that he faced some kinds of discrimination. 4 of 5 respondents answered that they were treated well everywhere and they did not notice any special criticism because of their body modifications. I think it is necessary to mention here that two of five respondents connected their lives with body modifying at professional level as well. R-9 was an industrial worker and now he is a tattoo-artist and has his own tattoo shop. R-7 always felt an interest in body modifications in professional context also so he is tattoo master and travels a lot exploring body modifications in different countries. They both exist inside some body modified bubble and it is much harder for them to meet any criticism as most of the people they know personally and professionally are also tattooed or pierced. Nevertheless R-9 who worked as industrial worker before he changed professional area mentioned that he faced some misunderstandings in his social life, not in the professional one. It is also interesting to mention the fact that respondents who turned their interest to body modifications into profession belong to the youngest age group who made their first modifications between the ages of 9 and 14 years old. So here is a strong correlation again between the age of the first body and its effect on the respondent's life. Those respondents who made their modifications later (after 18 years) did not mention facing any discrimination at all though their professional areas are different (photo model, fitness instructor and musician).

The fifth question for male respondents is "What do your family and friends think about your body modifications". Two of 5 respondents said that there were no problems from their family and friends in terms of appearance. One respondent (R-8) avoided this question politely and answered that he is not the best person to ask what other people think. According to his quote "*Do you suggest that people are so shallow, that having ink on your skin changes how you should be treated?*" I would probably evaluate it as

self-protection. Maybe he keeps certain ideas in his mind and does not want to change it somehow with his own memories. One respondent who works professionally in body modification area (R-7) admitted that it took some time for his family to get used to his body modifications but his mother belongs to creative industry, she is an artist, so probably for her it was easier. Now *“she relates to it with humor and says that she can do it better”*. On the other hand, R-7 also mentioned that when he meets people out of the industry (“civil” as he said), sometimes he needs to put some effort into communication to make them feel more comfortable and *“to get them out of the car”*. The R-10 who works as a personal trainer, mentioned a similar perception: *“Sometimes my clients who come to personal trainings feel a little bit awkward seeing me the first time... But when they know me better, it is fine; they stop to notice my tattoos.”* (R-10)

Also the R-10 said that it took more time for his mother to accept his changes:

“My mom first felt confused. She asked me several times if I need so many tattoos... But then she got used to it. My friends feel great; many of them have tattoos as well. My girlfriend likes to explore the patterns on my skin, she feels it is beautiful.”

The R-9 respondent divides his social roles from his appearance and he has no problems with his partner as well. He is married and has children and said that not depending on his self-modifying, his wife loves him for his personality and for his children he is not “tattooed dad” but just a dad as in other families. *“For my parents, I will always be their son. This was my decision, and everyone in my family and my friends respect that.”* In my opinion, it is important to mention here that R-7’s wife also belongs to tattoo culture, so they are both covered with tattoos and support each other.

The sixth question is “Have you ever regret about your body modifications(s)”? Two of five respondents answered that they have some regrets not about having the body

modification itself, but about its embodiment on the body. R-6 thinks that probably he could do the same tattoo in other ways; R-7 realized that his first tattoo (that was made in the middle of his back) is too big and hard to cover now though he wants to remake it into something bigger. There is no strong correlation between regrets and age of first body modification here as R-6 got his first body modification in his 30s and R-7 has been modifying himself since the age of 9. But these samples prove Richard L. Dukes's research that men are more inclined than women to have bigger tattoos that cannot be hidden easily under clothes. The R-8 and R-10 just answered that they had never regretted and R-9 besides having no regrets also mentioned that he just wants to have more and more tattoos (his age of the first body modification was 16, which may suggest some connections between early body modification and the so-called "blue disease").

The seventh question is about identity construction: "Do you feel that body modification(s) adds something special to your identity?" Two of five respondents (R-6 and R-9) think that body modifications helps them to feel "more like me" and "more free", so their modifications show some internal sides of the personality and represent their identity brighter to the world. R-8 again avoided the question and asked if his identity depends on how he looks like that made me to think about self-protection again because he has very many body modifications and obviously he tries to show something but denies the connection between his image and identity that looks quite contradictory. R-7 who owns a tattoo studio makes connection between his appearance not only in social but in his business life as well. *"My entire job is directly in contact with body modifications. It is part of my culture, it is what I do"* he says, so for him his appearance is also a kind of marketing and signs of belonging to the certain field. His clients are able to evaluate his tattoos to decide if they want to have something from this master on their own skin or not. As in any kind of identity formation, body modifications can

affect the construction of one's personality at many levels: personal (I feel more like myself), social interaction (this is my culture), professional (body modifications are my job)... The R-10 thinks that his tattoos help him to find some inner harmony he needs for spiritual issues:

“My tattoos show my perception of the world. These patterns are like an endless on my skin. They symbolize the way I should go through and it helps me to be in the harmony with my “inner” self. “

It is unique for all respondents but it is hardly possible not to have connections between identity and body since body is the most natural basic “tool”.

The seventh question is “Are you planning to continue your body modification(s) or what you already have is enough?” None mentions ending his body modifications. All of the respondents indicated they would continue the modifying process (tattooing mainly). R-8 thinks that he is not going to stop until his skin will be totally covered with tattoos. R-9 is going to continue but does not feel sure about certain plans. R-10 is not sure about the time, he said *“I am planning to have tattoo on my legs as well, but I don't know when I am going to have it and what patterns I am going to use.”* R-6 wants more tattoos even though he has some regrets about his current tattoos image. R-7 also says that process of his modification is never finished because he is getting inspiration from the world and people and never knows in advance what will inspire him for new tattoo or modification. He is sure that he wants more tattoos and as in the question six, R-7 makes connection between his body modifications and his business. *“At the moment I am working with people who do implants and I am really interested in it, so the best version is to try it on myself”* – he wants to test everything he offers to his clients so it will help him to grow in his professional area and probably implants will also become a new page of his personality. I have not noticed a specific correlation between age group

and tendency to continue modifications so probably men are more inclined than women to have what researches named “the blue disease”.

2.4 Male’s perspective related studies: what is special about male modifications

There are many gender related aspects which are explored in similar researches. First I would like to return to the “Amateur tattooing practices and beliefs among high school adolescents”. According to 464 interviews (divided equally by gender) made for the research, men in all age groups (there are 2 age boundaries in the research: 13-14 years and 15-16+ years) in general have more tattoos than women. Also males tended to acquire their tattoos earlier than female respondents (11.4 years vs 12.97 years). The maximal amount of tattoos for a man was 50 and for a woman only 6. Seems gender has more influence on body modification aspects than age. It is also important to mention in terms of the formation of the stereotypes that according to the research’s results, “*Males recorded higher scores on problem behavior than females, and students with tattoos attained higher scores than non-tattooed students*”¹¹. This research also covered regret aspects and the results of the interviews showed that: “*A total of 26% of the interviews had considered getting their tattoos removed, and two of these had actually attempted to do so*”¹². Gender was not specified here but according to personal interviews quotes, only female respondents mentioned that their tattoos caused a certain way of social and sexual evaluation from another people.

“Tattoo or taboo” research explored possible stigmatization of tattooed individuals in the society. In terms of the research “*the computer randomly assigned each person one set of four images: a woman and a man with a tattoo and a woman and a man without tattoos*”¹³. All images were of men and women in their early to mid-twenties, who were

¹¹ Houghton, 1996, 423

¹² Houghton, 1996, 424

¹³ Broussard , 2017, 9

attractive and dressed in casual clothing. All the images showed only upper body and a face (tattoo was pretty visible on these images). The results showed that participants evaluated tattooed targets more negatively than non-tattooed targets for all cases. On the other hand, male targets were rated more negatively than female targets. I think it might be connected with masculinity stereotypes and for the participants men targets looked more dangerous at subconscious level. Non-tattooed participants rated all targets more negatively than did tattooed participants and male participants rated all targets more negatively than female did.¹⁴ Probably tattooed participants faced some discrimination by their own that made some effect on their tolerance.

In terms of gender evaluating a tattoo caused negative evaluation for 1 male target of 2 and for 2 female targets of 2. Tattooed men and women were evaluated as more strong in both cases but at the same time tattooed men were evaluated as much stronger than tattooed women. Participants at this point rated male targets more similarly regardless of their own tattoo status.¹⁵ Evaluating of independence factor showed the main correlation between rating and tattoo status. Participants rated tattooed targets as more independent than non-tattooed.

*“Analyzing only male targets, there was not a significant main effect of target tattoo status, indicating that independence tattoo factor ratings of male targets did not differ based on the targets’ tattoo status, such that tattooed male participants rated tattooed male targets as more independent than non-tattooed male targets. Non-tattooed participants’ ratings of the male targets were not significantly different on participant gender or target tattoo status.”*¹⁶

¹⁴ Broussard, 2017, 16

¹⁵ Broussard, 2017, 17

¹⁶ Broussard, 2017, 19

When the results of the research were discussed with college students, they rated tattooed men and women more negatively than non-tattooed. Although it might be expected that younger people should be more tolerant to tattoos than older adults, results indicated that younger people nevertheless evaluate tattooed individuals negatively.

“Negative stereotypes about tattooed persons may lead people to generalize negative attributes to all tattooed individuals and create the expectation that all tattooed individuals possess undesirable qualities”¹⁷.

The “Perception of human body modification” research, which has similar structure and was based on evaluating tattooed and non-tattooed targets, showed similar results. Rater’s gender has a big influence on perception of a body modification. Men rated female tattooed figures as attractive but less healthie than non-tattooed, while women correlated more with dominance issue. Tattooed men were perceived as more healthy and dominant.¹⁸ In my opinion, there is an indirect sign that men percept female tattoos as a sexual object and evaluate tattooed women as a more inclined to have sexual contacts but less suitable as a permanent partner because reproductive health means a lot for relationship at subconscious level. While female tattoos evaluated more in terms of attractiveness, male tattoos still stay a way to represent masculinity and psychological dominance.

“Men that are perceived as more dominant or masculine, are regarded as more attractive by women perhaps because dominant men usually achieve higher social status due to their greater ability to provide or defend the recourses necessary for

¹⁷ Goffman, 1963, 12

¹⁸ Wohlrab, 2009, 204

*reproduction*¹⁹ or because masculinity signals testosterone, one cue for physical fitness”²⁰

These results make me think that historical sacral and signaling function of tattoos still stronger among men and have a connection to an ancient time when scarification or other male modifications were used in a way to illustrate a status of the person in the society. That’s why men are more likely to have big images on their skin and less inclined to cover or to remove their tattoos.

In the “Specifically requesting surgical tattoo removal: are deep personal motivations involved?” research gender proportion was not equal: only four male participants against 12 females. Nevertheless one important gender aspect was mentioned – men participants at the moment of the tattoo removing tended to be a bit older than women. Also some motivations for removing of tattoos are typically feminine, such as “planning pregnancy and breast feeding” that shows some differences between male and female perception of the body. It is interesting that only one respondent mentioned “stigmata” as a reason for removal of the tattoo but two of the respondents specified the reason as a “conservative work environment” that is quite close to stigmata at professional field in my opinion but it perceps as a norm for them.

Similar tendency about tattoo removing I discovered in the “Regret among tattooed adolescents” article. According to its results, men are less likely than women to remove their tattoos because they rarely become victims of stigmata and negative comments about their appearance. On the other hand:

¹⁹ Geary & Vigil & Byrd-Craven, 2004, 30

²⁰ Penton-Voak & Chen, 2004, 232

*“Men report more regret, and this finding more likely in due to their tendency to get larger tattoos and to get them in places that cannot be covered as easily as tattoos on women”.*²¹

Compared to my results, Dickson shows the opposite picture where *“young men are more likely to experience stigma than young women”*²². In my research almost no one mentioned noticeable stigmatization among the male respondents. I guess it is because my female respondents have quite big and visible tattoos. If we are going to evaluate more common situation when woman has a little easily covered tattoo and man has a bigger and more masculine image, than we will probably get the Dukes’ results. The more noticeable body modifications lead to the stronger stereotypes about feminine appearance and social role. At other points “Tattoo regrets” research has results that are close to mine. Older respondents and respondents who made their first body modification at older age show less regrets, probably because of more conscious choice.

*“Among 62 respondents between 11 and 14 years of age who have tattoos, 47% express regret, and among 282 respondents between 15 and 19 years of age, 27% express regret”.*²³ At the same time 36% of young men express regret vs 31% of young women. I suppose that it is because many of them got into the same situation as my respondent R-7 who has no regret about the fact of having the body modifications but has some regret about his first and too big tattoo in the middle of his back. Another part of the “Tattoo regrets” research indirectly proves my hypothesis.

During the research the respondents were asked if they have any tattoos. Answers categories were “Yes, but I wish I did not”, “Yes, and I am satisfied”, “Yes, and I want more”. “No regret” related answers are twice more and the majority of “no regret”

²¹ Dickson, 2014, 270

²² Dukes, 2016, 456

²³ Dukes, 2016, 453

respondents are going to continue their body modifying. That confirms my results about growing tendency to have more and more body modifications among youth.

Besides tattoo removal I am also interested in researches connected with regretting about having a tattoo. I had related question in the questionnaire and would like to compare the results. The most useful research in this field was “Regret among tattooed adolescents” by Richard L. Dukes. In terms of that research 417 tattooed adolescents were questioned about their tattoos and feeling regret. Richard L. Dukes did similar analyze and evaluated the information according to gender and the age when the first tattoo was done. His conclusions confirm my own in many ways. According to the “Regret among tattooed adolescents”, 35.1% of persons who did their first modification before the age of 18 express regret, but only 12.8% of persons of 18 years or older regret their first tattoo. In my research those respondents who started to modify their bodies before the age of 18, did not show their regret actively. Only R-3 answered the regret question *“A little bit, not because I have them, but sometimes I think that I’d have another picture or do it a little bit in another way.”* On the other hand, two other respondents from this age group showed a deep addiction to body modifying process and both mentioned that *“I want to get tattooed almost my whole body”* (R-2) and *“I just want more and more”*, so early start of body modifying definitely leads to some aftermaths from regret to the “blue disease” as I called it earlier. These results also confirm my theory that respondents who made the first body modification before the age of 18 are less likely to think deeply about meaning of their tattoos and in the future it leads to more regret. People who did their tattoos later and placed some sacral meaning into the image (as R-1 with her Viking rune compass or R-10 with his spiritual patterns) express less regret as they feel a deeper connection more with tattoo by itself than with the process of body modifying.

3. General related studies: (non-gender specific): first or favorite tattoo

As you can see, according to the questionnaires the meaning of body modifications is a very important aspect for me and I found an interesting research “To ink or not to ink: the meaning of tattoos among college students” by Lynda Dickson. There are some new points in this research compared to others: Dickson explores not only people who already have a tattoo but also people who are going to make it or who are not planning to have a body modification at all. 458 participants took part in that research, the mean age of the participants is 23.4 years and the median age is 21. 67% of respondents are women.²⁴ Lynda Dickson divided her respondents into two age groups according to the age when they got their first tattoo: under 18 and older than 18. The first question respondents answered was “why did you get your first tattoo”.

The first place among motivations for getting a tattoo is a “spontaneous self-decision” that belongs to internal factors and means spontaneous self-expression. The second reason is a “connective role transitions” that means represent bonds, connections, or remainders of family or friends (internal factor). The third reason is almost at the same level as the second one – tattoo as a personal statement of religion or spirituality or inspirational. The fourth reason is getting a tattoo as a form of aesthetics symbolism or positive self-distinction (internal factor). Peer-oriented role transition represents bonding experience or marks group affiliation (external factor) got the 5th place. Commemorative role transition that reflects life event or turning points (internal factor) is at the 6th place. On the seventh place is getting a tattoo as a statement of independence and rebellion (external factor). The last position took “affect

²⁴ Dickson, 2012, 109

management” that means getting a tattoo as a reminder/memorial of loved one (internal factor). “Other” reasons in total got the latest.²⁵

Those respondents who have at least one tattoo also answered the question “how much significance or deep meaning the tattoo has for them according to the scale: none (1), little (2), a moderate amount (3), much (4) and very much (5). The mean response is 3.95 and the median is 4.0 that show that tattoos have “much significance” for the respondents. 60.6 % of tattooed respondents have more than one tattoo that proves my hypothesis about possible developing of the “blue disease”, on the other hand Lynda Dickson’s research discovered that *“respondents who get their first tattoo at younger age tend to have fewer tattoos currently”*²⁶ while my research shows totally opposite picture and older respondents according to my questionnaires are tend to have less tattoos.

There are two more important moments in the Dickson’s research for me. She divided terms “first tattoo” and “favorite tattoo” and proved that the first tattoo is not always the favorite one. 74, 4 % of the respondents indicated the second tattoo as their favorite, at the same time “favorite” tattoos are usually of bigger size and not so easily covered as the first one. Probably that’s one of the reasons not to stop at one tattoo point: people get experience of self-expression through body modifications and start to think if they can do it better or in the other way. Some sort of the perfectionism. I have some related answers in terms of “the favorite tattoo” among my respondents. R-1 talked a lot about her Viking rune compass tattoo. In her case it was the first tattoo and it is also her favorite body modification. She pays a lot attention to it, does not try to cover it with clothes and talking about her future plans to body modifications she also mentioned her

²⁵ Dickson, 2012, 113

²⁶ Dickson, 2012, 116

favorite tattoo *“Definitely I am going to continue a compass to half sleeve because it has a big meaning for me. I think it deserves much more attention”*.

The second interesting point is that Dickson also questioned non-tattooed respondents about their intention to have or not to have tattoos in the future. According to the results, half of 257 respondents said that they are “not likely” or “not at all likely” to have a tattoo in the future. On the other hand, 22, 6% of non-tattooed respondents are likely or very likely to have a tattoo in their future. 64 % of non-tattooed respondents were female. Among the reasons that prevent them from having a tattoo respondents specified: concerns of permanency, do not personally like tattoos or have no desire to have it, costs in time or money for a tattoo, disapproval from parents or others, fear of needles and pain, have not found a meaningful enough reason, do not know what content they would get, tattoos are against personal or religious beliefs, and other reasons.²⁷ As we can see, there are not many reasons connected with some kinds of stigmatization - disapproval issues are the only one, though this reason still takes the 4th place. It is interesting that no one mentioned their professional area as an obstacle for having a tattoo. So the main issue for having or not having a body modification is a personal belief and relation to the body. This fact makes me think that sacral tattoos meaning is saved through ages even though it changed in some way to fit the era.

²⁷ Dickson, 2012, 118

4. Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis is made on the base of gender related issues. I analyzed differences and similarities between male and female interviews, looking through all questions, related researches and some personal observations.

Let's return to the questionnaire for a better understanding. For both groups of respondents, male and female, the most common body modification is a tattoo. Piercing (not depending on its location) is on the second place. Statistic data is the same; nevertheless there are some important differences in the embodiment of body modifications. First of all, as the pictures show, women are more inclined than men to have colorful tattoos: 3 of 5 female respondents have tattoos of other colors besides black, only 1 of 5 male respondents has some other colors in his tattoo. It is more common for men to have black inked tattoos of a big size. Arms are the most popular location in both cases, for men and women, but female tattoos are still easier to cover with clothes. That proves results of the Richard L. Duke's research "Regrets among tattooed adolescents" I mentioned before. Though the most common tattoo location seems not depending on gender, men are more likely to have some extreme kinds of body modifications: for example, scarification, tongue splitting, silicone implants or tattoos located on eyes and face. Only 1 respondent (R-2) of 5 in the female group has body modifications of this type and mentioned that she would like to use plastic surgery in the future for getting an elven ears. Nevertheless she has no tattoos on her face, only piercing that can be removed. In the male group 2 of 5 respondents have scarification, tongue splitting, eye balls tattoos and other extreme modifications. Also 2 of 5 respondents have tattoos on their faces which are not typically for women. These results in my opinion prove the hypothesis that women tattoos have more in common with self-decoration issues while men body modifications are still remain closer to the cultural

tribal tradition used to represent the dominance and status. Men are more likely to change their appearance in front of the world (if we are talking about a face) and women use body modifications for making their natural image more suitable to their beauty standards.

The second question about the age of the first body modification I analyzed not only in terms of gender but also in terms of the age groups as it shows quite strong correlation. There were two age groups for each gender: 13-18 and 18+ (for women) and 10-18 and 18+ (for men). According to the results, men are more inclined to have their first body modifications earlier (the youngest age among the respondents was 10 years old) or even to make them by themselves that was not mentioned by women at all. Probably this self-modifying incline is a kind of exploring own dominance and masculinity borders through a physical challenge. There were 2 respondents of 5 in the females “younger” age group (who made their first body modification before 18 years old) and 3 of 5 respondents in the same age male group that proves my hypothesis again.

As I mentioned earlier, the age of getting the first body modification also correlates with a current amount of body modifications and the meaning of a tattoo. There are 5 respondents who belong to this group at both genders. Two of them show some regrets not because they have tattoos but because now they would make it in another artistic way. One of these respondents (male, the R-9) shows incline to have the “blue disease”, he mentioned that he wants more and more tattoos and he is the only one of all 10 respondents who has a tattooed face. It is important to notice that all respondents of both genders who has extreme kinds of body modifications are belong to the younger age group and their body modifications are the most noticeable (you can make sure of that turning to the R-2, R-3, R-7, R-8 and R-9 pictures). All three male respondents in this age group did not mark some special or sacral meaning of their tattoos: one

respondent describes as a meaningful only a couple of his tattoos, one respondent does not put meaning into it at all, and the third one characterizes his tattoos as pictures in the skin for keeping memories. The last answer is quite typical for this group; both female respondents mentioned the same point: using skin as a diary or a representation of their life style (for example vegetarianism), so their tattoos meaning is more about present and the images tell what happened in their lives to others.

For the respondents from the older age group the meaning of tattoos is different. Only one respondent from this group (R-6) showed the same motivation's level as the respondents from the younger group. His tattoo sleeves are reflection of his life style – he loves animals and it is also a part of his professional image, he is a rock musician so he made the tattoos at his 30s when their band became popular. Other four respondents in this group describe their tattoos meaning as much more sacral. There are spiritual issues, reminder of the life's turning points and beloved people, life guiding symbol that helps to search for the right path. Lynda Dickson in the “To ink or not to ink: the meaning of tattoos among college students” research also proved that decision to have a tattoo relates more to internal factors. Turning back to her research, internal ideas of spontaneous self-expression or keeping the main points of your life and life style through the images took the highest position among the motivations for having a tattoo. The analysis of my questionnaire shows the same result. Summarizing all above, women are more inclined to put deep sacral meaning into images on their skin, though men tattoos look much more closer to the classical “tribal” style. Probably women traditionally used to think more about their appearance, or they just more sentimental and like to surround themselves by meaningful attributes. Also women motivation is differ from men – women should not prove their dominance through the appearance, their relation to the body is more internal.

Next point of the analysis is the discrimination issue. Gender's influence on this point is the strongest. Three of five female respondents mentioned that they faced any kinds of discrimination on the base of their body modifications. They evaluated these cases from "sometimes" to "very often" scale. As I noticed, respondents who have the most noticeable modifications (R-2 and R-3) mentioned facing criticism more often and it has more negative demonstration according to their words. One of female respondents did not face any discrimination but she has the smallest tattoo behind her ear, and one of the respondents did not mention discrimination though she confesses that she thinks about other people feelings and try to use not very noticeable kinds of piercing. For the male group results are different: only one of five respondents (R-9) mentioned having a discomfort in social life because of his appearance. Two of other four respondents said that sometimes they feel a tension when they meet new people, but then these people get used to their appearance. Three of four respondents mentioned discrimination belongs to the younger group. In general, women are more inclined to face discrimination toward their appearance. Other researches I explored also prove this hypothesis. The "Perception of human body modification" research shows that tattooed women evaluated as a less healthy though tattooed men perceived as a healthier and more dominance. "Tattoo or taboo" research proved that tattooed women perceived as a stronger and independent, though tattooed female targets were evaluated more negatively compared to non-tattooed. In my opinion, these cooperative results show that tattoos are still associated with power and dominance as in the ancient time, so their cultural subliminal meaning remains the same, as women motherhood related social status. Women perceived as more strong and independent with tattoos but it is not their basic function according to social standards. Women evaluated through the prism of traditional femininity and ability to give birth to healthy children, that's why they are

more likely to face discrimination when they step into traditionally men field of rebellion and independence.

Friends and family opinion about the respondents' body modifications is the next point of the analysis. There was not big gender effect on this question. All respondents said that their friends feel great about their body modifications; some of them also mentioned that their friends have tattoos or other modifications as well. In terms of family reactions are not always positive. Three of five female respondents said that it took some time for their parents or other relatives to get used to their new appearance. Piercing did not cause so many questions as tattoos. Two of three respondents faced questions "do you really need/want to have it" from their family, one respondent said that her father thought "it is only a phase, it cannot be serious". For two cases of three misunderstanding came from female part of the family (mother or grandmother). One case relates to a criticism came from the father. Eventually, all parents get used to their children modifications and relations seem fine in all families. Result is almost the same for the male respondents. Two of five respondents faced some difficulties in terms of their relatives. No misunderstanding with friends mentioned. Two respondents said that everyone in their surrounding supports them. Two respondents mentioned that it was quite difficult for their parents to accept their changings at the beginning, especially for mothers (again). The R-8 avoided this question because "he is not the best person to say what other people think" but his behavior is so connected with self-protection that I personally inclined to think that he faced some negative moments as well, he has the most visible modifications among my respondents. In total, five of ten respondents felt some confusion from their families. Family reaction does not depend on the age of the respondent – respondents of both groups, younger and older, mentioned the same difficulties answering this question.

Regret issues question showed more dependent results. Two of female respondents removed some of their piercings but do not have any regret about the tattoos. If we are talking about tattoo related regret, there are three respondents who admitted it. One of them is a female and two are males. Two of these three respondents (one male, one female) have regret not about having a tattoo but about its embodiment. Now they think that they could present their idea in a different way. One respondent (R-7) has regret about his first tattoo because it is in the middle of his back and it is hard to cover it with something. Two of three respondents belong to the younger age group. In the “Specifically requesting surgical tattoo removal: are deep personal motivations involved?” research, there are 12 women among the 16 patients who decided to remove their tattoos. But my results are closer to the Richard L. Dukes who wrote “*women have as many tattoos as men have, they are more inclined to make smaller tattoos and to make it less visible and hidden under clothes in daily life*”. Probably that’s why they showed less regret in terms of the research. Even if they have some regret about their tattoos, it is often easier for them to cover it with clothes or with other image. Men are inclined to have bigger tattoos and it is almost impossible to make something except removal with a big image in the center of your back.

The formation of the identity remains one of the most important aspects for the body modifications phenomenon. What do people get when they have tattoos or modifications of other kinds? According to my results, the perception of the identity depends on the gender. Four female respondents of five told that body modifications add something to their concept of the identity. One respondent (R-1) defined that tattoos are her way to express her rebellion nature and to show her truly identity to the world. For the R-5 “*tattoo is just a tattoo*”. Remained three respondents connect their tattoos with self-confidence and mentioned different reasons for that: overweight, personal feeling of beauty, reminder of something important that makes to feel better. It is

interesting to mark that both respondents who have no correlation between self-confidence and tattoos belong to the older age group. Two of three respondents mentioned self-confidence as the component of the identity belong to the younger age group and did their modifications before the age of 18. According to the results, it is possible to say that in adolescent age when many of us feel uncomfortable in front of the world, body modifications might become a shield between self-awareness and other people. Male group showed other correlations in terms of the identity formation. There are *“own perception of the world showing through patterns”*, *“certain kind of culture I belong to”*, *“feel like more me”* and *“makes me feel more free and let me be who I am”* among male answers. In my opinion, female are more inclined to use body modifications according to their internal motivations or in terms of correction of their natural image. Men are more likely to create their new image in front of the world and change their natural identity. Directions are close but its vector is different, internal or external depending on the respondent’s gender.

The last question about having plans to continue the body modifying is also very important for a better understanding of the phenomenon and for the “blue disease” aspect exploring. Results are not depending on gender here but have some correlations with the age of the respondents. Ten of ten respondents said that they are going to continue their modifications in the future. No one said “I am satisfied and done” that proves the “blue disease” is not a myth. Respondents belong to the younger age group have more extensive plans. Three of them said that their modifications are not finished until the body is full. One respondent has plans not only about tattoos; she is planning to make some surgical modifications such as an elven ears. On the other hand, respondents from the older group have more certain plans: to continue one favorite tattoo or to have one or two more pictures when they will have a time or money or clear idea. It is obviously that modifications made at the earlier age have more effect on the

respondents following life. When the formation of your identity is connected with body modifications it is much more difficult to stop and of course modifications have a stronger impact on self-perception. Personality is developing and a person wants to embody this process through new body modifications as he or she gets used to do it.

5. Conclusion

Working on explored hypothesis I realized that there are big differences in how body modified people percept themselves and how the society percepts them. According to related researches, people are more inclined to evaluate the same people more negatively or positively depending on their tattoo status. Tattoos are connected with independence, rebellion and power but on the other hand tattoos might effect on the perception of health status or to shape certain gender stereotypes in people minds. If you have a tattoo, you show some idea to the world but at the same time you accept some common ideas that the world already has about body modifications. The respondent's gender and the age of the first body modification have a great influence on related stereotypes, possibility to face discrimination or to have a manifestation of the "blue disease". Nevertheless respondents do not express regret about the fact of having their body modifications so personal motivations and necessity to show their identity through the modifications is much stronger than accompanying social discomfort. Body modifications are very important for all respondents and they become an integral part of their personality.

My personal suggestion for the following research is to pay more attention to male tattoos meaning. Searching for related researches I found a big gender inequality in that field. As female body modifications are pretty new phenomenon, the majority of last researches are related to female tattoos studies though male body modifications also have its way of developing. Looking at the results of my research, it is obviously that some tendencies effecting on body modifications issues, such as the age or motivation, are common for both genders so it should not be an abyss in the studies.

Another field of my future interest is differences between how body modified people see themselves and how the society sees them. There are many researches in this area

and some of them I observed in the thesis but the problem is still current and this phenomenon in my opinion should be also studied in terms of tattoo removal. I have not found a lot of information in this area besides the “Specifically requesting surgical tattoo removal: are deep personal motivations involved?” that covered only 16 respondents. Tattoo removal is an important side of body modifications phenomenon and it comes hand in hand with possible stigmatization or personal and identity formation. Hope to continue exploring of these questions in my next research.

For a better understanding of the conclusion I would like to return to the hypothesis I wrote about in the introduction.

Hypothesis 1.

People become more tolerant to body modifications though some gender stereotypes are still current. It is not a secret that women face more criticism and social expectations toward their bodies.

According to the questionnaires, I think I proved that hypothesis completely. Female respondents are more likely to face negative issues about their appearance. At the same time they have many body modifications (not less than men) that are very noticeable and feel free to express themselves through their bodies. This tendency was hardly possible a couple decades ago. So we can talk about increasing tolerance in the society but female image is still connected with femininity and motherhood concept a lot.

Hypothesis 2.

Tattoos are losing its deep sacral meaning comparing recent past and turn into tool of body decorating and self-expression. Does it still has connection with its original motivations or changed totally?

The results showed that nowadays people are not inclined to put into their modifications so much meaning as it was previously. There are a lot of new reasons for having tattoos and of course motivations and the meaning of modifications changed according to the era. Nevertheless sacral beliefs in power of the image made on skin are still alive. Some respondents try to change their life by having the certain image on their bodies, some respondents connect their tattoos with spiritual practices which is also typical for original historically purpose of making tattoos. Summarizing the results, nowadays body modifications develop both as cultural and social phenomenon and combine historically functions with new directions such as self-expression. Previously many body modifications were an obligatory issue depending on the cultural belonging; nowadays it is a voluntary way of exploring relations to the body and to the world.

Hypothesis 3.

The age of the first body modification might have a big influence on following body modifying. I suppose that people who start to modify their bodies at the early (before 18) age are more inclined to have more body modifications or to do more extreme kinds of body modifications.

This hypothesis is proved completely according to the questionnaires. Those respondents who did their first modifications before 18 years old have more amount of body modifications at the moment. Their modifications are very noticeable (such as silicone implants or eye balls tattoo) and these respondents also have the most extreme plans for their future changes – they express intention to turn to plastic surgery or to have their bodies fully covered with tattoos. We can talk that people who started their modification process earlier are more likely to have the “blue disease” in the future. Also body modifications can effect on their professional life. Two respondents who

belong to the younger age group changed their occupation and started to work in the body modifications' area (tattoo studio owner, tattoo artist).

Making connection with the world through relations to the own body stays a stablish demand of a human nature not depending on the age and cultural belonging. Body modifications develop and grow into new shapes and kinds and even the most extremal of them have its audience. Plastic surgery also develops not only in the medical direction but also in the direction of body modifications, so it is possible to predict a following development for body modifications phenomenon according to medical and cultural developing of the current society. "To ink or not to ink: the meaning of tattoos among college students" research proves that a big amount of non-tattooed people are likely to have a tattoo one day and even have some certain plans about it. Female body modifications become more and more common and spread compared to last decades. That's why following researches in this field will definitely be current. As any developing issue, body modifications have to be studied and these studies should keep in touch with the phenomenon.

Bibliography

Interviews

Female interviews

Respondent 1 (R-1). 2017. 01.10.

Respondent 2 (R-2). 2017. 08.10

Respondent 3 (R-3). 2017. 22.10

Respondent 4 (R-4). 2017. 04.11

Respondent 5 (R-5). 2017. 12.11

Male interviews

Respondent 6 (R-6). 2017. 20.11

Respondent 7 (R-7). 2017. 28.11

Respondent 8 (R-8). 2017. 2.12

Respondent 9 (R-9). 2017. 7.12

Respondent 10 (R-10). 2017. 20.12

Researches

Broussard A Kristin. 2017. "Tattoo or taboo? Tattoo stigma and negative attitudes toward tattooed individuals". *The Journal of Social Psychology*, DOI: 10.1080/00224545.2017.1373622

Dickson, Lynda. 2012. "To ink or not to ink: the meaning of tattoos among college students". *University of Colorado, College Studen Journal*, 32, 106-120.

- Dickson, Lynda. 2014. "Stigma of ink: Tattoo attitudes among college students". *The Social Science Journal*, 51, 268-276.
- Dukes, Richard. L. 2016. "Regret among tattooed adolescents". *The Social Science Journal*, 53, 455-458.
- Geary, D.C., Vigil, J., & Byrd-Craven, J. 2004. "Evolution of human mate choice". *The Journal of Sex Research*, 41, 27-42.
- Goffman, E. 1963. "Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identities". *La Jolla, CA: Touchstone*.
- Houghton, Stephen. J. 1996. "Amateur Tattooing Practices and Beliefs Among School Adolescents". *Journal of adolescent health*, 19, 420-425.
- Koljonen, V. 2011. "Specifically requesting surgical tattoo removal: are deep personal motivations involved?". *Journal of the European Academy of Dermatology and Venerology*, 26, 685-689.
- Penton-Voak, I.S., & Chen, J. Y. 2004. "High salivary testosterone is linked to masculine male facial appearance in humans". *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 25, 229-241.
- Taylor, Paul. 2014. "The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown". *PublicAffairs*.
- Thornhill, R., & Gangestad, S. W. 1999. "Facial attractiveness". *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 3, 452-460.
- Wohlrab, Silke. 2009. "Perception of human body modification". *Personality and Individual Differences*, 46, 202-206.