

Evaluating the condition of the existing art of body tattooing and current practices in Turkey

Seyda Akarsu *, SRA Beauty Institute, Umit Mah. 2494. Sk. Camlica Bulvar Sitesi A Blok 1/18 Umitkoy Cankaya, Ankara 06810, Turkey.

Suggested Citation:

Akarsu, S. (2016). Evaluating the condition of the existing art of body tattooing and current practices in Turkey, *Global Journal on Humanities & Social Sciences*. [Online]. 03, pp 47-52. Available from: <http://sproc.org/ojs/index.php/pntsbs>

Received January 10, 2015; revised March 04, 2015; accepted May 10, 2015.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Milan Matijevic.

©2016 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved.

Abstract

Throughout history, human kinds have always been trying new ways by different means to look beautiful and different. Tattooing is also one of those ways and challenges. Today tattooing is losing its traditional concept and becoming more common with new professional spirit. Traditional tattoo with all its concerns to tattoo receivers and tattooing artists now is gradually become peeled from its old cast to be regarded as an art. Tattooing is application of dye to subdermal layers of skin which stays permanently and can't be rejected by skin later on. With rising tattoo application and use in the world, likewise in our country tattooing, it is also growing and become more popular. Based on this idea, the existing tattooing practices in Turkey were investigated and evaluated. This research applied in three biggest metropolises and a Holiday village. On these locations, the questionnaires were submitted to 553 tattoo receivers and 69 tattooing artist personnel. At the same time, 69 tattooing centres were visited and observed. The study results show that; tattoos are mostly the product of aesthetic and self-expression predominantly in younger generations. The most preferred tattoo motives were writings and images, and also the most preferred color found to be black. None of tattooing artist had formal training and they had different understandings of hygiene. As a result of this study, it has also been found that there are no regulations, administration or enforcement for standards in tattooing centres. Following the evaluation of this research results and also considering the current practice of tattooing centers in Turkey. It is proposed a set of recommendations to train, to regulate, to administrate and to enforce the standards for the art and practice of tattooing in Turkey.

Keywords: Tattooing, Body Art.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Seyda AKARSU**, SRA Beauty Institute, Umit Mah. 2494. Sk. Camlica Bulvar Sitesi A Blok 1/18 Umitkoy Çankaya, Ankara 06810, Turkey. E-mail address: sheydaem@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The meaning of art is not only crafted and created products made by practice but also an inspiring effort and expression of creativity which gives great pleasure and inspiration to soul and ideas of viewers and listeners (Serin, 2012). The first artists used cave walls to paint, as well as their bodies. It is thought that rubbing a wound with dirt left a permanent mark on the body after healing so they conceived the tattoo art by accident.

Unlike artisanal activities or public goods which have the artistic legitimacy, tattoo should primarily be freed from bad connotation to get a rightful place in art society. It would be reasonable to say that today's tattoo will be as successful as other branches of art by its technical skills, organized presentation, aesthetic appeal, and gradually increased academic and critical interest. Since the mid-1970s, it appears that tattoo application has an increased frequency. However, as the presentation of tattoo in art galleries and museums sometimes includes live exhibition on the "human flesh", these presentations mostly use photographs, model dies and other relevant objects of exemplar products (Sanders & Vails 2008).

People's desire to pursue the innovative and creative methods to change their bodies is increasing. We live in an age that almost everyone frequently applies some kind of body modifications such as hair cut as well as breast enlargement. Tattoo appears to be the latest noticeable trend in this millennium (Atkinson, 2003). Nowadays, having a tattoo can be described as personal beautification and trend. However, there is no doubt that tattoo's first introduction to the history of humanity was not quite simple. The first tattoo applications were made by primitive-communal societies, considered as primal social life on earth, with utmost innocent requirements to express their fears, admirations, desires, beliefs, traditions, and caste status using lines and marks on their bodies to other people or nature. Back in the day, the adornment, made with primitive methods, found the right niche in human history. In the modern world, the reasons of tattooing are aesthetics, emotionality, self-expression and belonging to a certain group.

Tattoos are also quite old and a resident application in Kazakh and Kyrgyz Turkish culture. Human remains in Hun burial sites had tattoos consist of fictional creatures and ram figures with highly agile and decorative lines (Kadioglu, 1996). Shamanism, selected by the Turks, made tattoo more meaningful in society. It was believed that bad luck and evil were removed from body by the tattoos applied by Shaman priest to their followers (Celik, 2007). Expansion of Turkish state and moving forward to the middle of Europe carried this culture to Europe. The cultural interaction between Turks and other societies generated a technical and artistic development in tattooing.

Based on written history, Turks did not prohibit tattoo for a long time after they had settled down in Anatolia. This practice, especially during the principalities, could be seen tolerated by soigneurs, princes and even then the emperor.

Tattooing trend became popular among Ottoman sailors due to the influence of Algerian sailors; from 17th century to abolition of Janissary corps in 19th century, Janissaries used tattoos to symbolize their affiliation with the troops (Kadioglu, 1996).

Tattoo was used to identify and distinguish military rank of dead or seriously wounded Levants (navy soldiers) and other soldiers whose clothing was partially or completely lost during a battle; these tattoo drawings and depictions processed onto gazelle skin are exhibited in museums (Celik, 2007).

Recently, however, tattoo is coming into fashion among young people in the cities, it also continues to be an old custom in south eastern Anatolia (Diyarbakir Karachi gypsies, Bozhoyuk region, Sanliurfa peasants, Gaziantep Barak district, Mizar Village Karakecilik of the sovereignty of the Yazidis, Tirkemis and Kurdish Alevis and settlers in the town of Siverek places Retaliation (Bulut, 2002; Can, 1991; Cihan, 2007; Hazar, 2006; Tasgin, 2001).

2. Methods

The methods used in this research are descriptive and scanning methods. In this research, a survey was conducted to determine the profile of both tattoo artists and their customers. The universe of this study is tattooists and tattooed people. The sample group consists of tattooist (69 individual) and tattooed (553 individual) who agreed to participate in the research and were contacted in four major cities (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Antalya) and 2 towns (Side and Bodrum). Since there is no legal database for tattoo studios, this sub-problem sample group, consisting of application places (69 studios), was attained by random and snowball methods. Tattooists and tattooed people were asked to fill out a questionnaire for data gathering in this study in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and Antalya metropolitans and Side and Bodrum holiday villages.

2.1. Data analysis techniques

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 15 was used to evaluate the obtained data and generate tables. The tables are generated to present Qualitative (categorical) variables (e.g., gender, educational status, etc.) by using frequency and percentage values. In addition, some variables are expressed with graphics. In order to evaluate quantitative variables statistically, it was primarily investigated whether parametric test conditions (adequacy of the number of subjects in the group, compliance with the normal distribution) were provided by Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. Provided parametric test conditions were met, Student's t test was used to compare two groups and one-way analysis of variance was employed to compare three or more groups. After the comparison of three or more groups, Tukey's multiple comparison test to determine which groups have the difference in statistically significant results was conducted. When parametric test conditions were not provided, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare two groups and Kruskal-Wallis variance analysis test was employed to compare three or more groups; in case of Kruskal-Wallis test had statistically significant results, Bonferroni-corrected Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine between which groups have the difference. $p < 0.05$ was adopted as significance level in all the statistical analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Tattooed participants educational status

The educational degrees of participants (46.5% female and 53.5% male) are 8.3% elementary school, 39.2% high school, 10.1% associate degree graduate, 31.5% undergraduate, 9.2% master's degree graduate and 1.6% doctorate degree. Among all participants, high school students (39.2%, $N = 217$) and undergraduate students (31.5%, $N = 174$) are more willing to get tattoos done. The tattooed participants are the graduates of high school and higher education (total 52.4%), which indicates that educated people are more prone to having tattoo. Employment ratios of participants are 61.7% freelance and private sector employees (2/3 of total participants), 28.6% students, 5.2% of civil servants, 4.5% unemployed.

The income ratio of participants are 32.5% 1000TL and under, 30.2% in 1001-2000TL, 12.1% 2001-3000TL, and 8.5% 3001 and more, while 16.6% have no income. 62.7% of participants (347 people) have an income of less than 2000TL. Although private sector employees have higher education, they are included in low-income level group. Interestingly, 16.6% of those who have tattoo and belong to no income group are either undergraduate students or unemployed, according to their own statements. The high ratio of unemployed university graduates (Suzer, 2013) sometimes represents these two groups as the same one group.

3.1.1. *The age when tattooed participants had their first tattoo*

35% of participants (N = 192) had their first tattoo done at the age of 18 or earlier while 58% (N = 324) when they were 19-30 years old and 7% (N = 37) 31 years and over. This indicates that more than half of the participants had their first tattoo done when they were between 19-30 years old. Nonetheless, 1/3rd of sample group comprises participants under 18 years old. This group has a high ratio over all. Tattooing on a minor is not permitted in many countries but in our country the ratio of tattooed minors is considerable. This situation can be explained in 4 dimensions:

- Parents are extremely tolerant
- Sample group of teenagers are being stubborn and persistent about tattoos due to puberty issues
- Practitioner's opportunistic approach to teenagers
- There are no legal arrangements and punitive regulations to prevent it.

Although there is no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between age of first tattoo, gender and educational status, statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) is found between age, profession, and income groups.

Accordingly, minors and 18-28 aged groups had their first tattoo done when they were younger than other groups (29-39 and 40+ aged) similarly, 29-39 aged group was younger than 40+ aged group. Students and unemployed groups had their first tattoos earlier than other groups (civil servants, free-lancer and private sector employees) while free-lancer tattooed younger than civil servants. It is found that the groups being without income and with under 1000TL income tattooed in earlier ages compared to other groups (1001-2000TL, 2001-3000TL, ≥ 3001 TL).

3.1.2. *Preferred tattoo motifs by tattooed participants*

Participants selected text, symbols, animal, tribal, mystic, flower, cartoon characters, portraits, biomechanics and etc. as tattoo motifs respectively. The ratio of preferred text motifs is (N = 261) 47.2% because it is thought that text is an easy form and choice for self-expression. Besides, the current technology (eg. Windows 8 font format) renders fonts more aesthetic. Considering the alphabets of different languages we come across a very wide range of choice. Self-expression with text recently has become popular as another branch of art (graffiti). The preference of text as a tattoo motif was investigated according to various demographic characteristics. In terms of text choice, there is no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between age, gender, profession and income groups, significant difference ($p < 0.05$) is found between educational status groups. Postgraduates prefer text figures less frequently than elementary and high school graduates. It is understandable that tattooed postgraduates, who have more educational, intellectual and social formation, prefer symbols and figures other than text compared to elementary and high school graduates with tattoos.

When symbols, tribal and mystic tattoo motifs were demographically investigated, it is found that there is no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between gender, age, educational status, profession and income groups.

3.1.2.1. *Tattoo motif selection status of participants*

89% of participants (N = 492) choose motifs themselves, 6.7% (N = 37) sometimes choose themselves and 4.3% (N = 24) do not choose their motifs in addition, 80.7% (N = 446) of participants do not let tattooists choose on their behalf, 15.6% (N = 86) sometimes let tattooists select and 3.8% (N = 21) of participants have tattooists chosen. It is expected that the individual who can express themselves will choose their own tattoo figures with as high a ratio as 89% (N=492). When the selection style of tattoo motifs were demographically investigated, it is found that there is no

statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between gender, age, educational status, profession and income groups.

3.1.2.2. Tattoo color selection status of participants

When choosing the color of the tattoo survey participants have selected in order of black, red, green, white, yellow and others. Black is the most preferred color for tattooed participants. The reasons for choosing black, are being easy to achieve visual expression (shadows), more economical and that removal black tattoo is easier than colorful ones. According to investigated demographical characteristics of preference of black, women compared to men and minors compared to other age groups choose less black tattoos. Men prefer black and one colored tattoos instead of multiple and different colors which may seem extremely alluring. Adolescence is an intense psychosocial marathon period so vanity, being noticed and prominence are important aspects of this period (Yorukoglu, 2000). As black symbolizes power and dignity (Acibademmedya, 2013., Lusher, 1991), teenagers may be less interested in black tattoo.

3.2.1. Tattooist participants educational status

The educational degrees of tattooists are 5.8% elementary school, 55.1% high school, 2.9% associate degree graduate, 29% undergraduate, 5.8% master's degree graduate and 1.4% doctorate degree. It seems that approximately half of the (55.1% and $N=38$) tattooists are high school graduates. Moreover, this profession is also popular among undergraduates (29%, $N=20$), especially art originated education programs.

3.2.2. Vocational education status of tattooists

The gender range of the tattooist who agreed to participate this study is 98.6% male and 1.4% female. The vast majority of male tattooists shows that the profession is more popular among men. However, it is believed that the application of permanent makeup, a sub-branch of tattooing, is exercised mostly by women (Kahraman, 2012). 52% of tattooist participants received training and 48% of them did not trained at all. Half of the participants (52%, $N=36$) who applies tattoos stated that they had special training. However, only 13 individual (out of 36) declared where they got special training, other 23 tattooist made no statement. In addition, these 13 tattooist stated that they informally trained abroad education institutes.

Although educational certification programs have been set about the subject, there is still no formal or informal programs for tattooists in our country. Half of the tattooists (48% and $N=33$) have intimately confessed that they haven't had any education about this. Considering the tattooists, claiming to have had education, together with the ones that claim to have had education but avoiding to indicate from where, it can be inferred that 80% of tattooists (81% and $N=56$) lack education. 70% of the tattooists participants ($N=54$) serve people who are not older than 30, 10% of them ($N=7$) serves people between ages of 31-35 and the 12% ($N=8$) of them serves people older than 35. It's clear that the ratio of tattooed between the ages of 18-28 (61.7% and $N=341$) is harmonic with the tattooed ones under the age of 30 (78.3% and $N=54$). This situation coincide with the increasing number of young, willing to get tattooed, when the 50% of the population was under the age of 30 in Turkey (Tuik, 2013).

According to the tattooist participants, most desired tattoo motifs respectively are writings, animals, symbols, tribal, flowers, portraits, mystic, biomechanics and cartoon characters. This row is

almost the same comparing the answers of both tattooed and tattooists. The first five choice of tattooed are motif writings, animals, symbols, tribal and flowers. According to the tattooist, the row is motif writings, animals, symbols, tribal and flowers. There is only "tribal" in the place of "flowers". In both groups there are writings, symbols, animals and tribal as tattoo motifs.

3.3. The ways to decide tattoo motifs according to the tattooists

According to the tattooist participants, %29 of people, who appears willing to get tattooed, are suggested by tourists to choose figures, %20 choose figures from catalogues, %18 come up with the design they want, %16 get the idea from the internet, %4 draw themselves and %13 appears the other ways. So it is understood that the 1/4 of the designs are selected by tattooists and 1/5 are selected from the catalogue, but the percentage of self-designed, chosen from the internet and the others, including portions, special designs and cooperation-designed figures is too high to underestimate. In short, choices are made in several ways.

3.4. The colors of tattoo's according to the tattooists

According to the tattooist participants, most chosen tattoo colors respectively are black, red, white, green, yellow and the others. Tattooists claim that the most popular tattoo color is black. The fact that black has shadowing advantage should not be forgotten. From the other colors, the percentage of other chosen colors such as red, white and green is substantial. This color choice row is almost the same comparing the answers of both tattooed and tattooists. The first five choice of tattooed are black, red, green, white and yellow. In this row the colors are the same but the sorting.

References

- Atkinson, M. (2003). *Tattooed, The Sociogenesis of a Body Art*. University of Toronto Press Incorporated, Canada.
- Bulut, F. (2002). Dogunun Tenindeki Nakis; *Dovme, Atlas Dergisi*, 113, 36-54.
- Can, İ. (1991). *Beden Resimleri; Dovme*. Marmara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Resim Anasana Dalı, Yüksek Lisans Tezi.
- Cihan, A. (2007). Diyarbakır'da Karaci Cingenelerinde Dovme Gelenegi. Marmara Üniversitesi, Uluslararası Sempozyum: Turk Kulturunde Beden, 4-5 Haziran
- Celik, S. (2007). *Vucut Susleme Sannatı ve Dovme Tarihinine Bakis*, Copyright 2007, Bersabodyarts.
- Hazar, M. (2006). Mardin Kızıltepe- Bozhoyuk Yoresinde Beden İsaletleri. *Sosyal Bilimler Arastırma Dergisi*, Sayı: 8, Eylul, 2006, 293
- Kadioglu, N. (1996). Anadolu'nun Bazı Yorelerinde Dovme Adeti ve Bu Adetin Cagdas Yasamdaki Yeri. I. Turk Halk Kulturunu Arastırma Sonucları Sempozyum Bildirileri, Ankara, Hagem Yayınları, 222-227
- Kahraman, S.T. (2012). Kisisel Gorusme. Mesleki Egitim Fakultesi, Kuaforluk ve Guzellik Bilgisi Anabilim Dalı, Ankara, 2012/12/27, Saat: 15
- Lusher, M. (1991). *Colour Psychology*, T: Abizadeh, V. Yayınevi: Jamalolhag, İran
- Sanders ve Vails, C.R. & Vail, A. (2008). *Customizing The Body, The Art and Culture of Tattooing*, Revised and expanded edition, Temple University Press, Philadelphia.
- Serin, M. (2012). *Sanat; İslâm Sanatları Tarihi*, Anadolu Üniversitesi Yayınları, No: 2084
- Suzer, E. (2013). Üniversite Mezunları Daha Zor İş Buluyor, *Bugun Gazetesi*, 26 Ocak 2013
- Tasgin, A. (2001). Siverek'te Dovme Gelenegi, Tarihte Siverek Sempozyunu Bildirileri, Siverek Kaymakamlığı, Ekim 2001, 229-233
- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2013). *Türkiye Nufus Verisi*, Ocak, 2013
- Yorukoglu, A. (2000). Genclik Çağı, Ruh Sağlığı ve Ruhsal sorunlar, *Ozgur Yayınları*, (11.basım), İstanbul www.acibademmedya.com/blog/renklerin anlamları ve insan üzerindeki etkileri, 08-04-2013