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Taking Pride on Tattoos and Piercings: The LGBTQ Communities of La Union

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Abstract: Due to the evolution of our society, one's emotion or life story cannot only be seen in forms of literature or speech but also in the form of "body art" like Tattoos and Piercings. Nowadays, the LGBTQ Community has used body art as a way to cope up with their different experiences and to express themselves. Although possessing body art can be a difficult process, physically and mentally, as some undergo painful procedures and experience discrimination that affected their careers due to these tattoos that can be seen negatively. The researchers aimed to analyze the meanings of the tattoos among the LGBTQ members. For this phenomenological study, the researchers gathered data by conducting a semi-structured interview to LGBTQ members who possess tattoos. To further justify our research, pictures of the tattoos were taken. Based from their responses, they are motivated by the people close to them and others are motivated by the life-changing experiences they had. The symbols of their tattoos where mostly animals that represent emotions like freedom and love while some are symbols of their organization. The tattoos may differ from their sizes and designs but the similarity is that it represents an important mark that changed their lives. With the data gathered, the researchers concluded that tattoos is more than just an aesthetic but it serves as a platform to express one's experiences and a reminder that one has dealt with an obstacle and was able to show it through art.

Key Words: LGBTQ; tattoos; expression; identity; discrimination

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is not only described as clothing but it also has a deeper meaning to it where it symbolizes one's cultural ethnicity and and identity. Fashion is also not just about clothing but it is also constantly evolving as time passes

by due to the different trends and even introduces different aspects such as tattoos, piercings, the evolution of skirts and shorts, dental fashion etc. The study talks about how the gender influences fashion particularly the LGBTQ community. They use it either to express themselves freely or to gain



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appreciation and encourage them to view fashion the same way they do. View fashion as something that can enhance your body as a whole. Tattoos can enhance one's self-expression, accentuate self-identity and can improve someone's self-esteem. Although older people see it as an association towards doing illegal and sexual activities together with being violent. But then, some adults argue about how tattoos are just art inked on the body or if it is something that can improve the self-confidence of a person. As of now, there have been no news about the happenings.

Piercings on the other hand uses penetrations in the body using jewelry in the eyebrows, lips, ears, tongue, nose and the navel. People who consider getting piercings manifest irresponsible act because people who take these procedures are related to undesirable personalities. These results in anxiety, discrimination, or exclusion. Millennials of today are also getting involve into getting tattoos. In this generation, the Millennials, produces thousands of young professionals entering the business world. Although body art is being accepted as it encourages the exhibition of one's interests, uniqueness and involvement in the tattoo culture or simply a fashion trend. In the business world, these tattoos are considered to be unprofessional and taboo. Also in the topic of today's generation, Women showing themselves is tradition and now, men are doing the same for advertisers.

The view of the perfect male body has changed in the last couple of decades. Due to the equal rights for women, both men and women now desire the same way as seen in advertisements and magazines. Keep in mind that people are not the same and are short, tall,

fat and thin making it impossible for most people to have the perfect body shown in advertisements. Lastly, The Gay Skinheads, one of the research study of Kevin Borgeson and Robin in the year 2015 talks about the strategies used by six men to negotiate between their gay and skinhead identities. A recurring theme throughout this research is that for many gay skinheads the appeal of the skinhead image and their association with it is based more on the sexual appeal of the skinhead look, rather than the social or class identity associated with being a skinhead.

Various theories would support how tattoos and piercings are related to body image. One theory is the Trickle Down theory where it concludes that fashion begins in the upper echelon of society. Styles worn by the wealthy change, and those changes are gradually adopted by the middle and lower classes. Second is the Trickle-Across theory where it concludes that fashion moves across socioeconomic levels relatively rapidly. Clothing styles do not trickle down but appear at all price points at approximately the same time. Next theory is the Trickle Up theory where it assumes that styles begin with youth or street fashion and move progressively up the fashion ladder until they are favored and worn by older and wealthier consumers. Last theory is the Populist Model theory where it conceived by anthropologist, identifies social groups, rather than classes, as a source for fashion inspiration. A social group, such as punks in 1970's London, for instance, may adopt a distinctive style and appearance shared throughout the group. In short terms, this theory is about "Streetstyle" Fashion.



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The researchers aimed to answer the following questions: a. What are the implications of tattoos and piercings in the LGBTQ community, b.) What are the significant symbols of tattoos and piercings in the LGBTQ community of La Union, c.) How is identity portrayed in the tattoos and piercings in the LGBTQ community of La Union.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

A phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon or happenings in their lives. This research is an approach to a qualitative research that currently focuses on a LGBTQ community with tattoos and piercings in their bodies. We also focus the meaning or stories behind that tattoos or piercings that are attached in their bodies.

2.2 Participants

The participants in our research are the LGBT members because our research mostly focused on the LGBTQ community

2.3 Data Gathering Instrument

The researchers will use the semi-structure interview which asks people in person to gather information or data and allow backup questions to the person whom we're interviewing if the answer is lacking information. It doesn't need any formal order or list in questioning someone that we may. The questions therefore were created in advance before the actual interview and backup questions to the main questions to fully understand the information the person who we're interviewing is trying to say or deliver.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

In gathering data, we will first ask the permission of our school director to be able to interview the people that we picked. Secondly, we would arrange or make the questions to ask, in our case, we have the semi structured interview

2.5 Analysis of Data

Coding

In qualitative research, Coding is a process of identifying a passage in the text or other data items (photograph, image), searching and identifying concepts and finding relations between them (Gibbs,2007). Therefore, coding is not just labelling; it is linking from the data to the idea and back to other data. This would help us know the reason and motivation of the person to possess their tattoo.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis is a data analysis plan that qualitative researchers use to generate themes from interview data. This data analysis plan is perfect for both novice and expert qualitative researchers because the steps are easy to follow but rigorous enough to generate meaningful findings from the data (Braun and Clarke 2013).This would help us know what type of tattoos does these people have.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Patton, 1999). In order for the research not to be biased, aside from interviews, we would take images and surveys to prove



3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Implications

a. Motivations

The LGBTQ were motivated in 2 ways: Their peers and their life experiences. They have been influenced by the ongoing trend of tattoos and because of their peers influence and their curiosity to feel what it is like to have a tattoo, they were tempted to do it. While the other half of those we have interviewed were influenced by their life experiences. We have found out that aside from expressing their love for a special someone or their freedom from a dying relationship, they use tattoos as a way to cover their scars literally. One has chosen the path as a tattoo artist abroad and in order to be accepted, they must have at least one tattoo.

b. Struggles and Responses

Tattooed LGBTQ members experience judgments and discrimination with negative responses from other people which makes them feel insecure about themselves and lose self-confidence. People who have tattoos sometimes have a hard time getting jobs because some jobs don't accept people with tattoos. Discrimination from the society affects the self-confidence of the people who have tattoos which gives them struggles on finding their place in the society. Despite all the negative responses, there are also positive feedbacks given from the society on how interesting the story of the tattoo is or on how creative it is. As the people part of the LGBTQ community who have tattoos hear these nice comments about them, they tend to believe in themselves more and gain more confidence.

3.2 Symbolism

a. Images and Characters

The tattoos of what we have gathered in San Fernando and Bacnotan La Union, were designs of a rose, a butterfly, a bird and some others such as letters and a combination of the rose and butterfly. The tattoos were all outlined using a black ink and some were filled with colours such as red and blue. The tattoos are all different in sizes, some were big and some were small. Most LGBTQ prefer to put their tattoos in their arms and for some in their legs, feet and their chests.

b. Location

Most LGBTQ members prefer to put their tattoos on their arms, legs or near their chest. They prefer this spots to be tattooed because when they have to cover it in formal situations, they can easily hide it by wearing pants or long sleeves shirt. Whenever they would want to show off their tattoo, they can easily wear something that will reveal their tattoo like off shoulders, skirts or sleeveless blouses. Another factor on why they choose to put their tattoos on the parts that are easy to cover is because some LGBTQ members are afraid of discrimination and judgement. The researchers have interviewed an LGBTQ member who wasn't accepted in his chosen work due to the location of his tattoo and because of this he considers the location of his tattoo to not be discriminated.

3.3 Identity

- a. Unique Features- Every Tattoo has its own unique feature. Especially since it will be embedded onto your skin permanently. The different tattoos being possessed has their own distinctive



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features as well and they vary from Big, Medium and Small. Tattoos come in different shapes, sizes, meanings and designs and each and every design comes with its own reason and meaning, which makes them special in its own way. No matter how small or big the tattoo is but the way that it is fixed onto your skin, the way it was designed as the pieces from your past, present or future is the unique feature it holds.

b. Similarities

The researchers found similarities on the tattoos we have gathered. Some of them took their tattoo just for fun and was inspired their peers to do so. The tattoos are colourful and very detailed to their design. Most of their tattoos are animals which has symbolism to their feelings. Every tattoo is detailed and is suited to the member's taste. Most of the tattoos we gathered are stories in their past experience for them to remember and cherish in the future.

4. CONCLUSIONS

LGBTQ members possess tattoo on their bodies due to four reasons: Peer pressure, curiosity, life changing experiences, and their chosen career. LGBTQ members that have tattoos and piercings show different styles and designs which represent their identities. Whether it's about their careers or past experiences they have decided to make it a permanent mark on their bodies. Some members had experience discrimination while others are fortunately receiving compliments from other people.

The researchers highly encourage the LGBTQ community to express themselves more and showcase their uniqueness in the field of body art. The researchers also encourage the Filipino People to acknowledge and accept the LGBTQ

community and their ways in expressing themselves due to the fact that these body art served as a platform for them to showcase their identity and uniqueness to our society

As a recommendation, the future researchers can broaden the research paper by exploring and interviewing different people outside of La Union to be able to gather more data and improve the research paper. The researchers could also interview people with a different ethnicity or explore on other genders like pansexual, queer , intersex, asexual.

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