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Tattooing as an Emotional Experience and a Personal Moment of Transformation: an Analytical Study Through the Hlynska Tattoo Method

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Abstract. *Tattoos have become much more than a decorative act, involving a person in a moment of power, in a sense – an emotional experience, a personal metamorphosis, something experienced on the level of one's identity, memory and personal transformation. This paper expands our understanding of tattooing from the perspective of the Hlynska Tattoo Method, based on its expert concept to help us understand tattoo as a highly technical as well as a personalized and experience-driven practice. The research considers tattooing as a multidimensional practice in which individuals commemorate episodes of significance in life their own experiences as well as evoke emotions in their lives through physical form on the body. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature, the paper investigates five intersecting dimensions: life transitions; symbolic meaning; relational trust; environmental atmosphere; and emotional imprint. Although existing studies may treat these dimensions as independent; the Hlynska Tattoo Method provides a unified architecture that links technical execution in practice with psychological and emotional results. And it shows tattooing is not just a matter of putting in a bit of ink, but guided transformation, a process that depends more on the narrative the client is telling in their own head than on the artist's methodology. The relationship between the artist and client plays a role, as does the controlled environment in and around the tattoo session. This analysis helps to improve our conceptualization of tattooing as a strategically planned way of being (experiential mode of experience): namely, a process where aesthetic strategy underlies emotional transition and self-integration.*

Keywords: tattooing, emotional experience, personal transformation, identity construction, self-expression, body modification, meaning-making, life transitions, trust in tattooing, client - artist relationship, embodied experience, emotional imprint, psychological healing, symbolic representation, atmosphere in tattoo practice

Introduction

In modern society, tattooing has changed from historically marginalized to an emerging and meaningful avenue of expression, identity creation and personal story [13; 14]. This shift is a reflection of this larger cultural process of remaking how people see their bodies - not just the bodies, but also the spaces where memory, feeling, transformation, may reside. With this in mind, tattooing takes this idea of externalizing your internal experience and attaching it to a permanent embodied state.

As noted in the literature, tattoos have become increasingly linked with significant life events including loss, healing, identity formation, and self-actualization [8; 15]. These times are not from

a time when nothing came along to fill it with an emotional urgency, and when it starts to be necessary to look for meaning in life. Tattoos are not only visual marks, but biographical ones, inscribing personal anecdotes deep inside of an individual's body.

In the current context where tattooing is being recognized as a meaningful practice, the existing literature has mostly focused on metaphor analysis, cultural considerations, or psychological factors. There is very little work around tattooing and all of its (and frequently fragmented) process of meaning making, making sense of and making meaning with it. This is also a significant gap, for tattooing is an embodied and relational behaviour that demands sensitivity, trust and the capability to utilize the senses. Due to this limitation, the current study focuses on the Hlynska Tattoo Method as its main analytic and conceptual technique.

This systematic, tiered approach, comprising a technical method and an experiential design approach, is elaborated on through professional practice. It emphasizes anatomical adaptation, regulated application and accuracy in addition to being part of a personalized plan, and also serves as the mechanism through which emotion, psychology and psychological experience are performed and negotiated. A tattooing, then, to this reasoning, works as a form of intentional change – it has the effect itself as a transformation; not just the final product – this process itself which encompasses every experience experienced.

It's during tattooing that you create personal meaning, establish trust, manage atmosphere, and leave an emotional imprint for the long term. Fusing the technical/psychosocial lens with these two perspectives and the more abstract approaches, this article contributes to a better understanding of tattooing as an active and purposeful practice, as an evolving process through it, rather than as just something that happens as the artist decides to decorate it.

Literature Review

So far the current academic literature on tattooing has transitioned away from the earlier perspective in which it was viewed as a form of deviant behavior towards understanding tattooing as a psychosocial and cultural phenomenon. The contemporary body of literature recognizes that tattooing is at the intersection of identity construction, emotive representation, and bodily experience, which gives its presence a higher value than mere artistic expression.

1. Tattoos as Identity Building and Meaning Taking.

In the literature, tattooing and identity formation is a recurring theme. Atli et al. (2022) describe tattooing as a popular style of expression, especially within the youth population, as tattoos are visible manifestations of internal standards and values [1]. The study found that tattoos are not symbolic, but rather instruments to build and negotiate meaning in the body (Dann and Callaghan, 2019). Roux and Belk (2019) draw a more specific parallel when they imagine a body as a 'heterotopic space', where 'the tattoo as textural image fulfills a function within that body that involves its transformation into a site that involves a complex network of layered, meaning making.

Similarly, Ifrach (2025) portrays tattooing as reclaiming identity reassertion and affirmation especially in transitional and healing contexts [8]. All of these perspectives point less towards tattooing as mere form, as it might have been in the old-fashioned sense, for the aesthetic purpose of beautifying the body, and much more towards embodied narrative construction in which meaning is endlessly interpreted and reinterpreted by the person who has tattooed.

At the same time, novelty has been identified as a psychological motive of tattooing behavior. Weiler et al. (2021) show that individuals with a high necessity for distinctiveness are known to have a higher tendency of engaging in body modification [20]. However, Clemmensen et al. (2025) challenge an entirely subjective approach by showing that tattoos have a strong societal and

cultural component and so the construction of identity through tattoos is both an individual and societal issue [4].

2. Tattooing and the Transition to a New Life.

An equally weighty theme is the nature of tattooing and major life markers. Tattoos are recognized as signifiers of change [15], and through them sometimes emotive content gets expressed, from loss to time of recovery, from growth. Similarly, McCandlish and Pearson (2023) articulate the way tattoos stand for mental health experiences, suggesting that tattooing can act as a coping mechanism as well as emotional expression [12].

Solano-Ruiz et al. (2025) make this point more powerful by recontextualising body modification as a site of reflexive self-engagement in which individuals reread events and experience life through the act of body modification [18]. What this research shows us is that tattooing is often “buried” in biographical watersheds in life which offer a tangible presence to otherwise abstractly emotional, even subjective, moments.

These studies highlight more generally that tattoo acquisition is not incidental as the timing of tattooing is not an accidental feature as discussed in some works. Still, tattoos get worn much more when emotions are at its peak, meaning that they are being made as more of a form of personal transition than just decoration to the outside world.

3. The emotional and psychological facets of tattooing.

All aspects of tattooing are known and accepted; the emotional aspects of this experience are beyond the bounds of any discipline. Carpentier (2023) through the art therapy lens also stresses the therapeutic potential, claiming tattooing offers a means for healing our emotional and self-integration issues [3]. This is in line with Weiler et al. (2025) body modification serves important psychological functions such as emotional regulation and identity stabilization [19].

Kıvanç Altunay et al. (2021) extend this discussion to psychodermatological dimensions, detailing that tattooing indicates intricate interplay between psychological states and bodily expression [9]. These results imply that mind and body are not sufficiently integrated to explain tattooing since emotional experiences are transformed into bodies and, with them, bodily functions.

Breivik et al. (2022) and Glans et al. (2024) investigate self-perceptions of tattooed body types and identify interrelationships of various personality characteristics with body modification [2; 7]. Although this work offers useful perspectives on behaviors, it reinforces the notion that tattooing is a multivariate process shaped both by internal dispositions and external contexts — a phenomenon which is also related to body image.

4. Cultural and Historical Contexts.

Tattooing was imbued with cultural and historical traditions. And it can be particularly difficult to interpret. Now the main task is to set a clear picture in human language: How come tattoos become this important culturally? Ghosh (2020) recognizes that tattooing is also the cultural heritage and historical link: not only this, but so too do we carry the cultural value of identity, status, and belonging.

In a similar vein Krutak & Deter-Wolf (2017) note that tattooing has evolved throughout the years among cultures and has been applied to the social or rituals aspect of life [10]. Taking this wider perspective, Lefebvre (2024) investigates traditional tattooing practices within Indigenous communities, as a part of healing and reconnecting in Indigenous communities [11]. It's not just about being alone with your tattooing.

The core value, on many levels is what makes people modernizing tattoo culture [16]. As such, tattooing is known both as something that people do for the sake of one another but also as

something with entrenched meaning across a culture and the collective carrying of meaning with the people within that culture.

5. Tattooing as Body and Experience.

Tattooing is deeply symbolic, mental and aesthetically significant, but has not come into much focus compared to the process itself. Roux and Belk (2019) highlight the embodied elements of tattooing, such as sensory, emotional and spatial participation in the process [17]. Related, this suggestion, implicit in several studies, highlights that relational dynamics are of high importance in a tattoo artist's and client's own work, particularly in the relationship between the artist and client.

This interaction is thus an important component of the construction of the meaning and perception of the tattoo (Dann and Callaghan, 2019; Ifrach, 2025) but is not usually used in specific analysis. Environmental variables such as the tattoo studio environment are similarly undervalued in the academic literature, but they affect emotional experience. That is still important, because the contexts we are in around tattooing can have huge impact not only over the visceral emotional responses, but also long term perspectives.

6. Synthesis and Research Gap.

When combined, these reviewed literature suggests tattooing as a multidimensional activity — one that intersects with identity, emotion, culture and embodiment. However, many studies are focused on individual dimensions leading to a discombobulating perspective of tattooing in isolation. For example, there is no coherent framework that links:

- the emotional importance of life events,
- the evolution of personal sense,
- the relational mechanics of trust,
- the impact of the environment,
- and leaving the most permanent impressions in people emotionally.

This discrepancy shows the need for organized methodologies integrating these into one system approach. To cope with this challenge, the study follows the Hlynska Tattoo Method, which defines a systematic design for measuring the relationship between technical tattooing practice and emotional and experiential results (See Table 1).

Table 1. Literature Review Synthesis

Author(s)	Key Focus	Relevance to Study
Atli et al. (2022)	Self-expression	Tattoos as identity communication
Dann & Callaghan (2019)	Meaning-making	Tattoos as narrative construction
Roux & Belk (2019)	Embodiment	Body as symbolic space
Ifrach (2025)	Identity & healing	Tattooing as transformation
Pankiv-Greene (2023)	Life transitions	Tattoos as emotional markers
McCandlish & Pearson (2023)	Mental health	Tattoos as coping tools
Carpentier (2023)	Art therapy	Emotional healing through tattooing
Weiler et al. (2025)	Psychological function	Emotional regulation

Kivanç Altunay et al. (2021)	Psychodermatology	Mind-body connection
Clemmensen et al. (2025)	Cultural influence	Social shaping of tattooing
Ghosh (2020)	Cultural heritage	Historical significance
Krutak & Deter-Wolf (2017)	Anthropology	Tattooing across cultures
Lefebvre (2024)	Indigenous practices	Healing and reconnection
Rees (2021)	Authenticity	Personal meaning in modern tattooing
Owens et al. (2023)	Social perception	Shift from deviance to acceptance

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative analytical synthesis methodology, which involves a reference to interdisciplinary literature and focuses on the Hlynska Tattoo Method as the framework of the author's research. This approach is conceptual and interpretive by nature, and it should serve as a synthesis for the psychological, sociological, and cultural perspectives towards tattooing in the sense of a single concept of tattooing as an emotive and life changing process.

Hlynska Tattoo Method is a specific system that is methodically layered. It includes a great deal of technical precision and experiential design methods. Underlying principle: This method considers a large number of related principles: anatomical adaptation (which requires detailed mapping of skin tension), the application of a layered pigment, this makes room for calculated gradients and long-term stability of aesthetics, and personalized design planning that ensures the design resonates with the client's body, narrative and aesthetic aims.

This new approach is process-driven rather than impactful (as with the visible effect of a tattoo, which only has some of its elements around it for visual display), the process of tattooing is not just about an external representation and therefore has effect on the client's emotional experience, but also the way of thought on how to engage them, and compared to the process in classic ink painting which emphasizes the visual aspects of it the method would be to develop more of an intention-based process on what the effect would look like by how the tattoo was done.

This paper analytically applies the Hlynska Tattoo Method to five layers related to experience specifically the alignment to significant events in life, personal meaning construction, trust building between the artist and the client, the regulation of environmental and atmospheric situations, and long-term emotional imprint creation (See Figure 1). These dimensions serve as analytic parameters by which the literature is systematically analyzed.

Comparative thematic investigation for over fifteen sources was conducted using the reference list for their contribution to tattooing on the five dimensions. The Hlynska Tattoo Method is employed as an integrative analytical perspective allowing for the synthesis of separate evidence to be integrated into one structure (See Table 2).

Results

Findings

Considering this idea through the framework of the Hlynska Tattoo Method, tattooing comes to be perceived as a systematically planned emotional process and performance is to be understood with the experience being integrated into it. The results clearly illustrate how every type of method affects the depth, clarity, and longevity of the tattoo as a visual and psychological object.

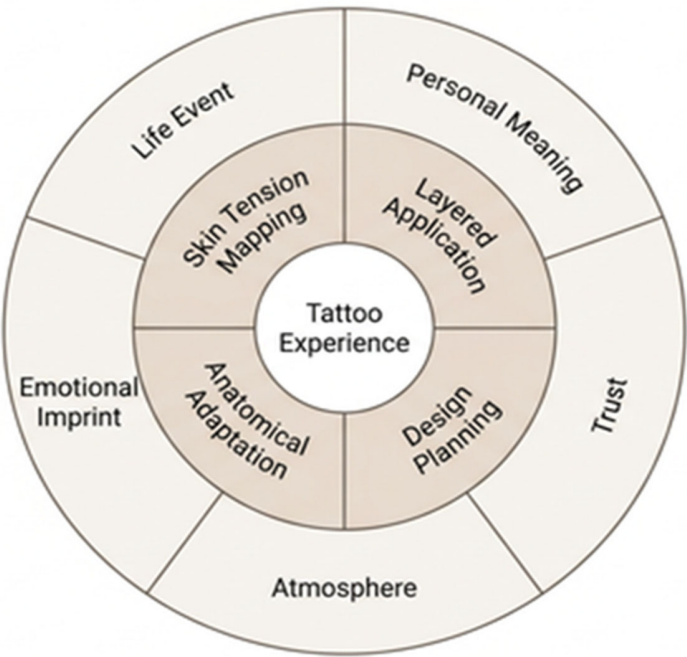


Figure 1. Hlynska Tattoo Method Framework

Table 2. Hlynska Tattoo Method Components

Component	Description	Impact on Experience
Skin Tension Mapping	Adapting tattoo to skin mechanics	Improves precision and comfort
Layered Application	Controlled pigment building	Enhances longevity and depth
Design Personalization	Custom design per client narrative	Strengthens personal meaning
Anatomical Adaptation	Alignment with body structure	Improves visual harmony
Process Structuring	Step-by-step execution	Reduces stress and uncertainty

1. *Life-Event Alignment through Structured Design Planning.* The emphasis on creating tailor-made design schedules helps to guarantee the tattoo is congruent with pivotal life milestones. Unlike conventional strategies which primarily focus on form, the Hlynska Method provides narrative consultation to make sure that the tattoo represents a moment in the time of the person’s life (or at least a change in their identity). Building further on this premise, Pankiv-Greene (2023) and Ifrach (2025) have been found to have some tattoos in socially intense subjects, and the findings are reinforced further by how structural methodology also ensures even wider alignment of psychological and social experiences [8; 15].

2. *Reinforcement of Personal Meaning through Layered Conceptualization.* The multilayered design and use of the method, both, favor more symbolic integration. Meaning is not taken as

something ephemeral, but rather is created incrementally, in conversation with visual presentation, anatomy and even, ultimately, longevity. This is in addition to substantiating the literature from within this regard arguing that tattoos can be tools for construction of identity [1; 5], and further emphasizing that meanings can be established purposefully through methodological rigour (See Figure 2).

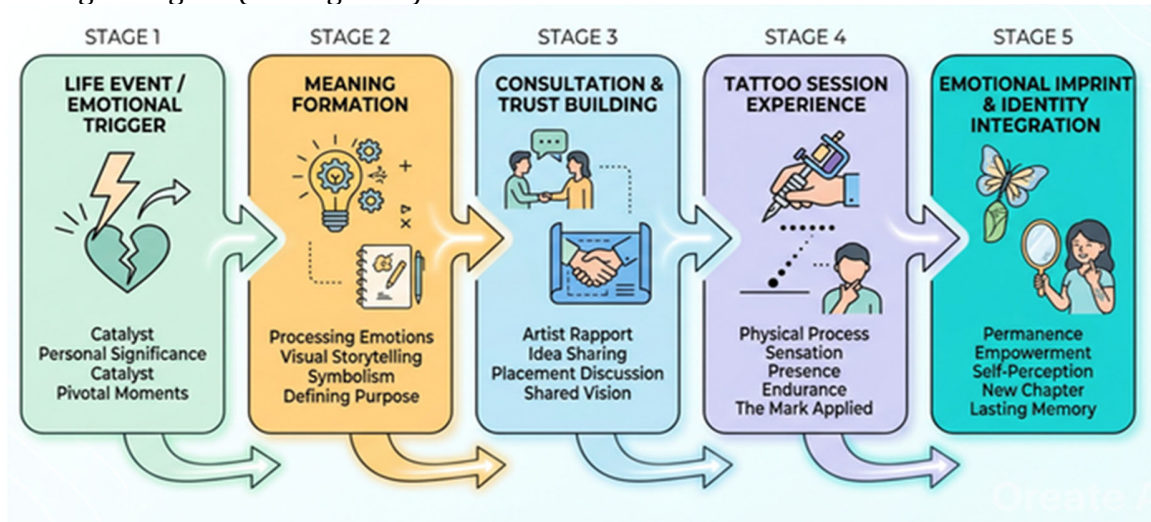


Figure 2. Tattooing as a Transformational Process

3. *Trust as a Structured and Managed Variable.* One of the most important results for the Hlynska Method is that trust, which can often be thought of as an underlying factor of relations, is developed in the Hlynska Method as trust that is systematically built up. The strategy minimizes uncertainty while maximizing the client's sense of safety by clearly stating the procedures, explaining each step of the process and keeping everything in the right conditions. This is in line with the relational dynamic described in prior research [17], but contributes to this field by placing trust within an operational realm of tattooing, as opposed to an extrinsic variable of the process.

4. *Atmosphere as a Controlled Experiential Condition.* Environmental and atmospheric regulation are also included in the tattooing process as a way to do it. Everything from pacing and sensory conditions to communication is purposeful to help stabilize the client's emotional base. It is revealed that atmosphere is a significant contributor to pain, stress and general satisfaction, thereby confirming its position as an important but poorly theorized predictor.

5. *Emotional Imprint and Long-Term Perception.* Last, the Hlynska Method is used to demonstrate that the emotion of tattooing is derived from more than the symbolic implications, and also indicates the way the tattoo is made. The technical concern along with the relational trust and the controlled space creates lasting emotional impacts, a contributing factor to studies of tattooing as an emotional processing and memory anchoring process [3; 12].

Wider implications – more generally, these findings show that tattooing, when practised systematically is an intentional form of emotional expression. Transformation through tattooing process and outcome is integral to personal transformation (See Table 3).

Table 3. Experiential Dimensions of Tattooing

Dimension	Description	Outcome
Life Event	Tattoo linked to key moment	Emotional significance
Personal Meaning	Symbolic interpretation	Identity construction
Trust	Relationship with artist	Psychological safety

Atmosphere	Studio environment	Emotional regulation
Emotional Imprint	Long-term perception	Lasting psychological impact

Discussion

The findings of this research support a significant conceptualization of tattooing as a deliberate affective and transformative experience as opposed to an intuitive or merely aesthetic endeavor. When examined through the lens of the Hlynska Tattoo Method, we can notice that the emotional and psychological effects of tattooing emerge not through chance but rather through design and practice considerations heavily influenced by practice.

This approach is aligned with, but offers new developments on, the literature by providing a processual, interpretive description of tattooing. A point of convergence with previous research is the role of tattooing in marking important life transitions. The results illustrate that tattooing is commonly utilised to signify emotional occasions like bereavement, healing or a transition of identity [8; 15].

Although the relationships between tattoos and healing are covered more and more informally by the literature, the Hlynska Tattoo Method illustrates the potential of intentional management through systematic design plans. This is a new dimension of meaning of the literature in that it means that tattoos and life experience are not only reflective but are constructed through method. And it also is backed up by literature and results well, the importance of personalized meaning.

Tattoos have been found in research to be tools for identity construction and symbolic communication [1; 5]; tattoos can be seen as part of the process of a symbolic practice. These results build upon these observations, which indicated that meaning is not simply an outcome of the interplay between design, placement and execution rather than fixed at the conceptual level. In the Hlynska Method, layered meaning is iterative, developing the legibility and significance of the tattoo over a period of time.

To Roux and Belk (2019), who described the body as a living site of meaning [17], this deepens technical complexity in making meaning and supports the body's view as a living site of meaning. The significant contribution of this study is to revise trust as a structured aspect of the procedure of tattooing. The relational aspect of tattooing has been acknowledged in past studies [5; 8], nonetheless, a bias toward minimizing the influence of trust is frequently reported.

These findings contradict this assumption as it suggests that trust can be established and maintained on an organized and consistent basis, with clear communication, procedural transparency and consistent execution. It shifts the view of trust from a relational trait in general to the predictable operational variable it is, and fundamentally changes the nature of tattooing itself. Atmosphere extends this process-oriented perspective even more.

A lot of the scholars have ignored environmental and contextual factors that clearly play a great role in an experiential practice. The analysis concluded that atmosphere — from sensory conditions to pacing to interpersonal dynamics — was key to the emotional experience of the client involved in the tattooing process. It was found that the introduction of atmospheric control to the Hlynska Tattoo Method regulated the emotional experience actively as opposed to passively (See Figure 3). This links with models of embodied experience more generally while articulating a useful framework to use when tattooing.

Another key aspect that is also addressed is the emotional imprint that is far more than just the emotional value of the tattoo as a whole. The therapeutic and psychological aspects related to the process of tattooing [3; 12; 19] and related, it has been emphasized in the preceding research

as beneficial but with the conclusion being as influential on emotional perception, especially if they are considered in the long run than the symbolism attached to the tattoo.

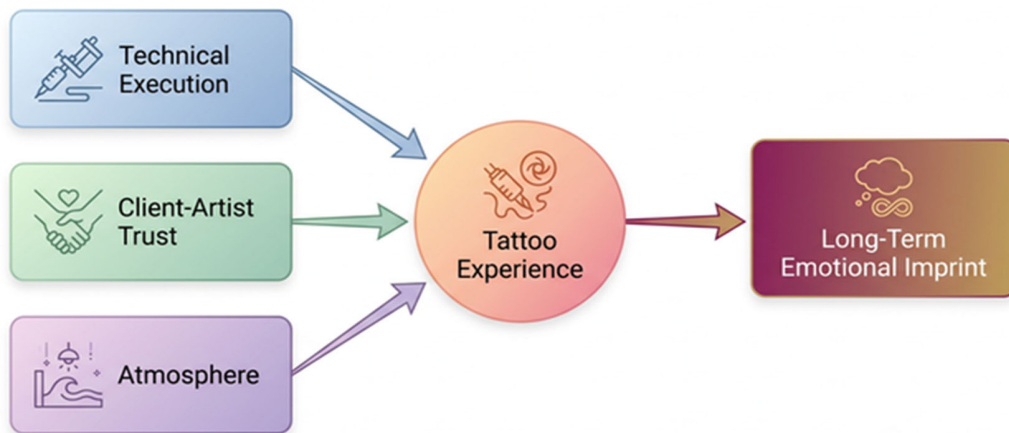


Figure 3. Emotional Imprint Model

So tattoo is not only a reflection of past experience that is shaped by the circumstances of the tattooing process. Thus, the emotional significance of tattoos is co-produced as a piece of symbolic content and an experiential context. The findings underscore the importance of integrating newly obtained skin into a larger tapestry rather than a piecemeal approach to what is a patchwork of tattoo research.

Yet, while existing research focuses on identity and the emotional and cultural aspects of the work, rarely does this intertwine into a holistic body of knowledge. This research responds to this need by developing the Hlynska Tattoo Method, a method capable of connecting technical application with emotional and psychological ends, uniting artistic output and its lived reality.

The study, alongside contextualization, contributes to the description of tattooing as both visual practice and emotional metamorphosis, which it does in a more sophisticated view of a multidimensionality of what we term a profession. It is a repositioning that would view tattooing not merely as one of an aesthetic intervention — but rather a continuing process of transforming ourselves as people through meaningful and embodied practice.

Lastly, the conversation demonstrates that tattooing - where the method offers us a structured, methodical framework to work within - is an emotional experience in design, a craft, an artistry in all its process in which meaning, trust and psychology are constructed along the way.

Author Contribution.

This means that the Hlynska Tattoo Method represents a new merging of the art and the psychological realm, offering universal connections that unite:

- design,
- process,
- emotion,
- and identity.

This contribution, being one of the first in the field to find the interplay here between qualitative and quantitative approaches that go beyond mere technological processes - a practice that can directly affect the transformative power of tattooing itself - contributes to advancing the field.

Conclusions

This investigation redefines tattooing as a well-defined experience of both the emotional and the lifelong, and transforming rather than merely a decorative behavior. Utilizing evidence from cross-discipline literature and the author-developed Hlynska Tattoo Method, the paper shows that tattooing is a multi-tiered process of interrelated personal meaning, transitions in life, trust/relationship, environmental influence, and long-term emotional experiences.

The results support the idea that tattoos most frequently form, in times of life's transformation, and act as embodied marks of personal stories [8; 15]. However, at the same time, the meanings of designs are not static but constantly being designed, deployed, and interpreted as a form of interaction [1; 5].

By putting a structured method in place, this work shows that emotional results are not incidental, but can be actively influenced by controlling the technical quality with care in order to create relationships.

The Hlynska Tattoo Method provides a new model that connects the practice of tattoos and psychological sensation. It frames the tattoo artist as an agent of change, a facilitator of a transformational relationship forged in trust, in the atmosphere and process design that has no less direct impact on the client's perception and emotional content. Tattooing should, therefore, be viewed as a purposeful journey not just to create what we want or need, but to understand at the same time who we are by creating it.

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