

The art of tattooing as a form of creative writing

Kyriakopoulou Olyvia

PhD, Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Western Macedonia, Greece
olyviaky@gmail.com

Kotopoulos Triantafyllos

Professor in Creative Writing and Greek Literature, Univ. of Western Macedonia, Greece
tkotopou@uowm.gr

Abstract

The act of tattooing can be considered as a reflective and expressive creative process, which refers to creative writing (CW). Here, we attempt to connect tattooing with creative writing, focusing on the common elements that exist between them. Two investigations take place: one concerns the investigation of the role of tattooing in defining a person's identity, and the second investigates the role of tattooing in the self-healing of individuals who have experienced a traumatic experience. In the first, ten people who have tattoos participate and answer semi-structured research questions, while in the second, specialist psychologists participate, who, through open interviews, convey the lived experiences of six of their "patients" with trauma management problems. Research findings confirm the connection between tattooing and creative writing, understood as a reflective and expressive creative process of externalizing one's interiority with positive results for the same.

Keywords: Tattooing, Body Modification, Creative Writing, Identity, Self-Healing

Introduction

Tattooing as a modern phenomenon

Tattooing has been present in almost every culture for centuries (Greif et al., 1999). Historically, it has been a practice intended for the socially privileged, serving as a cultural indicator, perceived as art, utilized as a means of self-expression, or used as proof of masculinity and power for men, and femininity and fertility for women. It has also been considered a sign of mental instability, deviant and criminal behavior, and finally, as a symbol of resistance for marginalized members of society (Atkinson, 2003; Chinchilla, 2005; Mifflin, 2013;).

The process of tattooing involves the insertion of colored ink substances into the skin and requires: 1. the skin, 2. an image or design or text, and 3. a tattoo artist (Samyuktha et al., 2018). It is a permanent mark on the skin from a needle that pierces the epidermis and injects ink spots into the second layer of the skin (Santos & Villafranca, 2019). Tattoos are considered works of art on human skin, just as paintings are on canvas (Ocampo & Castronuevo, 2016).

Until the mid-20th century, tattooing was considered a deviant activity and tattooed individuals were stigmatized at high rates. In the second half of the century, the desire of minority groups to test the boundaries of society led to the spread of tattooing practice. Members of these groups recognized skin marking with ink as a form of collective assertion of an independent and strong identity. They began to use the tattooing practice to surpass conventional cultural boundaries and to project an "us against them" ideology (Sanders, 2007).

The widespread practice of tattooing constitutes a cultural phenomenon that has surpassed cultural, national, and gender boundaries, and has redefined society's view on deviation (Koust, 2006; Mifflin, 2013). Chronologically, it coincided with the emergence of New Social Movements for feminism, environment, peace, and LGBTQ rights, with the need to claim a new way of life (Fisher, 2002). These movements opposed strict rules of mass fashion and behavior and revolted in favor of tolerance and acceptance of individual

uniqueness. In this ideological framework, tattooing served the right of individuals to self-determine and express their distinct identity (Featherstone, 2000).

According to Sanders (2007), within consumer culture, tattooing establishes the wearer's social identity and reflects their effort to mark and transform their body into a dialectical product (MacCormack, 2006). The popularity of tattooing and its integration into mainstream fashion has erased its boundaries with art and served the practice of self-expression (Beeler, 2006; Kienlen, 2005; Pitts, 2003). It is widely perceived today that "the body is a canvas" and "tattooing is a work of art" that satisfies the human need to creatively extend and expose themselves (Koust, 2006). Tattooing, once synonymous with marginalization and criminality, is now considered a popular product of dominant fashion and a tool for creative and therapeutic expression (Kluger, 2015; Sanders, 2007).

The internal dimension of externalized tattooing

The impact of tattooing mainly concerns the choice of design and how it reflects individuality. Engraved images, designs or texts on the skin are signified in various ways, as they reflect different states of mind (Hebb, 1968). The skin then becomes a mirror of emotions, identities, and thoughts. From a psychiatric and psychological perspective, it reveals the individual's inner state. The resort to tattooing is related to personal situations, experiences, people and events, with the "materialization" of spirituality, cultivating a sense of wholeness through the provocation of physical pain. This pain releases suppressed memories, tensions, conflicts, and makes them visible through representation and exposure (McCosker, 2005).

Tattooing, a dialectical snapshot of an individual's inner world that satisfies the desire to control unconscious states or to terminate unconscious conflicts within oneself (Karacaoglan, 2012). It functions as a defense against anxiety, as an enhancement of self-awareness, and as a reinforcement of identity. Tattooing is a combination of cosmic and spiritual writing on the skin (Hewitt, 1997) that is elevated into a material form of self-expression, emotional release, and internal trauma healing (Can et al., 2020). It is a reflection of the cycles of life, the loss of loved ones, desires, or fears for the future, an attempt to keep the memory alive and express intense emotions in a more visible, tangible way (Armstrong & McConnell, 1994a; Armstrong & McConnell, 1994b).

Tiggemann and Hopkins (2011) demonstrated through research that tattooing is a means of achieving self-differentiation and represents a bodily expression of uniqueness. A tattoo can serve as an intermediary for attracting the attention of others, thus reinforcing, projecting, and confirming one's identity (Swami, 2011). In the same vein, Dickson and colleagues (2015) argue that tattoos serve a symbolic function of signification, which is an integral part of the identity development process for adults, while placing great importance on the inherent human tendency to adorn their bodies with bodily, artistic interventions.

Recent studies link tattooing with individuals who want to express their sexual orientations (Taylor et al., 2021), with sexually active women and intersex individuals (Nowosielski et al., 2021; Ragmanauskaite et al., 2020), with women who have a history of sexual abuse (Kluger, 2015), with individuals addicted to the sound of the tattoo machine or the pain (Johnson, 2007, Stirn et al., 2011;), with those who desire to aesthetically decorate their bodies without introspection, and with individuals conforming to the dictates of dominant fashion (Kierstein & Kjelskau, 2015). Additionally, tattoos are utilized as a means of concealing scars or deformities resulting from illnesses and accidents, mainly to expedite emotional healing (Farhadi et al., 2006, Osborn & Cohen, 2018; Reid-de Jong & Bruce, 2020; Yeates et al., 2018;).

Significant motives for getting a tattoo include the internal desire for self-expression, the declaration of bonds with important people and things, the connection with ideologies, the reminder of events-things-people, the highlighting of an aspect of personality, the achievement of self-determination, the sharing of inspirations, the aesthetic symbolism, the

reference to significant events in life, the management of emotions, the acceptance of significant loss, self-healing, and the cultivation of a sense of identity (Dickson et al., 2015; Forbes, 2001, Littell, 2003; Naudé et al., 2017; Shelton & Peters, 2006; Tiggemann & Golder, 2006;). There are also those who point out that the decision to get a tattoo is "random" or the result of peer pressure or a "wrong impulse" (Naudé et al., 2017), which, however, is not consistent with the conclusions of individual psychology that tattooing is an integral and significant part of a person's personality who resorts to it (Adler, 2012). According to Littell (2003), even if someone got a tattoo randomly, they would gradually give it personal significance.

The functions of tattooing

Tattooing is a means of recording significant moments in a person's life and creating visual maps of them (Dickson et al., 2015; Kosut, 2000 Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005;). It functions as an indirect and continuous memory of loved ones, beliefs, and goals, providing a sense of uniqueness and "distinctiveness" (Littell, 2003 ,Tiggemann & Golder, 2006;). It acts as a strengthener for those who are psychologically and physically traumatized, as it improves their self-esteem, autonomy, and self-confidence (Kosut, 2000, Mun et al., 2012;). It contributes to the formation or dissolution of bonds, the attraction or repulsion of people, the cultivation of a sense of security, and the release from situations of manipulation and limited verbal or emotional extroversion (Littell, 2003 Mun et al.,2012;).

Tattoos, by nature, create meanings for both oneself and others (Dickson et al., 2015; Littell, 2003, Tokarski, 2017;), to the extent that they influence an individual's self-understanding (Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005). The potential significances of a tattoo are multiple and determined by the observer's perspective and the position of the observed (Kosut, 2000). Each introspective or extrospective tattoo symbolizes what it addresses to oneself or others, transforming any thought, desire, or emotion, no matter how abstract, into a symbol, point, or image. Each symbolization aims at self-awareness, self-consciousness, and self-understanding of the individual, as well as at opening oneself to others (Dickson et al., 2015; Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005 , Tokarski, 2017;).

Tattooing provides a powerful means of communication to humans, not only in its visual form, but also in its verbal form, as it potentially leads to dialectical interactions (Naudé et al., 2017; Kosut, 2000). The viewer of a tattoo can experience pleasure or disgust, may feel the need to speculate, reflect, ask and learn. This process presupposes the initiation of a revealing dialogue (Wymann, 2010). Reflective narratives then take place from the self to the outside and to the inside, and on the other hand, interpretive narratives from others. Both are equally important for personal self-development (Kosut, 2000).

If it is considered that the self is determined by a continuous process of constructing personal narratives (Alcina, 2009), tattoos as a result of the composition of personal experiences, thoughts, and emotions, become an integral part of it. The narratives of the tattoos connect and signify moments of life and aspects of the self, in order to communicate them in every direction (Oksanen & Turtiainen, 2005). Since images "speak" eloquently and narrate the stories hidden behind them (Kosut, 2000), tattoos conceal personal narratives that must be deciphered and read. Perhaps these narratives are the real motivation for those who get tattoos (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010).

Every tattoo becomes a narrative tool in the hands of the individual, in order to penetrate the depths of their life and transform it into a meaningful 'text.' Like an illustrated page of the book of life, it guides the mind and body, unlocking the processes of memory, unraveling experiences, and restoring disturbed inner balance. The tattoo captures the viewer's imagination, inviting them to explore the motives and 'read' the narratives that are revealed before them (Sarnecki, 2001). In the narration of tattooing, the interaction of the mind and body, the conscious and the unconscious, takes place, which is both reciprocal and bilateral.

Through this, it is confirmed that tattoos have meaning and attempt important narratives, which are intended to be communicated, read, and understood.

Creative writing as an outwardly expressive process

Based on definitions of creativity (Carter, 2006; Cropley, 2001; Dawson, 2005; Prentice, 2000), writing that goes beyond conventional thinking, reshapes established empirical patterns, produces valuable results, creates new rules, solves problems, and activates and utilizes imagination can be considered creative. Its derivatives represent a unique expression of each individual, are original, innovative, and evolving (Kotopoulos et al., 2014). A crucial aspect of creative writing (CW) is its uniqueness, i.e., one's ability to create their own distinct symbols of experience and their own distinct symbolism. In this context, individuals utilize written language to symbolize and signify their unique experiences (Dawson, 2005).

The term CW refers to any form of writing that is original, unconventional, or expressive (Dawson, 2005), through which an individual expresses their thoughts and emotions in their own words. Therefore, it is incorrect to associate CW exclusively with literature or to expect it to produce only literary works (Kotopoulos, 2017). The product of CW is self-expressive and not imitative, as it reflects the uniqueness of the personal experience of the non-conformist and sensitized individual (Kotopoulos & Panagiotidis, 2013). From the perspective of the creative writer, the individual discovers and reveals themselves and communicates with both themselves and potential readers, whether expressed on paper, canvas, or in human flesh.

The prerequisite of CW is the cultivation or acquisition of perception, organization, and expression skills of thoughts and emotions through signs, in all directions. These have a liberating effect on the individual and confirm the "egocentric" character of CW (Dawson, 2005). The process of CW flows from the "self" and is directed towards the self and others. Therefore, it is self-referential. For its success, the utilization of multiple literary styles and the practice of communication, activation of the conscious and unconscious, the combination of critical thinking and creative imagination are necessary (Ramet, 2011).

Self-expressive CW is therapeutic as it facilitates emotional release in favor of psycho-emotional empowerment. The self-healing benefits do not arise so much from the result, as from the process itself (Morley, 2007). The more liberated the latter is, the more effectively its expected goals are achieved, and the more benefits are gained for the individual (Morley, 2007; Rodari, 2003). The impact of self-expressive CW is liberating for the individual, regardless of whether it is practiced systematically or not (Karagiannis, 2010, Karakitsios, 2012; Kotopoulos & Vakali, 2019; Kotopoulos, 2012a;).

The creative writer traverses myth and imagination to the benefit of logic and experience. They enrich and "open up" new horizons, making them available to the reader. Each creative text is also a creative reading that allows interaction with oneself and others (Kalogirou, 2004 Kotopoulos, 2013;). Cognitive scientists note that creative writing and reading stimulates the brain to give meaning to words and symbols, interpret them based on unique knowledge, and compose them based on personal experience, creating a text open to alternative narratives and readings (Papantonakis & Kotopoulos, 2011).

Tattooing as creative writing

The art of tattooing allows the individual to creatively describe, re-approach, and rearrange their personal stories. Experiences and knowledge, causes and effects, assumptions and certainties, reflections and solutions, conclusions and evaluations are combined in the produced tattoo in the form of specific or abstract words, marks, or symbols. The invention, composition/etching, and reading of a tattooing require the activation of the individual's creativity, either as the writer or as the reader. This is because, on the one hand, it presupposes the specification of personal information and their utilization as constitutive

elements of the personal narrative that will be visualized, and on the other hand, it involves the retelling and familiarization of foreign stories (Kotopoulos et al., 2014).

The engraving of words or symbols on the body functions liberatingly in terms of their meaning, as it involves their (re)creative approach through the establishment of multiple relationships between the signifier and the signified. The person with a tattoo utilizes visual elements to mobilize and activate their mental and associative processes. Creative tattooing, which excludes strict rules or patterns, involves the visualization of personal narratives, detached from the actual or imaginary events that led to the engraving, and disconnected from the respective communicative conditions.

Creative tattooing is based on a lived experience and is available for observation and understanding. The person wearing the tattoo creates by writing/engraving in order to communicate and expose their personal narrative to alternative interpretations. Tattooing satisfies the need for self-expression through an exhibition-display that takes on the dimensions of a unique "philanagnosis." It is a creative habit that promotes communication and constructive interaction. From this perspective, it is not an exaggeration to argue that creative tattooing also contributes to the realization of a kind of social literacy. The writer "speaks" to himself and "communicates" with the viewer/reader, as long as he interprets it. The closer the second's interpretive "arbitrariness" is to the real meaning of the first's personal narrative, the closer it can be found (Papantonakis & Kotopoulos, 2011).

Tattooing as a cultural practice redistributes the balances of power and allows all voices to be heard, whether they are internal or external, familiar or foreign. It introduces a form of informal textual democracy, where everyone, regardless of their educational background, social status, or linguistic abilities, can externalize their personal narrative, whether it is a thought, a desire, a memory, abstract or latent. Anything an individual may "lose" due to their abilities, skills, temperament, or opportunities on a social or personal level, can be "gained" through the creative art of tattooing (Kotopoulos, 2012 Kotopoulos & Panagiotidis, 2013;).

The self-healing dimension of tattooing

Tattooing involves the ideas, experiences, and expressions of the "author," the act of craftsmanship, and introspection. It can be used as a form of self-healing practice that is not prescribed or recommended by mental health professionals but activates the individual to "speak" for themselves, to share the experiences that define them. The freedom that governs the act of tattooing allows for the unrestricted sharing of autobiographical narratives (Raw et al. 2012, Van Goidsenho-ven & Masschelein, 2017;). In the practice of tattooing, therapeutic motives are combined with creative and artistic outcomes, and this may be why it is so popular.

Creative tattooing springs from the "soul" (Chavis, 2011), the "inner self-image" (Thompson, 2011), the "senses" (Bolton, 1999), the "heart" (Moss, 2012), and the "memory" (Turner-Vesselago, 2013). Its purpose is to express the self (Swinnen, 2019), to open a "window" to the soul, to externalize personal truths, and to chart a course of self-discovery (Bolton et al., 2006). Based on Ena Illoz's analysis (2008), tattooing is revitalized in a crossing of self-healing, self-help, and autobiography, in a combination of popular/mass psychology and dominant mass cultural product. It introduces a new language, a new interpretive framework, an alternative externalization, and "reading" of the self (Illoz, 2008). It embodies a creative and evolving production and consumption of narratives that fall into mass fashion and serve therapeutic purposes (Illoz, 2008).

Tattooing as an art and as self-healing, although they have different qualitative characteristics, are not mutually exclusive. Engraving a story for narrative and (self) therapeutic purposes clarifies the individual's image of themselves, helps them accept it, and communicate it to others. The design of a tattoo presupposes the composition of verbal and pictorial elements through a long, arduous, and laborious process of self-reflection-

extroversion. It is a cyclical process where the individual "works" with themselves to achieve the product that communicates elements of their inner self to the outside world (Bolton, 2011).

The phenomenon of the commercial "explosion" of tattooing today raises questions about how much it represents creativity and authenticity of personal "voice". To what extent does it meet the requirements to be considered a form of Creative Writing (CW). In this context, there is a sense of caution regarding overcoming narrative spontaneity by narrative automation. Goldsmith's (2011) accusation that commercial tattoos are identified with forms of CW that concern copying and appropriation strategies, rather than original storytelling and expression, is rebutted by the fact that tattooing activates, to a greater or lesser extent, creativity. Any process of composing terms, concepts, words or phrases, symbols, signs or images is internal, even if it is mobilized by external stimuli, such as mass fashion (Wandor, 2008).

The process of producing a tattoo involves the composition, assembly, rearrangement, and projection of information, the selection and classification of elements, without always requiring the creation of a new writing material from scratch (Dworkin, 2011). The appropriation of words and images from available materials, although it allows for equating creative tattooing with "commercial" writing, actually entails activating a creative process of adaptation to a psychoemotional or mental state. In available materials, the elements are "empty or meaningless." They are only given significance when they start to mean something to someone. Thus, tattooing confirms that it signifies when it corresponds to thoughts, emotions, and experiences (Doane, 2007).

Methodology

Within the context of this study, two qualitative research studies were conducted to discover and interpret the motivations and meanings behind individuals' decisions to get tattoos. The qualitative research design was deemed the most appropriate for expressing the thoughts and emotions of the participants and for understanding the practice of tattooing not only as a social phenomenon but also as a form of creative writing with psychological benefits. The findings were interpreted through reflective analysis of the narrative data collected throughout the research process (Carspecken, 1996).

In order to understand what questions should be asked and what is the best way to approach the participants in the research, the first interviews had a pilot character in order to explore the possible difficulties and challenges related to the research question.

The data collection was conducted through electronic platform interviews (via zoom and skype). It was accompanied by recording and sound recording, while notes were taken. In the first study, semi-structured individual interviews with predetermined open-ended questions were used, and in the second, open interviews were conducted. The design of the tools was based on relevant literature, and their selection was based on the possibility of delving into the psycho-emotional and intellectual state of the interviewees. The interview process was primarily flexible. The researcher adapted and modified the questions where she deemed it appropriate for the best effectiveness of the process, while she was in direct communication and free and unimpeded interaction with the participants.

In both qualitative studies, sampling was purposive and did not aim for generalization to the population. The sampling strategy was convenient, and individuals who declared themselves immediately available were selected to save time and effort. The significance of the results lies in the fact that, although they do not represent the population, they can be used as indicative of the main and specific assumptions of the study. The first study involved individuals with tattoos, and the second involved psychologists who worked with "patients" with psychological trauma, who underwent tattooing for self-healing reasons. (At the end of this section, the summary tables of the participants in the two studies are presented).

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher obtained consent from the participants, informed them about the purpose and objectives of the research, her identity, the selection criteria, and the audio/video recording, while emphasizing her commitment to confidentiality and anonymity principles. Following the process, a detailed analysis of the findings was carried out using the content analysis/thematic analysis method. This contributed to the qualitative organization of the data that emerged from the individual interviews and served as a kind of technique for drawing conclusions that were classified based on the central theme.

The data analysis process was organized as follows: the participants' responses were collected in an electronic file, transcription and enrichment of notes were done, themes were organized, responses were categorized, extraneous elements were eliminated, and those related to the research objectives were highlighted. Before the final integration of the conclusions with the findings of the theoretical review, the researcher recorded the results and drew conclusions.

The validity and reliability of the research were ensured by adhering to a strict timeline and common conditions for all participants, by carefully selecting the research method, sample, and tool, by carefully preparing the Interview Guide, by the objectivity of the material analysis, by the flexibility of the process, and by protecting anonymity, personal data, and responses. The limitation of the first study is that the sample of participants does not cover a wide range of ages, genders, ethnicities, and social backgrounds, that geographical representation was not ensured, and that the categorization of participants into social "differences" was not foreseen. As for the second study, the findings cannot be entirely reliable and/or generalizable since they arise from the interpretations of the participants who are influenced by their personal and professional perceptions. The small number of participants and the deliberate sampling method that led to a homogeneous sample (6) of female psychologists and corresponding (6) female "patients" with psychological trauma are also limiting.

Table 1: Participants in the research with tattooing

| Serial number | Sex | Age | Profession | Number of tattoos | Year of 1 ST tattoo |
|---------------|-----|-----|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | F | 25 | Private employee | 60 | 16 |
| 2 | M | 42 | Freelance | 15 | 17 |
| 3 | F | 24 | Unemployed-Graduate FineArts | 5 | 18 |
| 4 | F | 37 | Fashion designer | 18 | 20 |
| 5 | F | 21 | Student | 2 | 17 |
| 6 | F | 25 | Student | 2 | 22 |
| 7 | M | 27 | Chef | 4 | 19 |
| 8 | F | 46 | Tattoo studio manager | 10 | 18 |
| 9 | M | 21 | Tattoo artist (private employee) | 7 | 18 |
| 10 | F | 41 | Private employee | 5 | 35 |

Table 2: Research participants with psychologists

| Participant | Specialty | Age | Patient | Type of injury |
|-------------|--------------|-----|---------|--------------------------|
| 1 | Psychologist | 48 | K. | Personal loss/expulsion |
| 2 | Psychologist | 54 | E. | Physical-emotional abuse |
| 3 | Psychologist | 53 | T. | Personal loss/expulsion |
| 4 | Psychologist | 49 | S. | Paternal autocracy |
| 5 | Psychologist | 52 | A. | Rape |
| 6 | Psychologist | 47 | D. | Sexual assault-rape |

Results

The first study was based on the theoretical claim that tattooing is part of a process of constructing the individual's interiority and its externalization. From the participants' responses, it was proven that tattoos function as crucial tools for self-awareness and self-understanding, as mechanisms for writing and copying the variable and pluralistic everyday life, as elements of cultural and ideological identities. The perception that tattooing today reflects the diversity of human self-perception and the multiplicity of its forms of expression was confirmed. The needle and ink of the tattoo artist are revived as tools of self-disclosure and self-interpretation in a circular process of extroversion-introversion and feedback-(self) reinforcement, in which the "readers" are also involved.

During the interviews of the first survey, two main themes emerged: the first is that tattoos function as reminders. They are utilized as a form of written and symbolic memory. Regardless of their age, variations, hidden 'messages', and the value of the stories they 'carry', all interviewees, even those who stated that their tattoos are simply aesthetic modifications or bodily decorations, 'narrated' a story that accompanies them. A small or large set of memories and experiences that refer to people, things, or situations. These narratives, although seemingly related to 'others', essentially reveal the personal perceptions only in relation to them.

Some participants described their tattoos as visual and memory links, confirming their mnemonic power. They actually function as "notes to oneself not to forget" and are described by the participants with figures of speech (metaphors, similes, hyperboles, etc.). Just like a writer, a person with tattoos uses metaphors and similes to give meaning to their memories on their skin. This reveals the creative nature of tattooing, its originality, and allows its inclusion in the genres of creative writing.

One issue that has emerged concerns the need to distinguish between the role of tattooing and its symbolism. Among symbolic tattoos are "notes to self not to forget," but there are also those that reflect aspects of personality. These serve a dual role: they establish in the individual's consciousness an aspect of themselves and then reveal, expose and publicize it to "others". Participants pointed out their tattoos that reflect aspects of their personality but emphasized that a tattoo cannot fully define their personality or express their personal story. Therefore, a tattoo is like a page in a novel: just as the last page does not reveal the plot of the work, the first page does not reflect the entirety of a "self". What it does is creatively and self-therapeutically compose some of its fragmented elements and gradually visualize them.

The participants did not use their tattoos to address any issues of self-consciousness. Instead, accepting the plurality and variability of elements of themselves, they utilized it to specify and make visible to others. Therefore, tattooing did not function as a means of self-acceptance for them, but as a tool for visualizing aspects of themselves that are normal and expected to change. They state that they do not regret any of their tattoos because that would mean rejecting some old or new element of their personality, erasing the history associated with it and abandoning it to the decay of oblivion. They accept that even tattoos that they consider mistakes of youth or momentary impulses should not be erased because they are part of the "puzzle" of their personal history. If one of them is erased, it is likely that the overall image of the self will be altered. Furthermore, they point out that they have defensive mechanisms to signify a tattoo differently, keeping the initial narrative and creative background somewhere. As they declare, the function of a tattoo is oriented towards benefit and never at the expense of the person who decides to get it.

The results of the research in question reinforce the idea that tattooing constitutes an alternative form of self-expression. This is because tattooing, through the participants' responses, was shown to be a tool or method for creatively stabilizing one's personality, character, and self, defining and visualizing thoughts, desires, emotions, experiences, and motives, with the aim of externalizing them as "notes to oneself," as reminders, as paying

homage to important people, things or events, as a practice of self-awareness and self-knowledge. It facilitates the understanding of oneself as a "narrative" and as a "text," and therefore as a field of creative interaction between the narrator and the reader. Those participants who admitted to being unable to externalize what they feel, think, or desire, either due to linguistic inadequacy or social literacy, declare themselves liberated by their tattoos, which give them the opportunity to do so.

The purpose of the second study was to understand the experience of tattooing for trauma survivors as revealed through psychotherapeutic processes. Two main research questions were posed regarding the perceived experience of getting a tattoo and how useful it was in managing the trauma. Emphasis was placed on in-depth narratives of the professional experiences of participants who had tattoos as part of their therapeutic process for managing their trauma. A common criterion for selecting participants was a series of therapeutic sessions with a specific "patient" who had a trauma and turned to creative tattooing to manage their psychologically burdensome state. Through interviews, the participants communicated their professional histories and answered research questions to provide information on their tattoo experiences.

The first significant finding of the second study is related to the reduction of tattooing to a stochastic and expressive act, which in the case of people with trauma requires investment of time. This is because, in addition to long and in-depth introspection, it includes evaluating the correctness of the decision. Visualization of the experience through tattooing was perceived by participants as a creative management of the trauma, which partly equated to self-recovery, dominance, and control. According to them, the marking on the skin cultivated feelings of safety and stability, while signaling effective management of the problem.

It was argued that individuals with injuries tend to symbolize their tattoos in a way that makes them unique, so that they can lead them "from darkness to light". The interviewees stated that their "illness" creatively conceived the idea of the tattoo to satisfy their expectation and need to manage the feeling of losing themselves and to find answers to restore their inner balance. The creative symbolization of the traumatic experience helped them understand the causes and meaning behind it. The decision to acquire a tattoo was evaluated by the participants as a powerful response to existential questions, in a completely personal and unique way.

The creative tattoo that visualized the traumatic experience of the 'patients' facilitated their acceptance and remained to remind them of the value of re-approaching and continuing life. It helped them understand what happened to them, to change, to shed the feeling of futility and helplessness, to gain control, and to stop being defined by the trauma. Although there were different opinions regarding the degree of control regained, there was a common understanding that the tattooing process modified personal narratives and/or led to new ones. The creative, reflective, and self-expressive process of tattooing encouraged the 'patients' to realize that they are the central characters in the story of their lives and not the peripheral ones they believed they were until that moment.

Through their tattoos, the 'patients' were able to 'speak' about their trauma, something they avoided doing because they felt guilty, while at the same time, the viewers/readers came into contact with the traumatic experience. The above confirms that tattooing was creatively utilized for 'writers' and 'readers' as an entry and exit point for managing trauma, as a response to ineffective therapies. Creative writing/etching on the skin served as an outlet from within to outside and as a unification of the fragments of the fragmented self. The interviewees discerned a psycho-emotional and mental transformation of their 'patients' after tattooing. They discerned that the dynamic and creative symbolism of their tattoos specified abstract thoughts and memories.

Just like in the first study, in this one as well, the interviewees point out the mnemonic property of tattoos and state that "patients" use them as "notes to themselves so as not to

forget" and also as monuments of their experiences that essentially changed their lives. Tattoos are the written monuments of the trauma that should not be lost in oblivion, but should mark the moment of transformation. For "patients," tattoos seemed to represent a permanent and constructive reminder of what they have suffered and endured, and a creative "awakening" that the path of managing and accepting the trauma is long and interesting. Through creative and self-expressive tattooing, the memory of the trauma is symbolically narrated, subject to successive readings, reconstructed and revised according to the individual's needs. The present study appears to agree with the previous one regarding the correlation between the function of tattooing and that of CW.

Discussion

The research study seems to confirm the initial hypothesis that tattooing and creative writing are linked through the element of creativity and self-expression, when the former is not exclusively related to satisfying aesthetic goals and the latter does not solely serve literary or educational purposes. Both studies showed that the practice of tattooing, as well as CW, creatively activates the individual's interiority in order to manage problems related to identity and trauma. Therefore, tattooing as an alternative form of CW has practical usefulness within the context of a type of self-healing or self-enhancement, whether it be an organized counseling-psychological external intervention.

CW transforms interiority into words and composes them semantically in order to convey thoughts, emotions, experiences, etc. On the other hand, tattooing visualizes them into symbols, signs, and images in order to concretize and substantiate the abstract. Both externalize interiority, communicate it, and expose it to creative reading/viewing, and thus to alternative interpretations. CW and tattooing are creative processes that move inward and outward. This implies that the person who decides to get a tattoo or to record their thoughts on paper, whether or not they adhere to literary principles, is activated by internal motivations, takes the time to reflect and settle on the form that will render the original result of this intellectual journey. His final expression, whether it is engraved or written, brings the inner outwards. It communicates his inner world in a symbolic, abstract, indicative or specific way, in order to expose it to selected or non-selected third parties. It is a self-awareness process that in some cases is completed only by visualization and incorporation, and/or in other cases is realized through feedback of interpretation of visualizations and incorporations from third parties.

The international and domestic literature is full of studies advocating for the positive impact of endoscopy and externalization of its results on individual development and therapy. This study adds to them by proposing two practices for self-improvement and self-healing: stochastic and expressive creative tattooing and writing. Due to their correlation, the benefits of creative tattooing for human beings are equivalent to those of creative writing and vice versa. From the latter, the second research hypothesis arises, which concerns the fact that creative tattooing and writing, as processes of reflection and expression, can be used as practices of self-awareness, (self)acceptance, and recovery of control over life.

Conclusion

The experiences of the participants in the two studies, direct in the first and indirect in the second, support the use of tattooing as a mechanism for managing internal states and cognitive diversity, and addressing the consequences of psychosomatic trauma. The stochastic and expressive process of tattooing, as similar and related to that of CW, provides benefits that are supported in the literature for CW. Research has shown that through tattooing, the human body can be used as a receiver and transmitter of information to the external world, as well as a means of promoting the individual's ability to interact with those around them. However, the most important aspect is that through creative tattooing, just like through CW,

a person remembers, reflects, becomes aware and ultimately understands themselves, whom they "see/read" on their body.

A tattoo and/or a literary text specify the abstract, objectify it, and communicate it. Along with this, they visualize identity, trauma, memory, even perspective, and 'open the way' for significant changes. For people who have the ability to express themselves through CW, the produced text, prose or verse, becomes a means of achieving the necessary change. For people who cannot express themselves in writing creatively, tattooing serves as a vehicle for the transition from the 'unsaid' to the 'said'.

The consequences of this phenomenon concerning pedagogical and educational issues remain to be seen in the future. The role of pedagogy is proper education, which means a well-rounded development of young people in terms of physical, mental and moral aspects as well as personality cultivation. The question is to what extent will young people be affected by teachers, and general tutors, who bear tattoo marks and, who will set an example to children who become members of the school community even of the age of three? They will take it for granted, they will grow up with it and it will be inevitable to follow their example. This trend spreads rapidly and as a result younger people are affected and tend to adopt it since they are used to its presence. However, this phenomenon has to do with people's external characteristics which partly shape people but do not affect their inner self. Perhaps after years it will be proven that subcutaneous color injection has negative effects on the body and thus fade the tattoo fashion that concerns most people. There will certainly be an assessment of this phenomenon in the future with other studies that will be conducted.

The current research study provides numerous paths for future research in dialectics to improve human life. It is likely that future studies will show the benefits of creative tattooing and writing for both the patient and therapist. These findings could be used to break away from stereotypes and prejudices surrounding tattoos, which hinder self-improvement. This study may also provide a theoretical foundation for exploring the significance of tattoos and CW in self-expression and contemplation for individuals facing challenges. Such research could accelerate the acceptance of these practices in psychology and social sciences.

References

- Adler, A. (2012). *Understanding human nature*. 4th ed., Eastford: Martino Fine Books.
- Alcina, M. (2009). *Tattoos as personal narratives*. Dissertation, University of New Orleans.
- Armstrong, M. & McConnell, C. (1994a). *Promoting informed decision-making about tattooing for adolescents*. *The Journal of School Nurses: The Official Publication of the National Association of School Nurses*, 10(2), 27–30.
- Armstrong, M.L. & McConnell, C. (1994b). *Tattooing in adolescents: More common than you think—the phenomenon and risks*. *The Journal of School Nurses: The Official Publication of the National Association of School Nurses*, 10(1), 26–33.
- Atkinson, M. (2003). *Tattooed: The sociogenesis of a body art*. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Beeler, K.E. (2006). *Tattoos, desire and violence: Marks of resistance in literature, film and television*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company.
- Bolton, G. (1999). *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing: Writing Myself*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Bolton, G. (2011). *Write Yourself: Creative Writing and Personal Development*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Bolton, G., Field, V. & Thompson, K. (2006). *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Can, Y., Altunay, I.K., Mercan, S., Evren, C., Pospos, O.H. & Ozkur, E. (2020). *Dermatological and psychiatric manifestations in heroin and bonsai use disorder*. *Heroin Addiction and Related Clinical Problems*, 22(1), 5–14.

- Carspecken, P. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Carter, R. (2006). *Language and Creativity*. London: Rutledge.
- Chavis, G.G. (2011). *Poetry and Story Therapy: The Healing Power of Creative Expression*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers .
- Chinchilla, M. (2005). *Stewed, screwed and tattooed*. Mendocino: Isadore.
- Cropley, A. J. (2001). *Creativity in education & learning: a guide for teachers and educators*. London: Kogan Page.
- Dawson, P. (2005). *Creative writing and the new humanities*. London: Routledge.
- Dickson, L., Dukes, R.L., Smith, H. & Strapko, N. (2015). *To ink or not to ink: The meaning of tattoos among college students*. *College Student Journal*, 49(1), 106–120.
- Doane, M.A. (2007). *Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction*. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 18(1), 1–6.
- Dworkin, C. (2011). *The Fate of Echo*. In: Dworkin, G. & Goldsmith, K. (eds), *Against Expression* (xliii–xliv), Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Farhadi, J., Maksvytyte, G.K., Schaefer, D.J., Pierer, G. & Scheufler, O. (2006). *Reconstruction of the nipple-areola complex: An update*, *Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive & Aesthetic Surgery*, 59(1), 40–53.
- Featherstone, M. (2000). *Lifestyle and consumer culture*. In: Lee, M.J. (ed.), *The consumer society reader*, (92–105), Malden: Blackwell.
- Fisher, J. (2002). *Tattooing the body, marking culture*. *Body Society*, 8(4), 91-107.
- Forbes, G.B. (2001). *College students with tattoos and piercings: Motives, family experiences, personality factors, and perception by others*. *Psychological Reports*, 89(3), 774–786.
- Goldsmith, K. (2011). *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Greif, J., Hewitt, W., & Armstrong, M.L. (1999). *Tattooing and Body Piercing: Body art practices among college students*. *Clinical Nursing Research*, 8(4), 368-385.
- Hebb, D. O. (1968). *Concerning imagery*. *Psychological review*, 75(6), 466. McCosker, 2005:30–48).
- Hewitt, K. (1997). *Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink*. Madison: Popular Press.
- Illouz, E. (2008). *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Johnson, F.J. (2007). *Tattooing: Mind, body and spirit. The inner essence of the art*. *Sociological Viewpoints*, 23, 45–61.
- Kalogirou, T. (2004). *Lector Ludens: Reading as a game / games of reading*. Conference Proceedings, *Literature today. Aspects, revisions, perspectives*, (128–133), Athens: Greek Letters.
- Karacaoglan, U. (2012). *Tattoo and taboo: On the meaning of tattoos in the analytic process*. *The International Journal of Psycho-analysis*, 93(1), 5–28.
- Karagiannis, S. (2010). *Creative Writing as an innovative action in School. Innovations and critical thinking: seeking practices for the classroom*.
- Karakitsios, A. (2012). *Creative Writing: an alternative approach to literature or the return of Rhetoric*. *TEXTS for research, theory, criticism and teaching of Children's Literature*, 15.
- Kienlen, A. (2005). *Skin Deep*. *Herizons*, 19(2), 24–28.
- Kierstein, L. & Kjelskau, K.C. (2015). *Tattoo as art, the drivers behind the fascination and the decision to become tattooed*. In: Serup, J., Kluger, N. & Bäumlner, W. (eds), *Tattooed Skin and Health*, Basel: Karger Publishers, 48, 37–40.
- Kluger, N. (2015). *Tattooed people, who are you? Demographic and behavioral characteristics of tattooed individuals*. *Annales de Dermatologie et de Venereologie*, 142(6–7), 410–420.

- Kosut, M. (2000). *Tattoo Narratives: The Intersection of the Body, Self- Identity and Society*. *Visual Sociology*, 15(1), 79–100.
- Kotopoulos T.H., Zografou, M. & Vakali, A.P. (2014). *Reactive discourse in preschool age*. In: Griva, E., Koutsogiannis, D., Dinas, K., Stamou, A., Chatzipanagiotidis, A. & Chatzisavvidis, S. (eds.), *Proceedings of the Panhellenic Conference "Critical Literacy in School Practice"*, November 1–3, 2013, Drama.
- Kotopoulos, T.H. & Panagiotidis, G. (2013). *Thesis as a novel, Writing practice and literary theory*. *Proceedings of the 1st International Scientific Conference "Creative Writing"*. October 4–6, 2013, Athens.
- Kotopoulos, T.H. (2012). *Teaching Creative Writing. The case of writing literary works for adolescents*.
- Kotopoulos, T.H., Papantonakis, G. & Nanou, V. (2012). *Creative Writing, Suspenseful Literature and Excited Students*. In *1st International Conference «Education Across Borders»* Proceedings (pp. 268-276). Florina: University Of Western Macedonia.
- Kotopoulos, T.H. (2013). *Philanagnia and Creative Writing*. In: Katsiki-Givalou, A. & Politis, D. (eds.), *Cultivating Philanagnia, Collective Volume*, Athens: Diadrasi.
- Kotopoulos, T.H. & Vakali, A.P. (2019). *The therapeutic properties of Creative Writing*, *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference "Creative Writing"*. September 12–15, 1082–1111.
- Kotopoulos, T.H. (2017). *Creative Writing as a cognitive subject: The particularities of the workshop*. *Polydromo*, 7, May, 37–42.
- Koust, M. (2006). *An Ironic Fad: The commoditization and consumption of tattoos*. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 39(6), 1035–1048.
- Littell, A.E. (2003). *The illustrated self: Construction of meaning through tattoo images and their narratives*, *PhD thesis*. Antioch University, New England Graduate School.
- MacCormack, P. (2006). *The Great Ephemeral Tattooed Skin, Body and Society*. 12(2), 57–82.
- McCosker, A. (2005). *A vision of Masochism in the Affective Pain of Crash*. *Sexualities*, 8(1), 30-48.
- Mifflin, M. (2013). *Bodies of subversion: A secret history of women and tattoo*. New York: Power House Books.
- Morley, D. (2007). *The Cambridge introduction to creative writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moss, J. (2012). *Writing in Bereavement: A Creative Handbook*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Mun, J.M., Janigo, K.A. & Johnson, K.K. (2012). *Tattoo and the self, Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*. 30(2), 134–148
- Naudé, L., Jordaan, J. & Bergh, L. (2017). *'My body is my journal, and my tattoos are my story': South african psychology students' reflections on tattoo practices*. *Current Psychology*, 38(1), 177–186.
- Nowosielski, K., Kurpisz, J. & Kowalczyk, R. (2021). *Sexual inhibition and sexual excitation in a sample of Polish women*. *PLoS ONE*, 16, e0249560.
- Ocampo, K.M. & Castronuevo, E. (2016). *The experiences of tattooing among selected Filipino young adults*. *The Bedan Journal of Psychology*, 2, 82–90.
- Oksanen, A. & Turtiainen, J. (2005). *A life told in ink: Tattoo narratives and the problem of the self in late modern society*. *Auto/biography*, 13(2), 111–130.
- Osborn, L.P. & Cohen, P.R. (2018). *Emotional healing with unconventional breast tattoos: The role of temporary tattoos in the recovery process after breast carcinoma and mastectomy*. *Clinics in Dermatology*, 36(3), 426–429.
- Papantonakis, G.D. & Kotopoulos, T.H. (2011). *From reading to literary reading and playful attitude of Creative Writing*. In G. Papantonakis, *Heterothali*, 21-36.

- Pitts, V. (2003). *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Prentice, R. (2000). *Creativity: a reaffirmation of its place in early childhood education*. *The Curriculum Journal*, 11(2), 145–158.
- Ramet, A. (2011). *Creative Writing*. Oxford: How to Books.
- Raw, A., Lewis, S., Russell, A. & Macnaughton, J. (2012). *A Hole in the Heart: Confronting the Drive for Evidence-Based Impact Research in Arts and Health*. *Arts & Health*, 4(2), 97–108.
- Reid-de Jong, V. & Bruce, A. (2020). *Mastectomy tattoos: An emerging alternative for reclaiming self*. *Nursing Forum*, 55(4), 695–702.
- Rodari, G. (2003). *Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories*.
- Samyuktha, P.S., Devi, R.G. & Priya A.J. (2018). *A survey on awareness and perception about tattoos among college students*. *Drug Invention Today*, 10(1), 2705–2708.
- Sanders, C. (2007). *Customizing the Body: Art and the culture of tattooing*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Santos, M.L.L.C. & Villafranca, M.R. (2019). *The Art in Pain on Becoming A Tattooed Person: A Grounded Theory*. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 19(2) 2019, 80–98.
- Sarnecki, J.H. (2001). *Trauma and tattoo*. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 12(2), 35 – 42.
- Shelton, J.A. & Okleshen Peters, C.L. (2006). *Actions speak as loud as products: Disposition as a self-perceptive method of identity incorporation*. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 9(3), 207-233.
- Stevenson, A. & Lindberg, C.A. (2010). *New Oxford American dictionary*. 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stirn, A., Oddo, S., Peregrinova, L., Philipp, S. & Hinz, A. (2011). *Motivations for body piercings and tattoos—The role of sexual abuse and the frequency of body modifications*. *Psychiatry Research*, 190(2-3), 359–363.
- Swami, V. (2011). *Marked for life? A prospective study of tattoos on appearance anxiety and dissatisfaction, perceptions of uniqueness, and self-esteem*. *Body Image*, 8(3), 237–244.
- Taylor, P.J., Usher, S., Jomar, K. & Forrester, R. (2021). *Investigating self-concept in self-harm: A repertory grid study*, *Psychology and Psychotherapy*. 94 Suppl 2, 171–187.
- Thompson, K. (2011). *Therapeutic Journal Writing: An Introduction for professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Tiggemann, M. & Golder, F. (2006). *Tattooing: an expression of uniqueness in the appearance domain*. *Body Image*, 3(4), 309–315.
- Tiggemann, M. & Hopkins, L.A. (2011). *Tattoos and piercings: Bodily expressions of uniqueness?* *Body Image*, 8(3), 245–250.
- Tokarski, K.J. (2017). *Identifying spiritual themes in narratives of young adults who have aged out of foster care: A qualitative study*, *Dissertation*. University of Denver.
- Turner-Vesselago, B. (2013). *Writing Without a Parachute: The Art of Freefall*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Van Goidsenhoven, L. & Masschelein, A. (2017). *Donna Williams's 'Triumph': Looking for 'the Place in the Middle' at Jessica Kingsley Publishers*. *Life Writing*, 15(2), 1–23.
- Wandor, M. (2008). *The Author Is Not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else: Creative Writing Reconceived*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wymann, C. (2010). *Tattoo: a multifaceted medium of communication*. *Medie Kultur, Journal of media and communication research*, 26(49), 41–54.
- Yeates, R., Rospigliosi, E. & Thompson, A.R. (2018). *A mixed methods evaluation of medical tattooing for people who have experienced a burn injury*. *Scars, Burns & Healing*, 4, 2059513118784721