
BODY MODIFICATION IN VOGUE : A BOON OR BANE ?

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ABSTRACT :

Body Modification is a process in which a person wants to be seen as different from others by cutting, piercing or remoulding etc. of the external body parts for non medical reasons. It is getting more popular since last decade. These modifications include the tattoo marks, scars, branding, piercing etc. which were of immense value to the Forensic pathologist for identification of an individual either dead or alive. But, the way how the modifications are going probably they may add to the difficulties of the forensic pathologists and Law enforcement authorities in future. The paper discusses the various aspects of body modifications and their implications.

KEYWORDS: Body modification, tattoo marks, body piercing, identification.

INTRODUCTION:

The question of identity may arise in the living as well as in the dead. In fact from womb to tomb and even after, question may arise about the identity of the person. The biometric profile of a person is taken for establishing the identity. The biometric profile consists of certain features which also includes scars, moles, deformities, tattoo marks, other special features like implants etc¹.

Identification is the most important criteria in both living and dead. When a person remains unidentified, he or she loses not just the identity but also many rights and privileges in the society. Identification is the determination of the individuality of a person based on certain physical characteristics i.e. exact fixation of personality. Identification is necessary in

- Living persons
- Recently dead.
- Decomposed body
- Mutilated bodies
- Skeleton².

Many advanced techniques are being used throughout the developed countries for determining the identity of an individual either living or dead, along with the routine criteria's. Routinely the external features which are visible and some of the peculiar features which are on the body play vital role in identifying an individual, At least two identification marks should be noted in all medico-legal cases.

Tattoo marks and body piercing are the commonest forms of body modifications, which get a special note in any medico legal examination or in autopsy reports. Usual sites are forearm, deltoid area, chest and forehead (usually in case of females), whilst for piercing are the ear pinna, nares or septa, navel etc. Depending on their location, design, color and contents, tattoos are helpful to assess the race, religion, belief, habits, social and mental status of the individual. Piercing may indicate the social status, religion of the person.

Up till recently these were limited to certain category of people like sailors, prisoners, people of low economic status etc. But now the body modification has become a vogue especially the younger generation who want to experiment and also like to be different. The tattoos and body piercing are in main stream in recent times and are becoming acceptable socially.

Body modification (or body alteration) is the permanent or semi-permanent deliberate altering of the human body for non-medical reasons, such as: sexual enhancement; a rite of passage; aesthetic reasons; denoting affiliation, trust and

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loyalty; religious reasons; mystical affiliations; shock value; and self-expression. It can range from the socially acceptable decoration (e.g., pierced ears in many societies) to the religiously mandated (e.g., circumcision in a number of cultures), and everywhere in between. Body art is a modification of any part of the human body for artistic or aesthetic reasons³.

Body modifications have gone to extremes in many parts of the world including India due to whacky youngsters and enterprising artists who are ready to cater to their needs.

Some examples of extreme body modifications are⁴.

- Piercing the cheek, eyebrows and tongue with needles with steel ball head.
- Eye ball tattooing – injection of pigment in cornea.
- Splitting of tongue in the middle so that when it sticks out looks like two pronged snake tongue.
- People are getting horns implanted on their scalp/head.
- Installing magnets and around wrist to get magnetic “Sixth Sense” feeling.
- Implanting steel balls subcutaneously over the entire body.
- Remoulding of ears to look like cat ears, pointed ears etc. [animal instinct?] Ear cropping⁵.
- Remolding of teeth, make them pointed, painted, coloured to look like 'Dracula' or something like that.
- Piercing of the vulva, clitoris and rings around the penis [Genital pearling] are also other examples for these modifications.
- Nullification; voluntary removal of body parts due to body integrity identity disorder; penectomy; removing of penis, testicles; castration, etc.

The basic thing about these persons who undergo body modifications is that they may tend

to add or change their appearances on regular basis.

LEGAL STATUS:

In India there is no legal or social binding / ban for body piercing or having tattoos. In Hindu religion the Child's ears are pierced within few days after birth or circumcision which is usually done in case of Muslim Communities. Moderate verities of tattooing and body piercing are accepted in Indian culture.

There is no age limit for piercing or tattooing as they are part of our culture. As on now, these extreme modifications are not so popular in India. Body tattooing is becoming popular nowadays due to the western and celluloid influence. Tattooing and piercing have unprecedented popularity in western society, so it's reasonable to expect that future society may feature even more bizarre and extreme body modifications, depending on how these modifications infiltrate our social fabric⁶.

In developed country like USA, there is an age limit for getting a tattoo i.e., the person has to be more than 16 years. Extreme forms of body modifications, features and wide rage of alterations are illegal in Texas and some other states of USA. Due to the complications and documented ruptures post-surgery, the FDA has approved breast implants only for women over 22 years old⁷.

DISCUSSION:

Body modification is in existence since the beginning of man kind. Main aim was to distinguish themselves from the other tribes. Still it is practiced in tribes of Africa and Amazon belt. Japanese girl's feet are wrapped firmly with roll of cloth so as to keep them from growing large with age. According to their custom girls should have small feet and is socially accepted. In some tribes of Africa the girl child is made to wear metal rings around her neck. They keep adding the rings with her every birthday, so that when

she grows she should have a lengthy neck which is supposed to be a sign of beauty, it is accepted social custom. There kinds of practices help in identifying a particular tribe, their customs and practices.

Likewise in India tattoos of God's name, figures, dates etc and piercing of nose, ears are accepted as social norms since ancient times. This type of body modifications are of immense help to the doctor / forensic pathologist as one of the important features for identifying the person either living or dead, if they are there on the body.

Now with these customs becoming fashion statements, in future they may result in many hardships in identifying the individual. Like a person who has a tattoo / scar today may not have it after few days or they might have been altered or that noted piercing might have been blocked / totally disappeared. The persons whose photograph has been taken today as nice clean man, comes with a pair of horns on his head after couple of weeks.

Dental impressions may be different due to sharpening or remolding. Ear measurements may differ due to moulding and sharpening or cropping.

All these years the tattoos and piercing's or body modifications which were of immense help in identifying an individual. They helped to solve many murder mysteries (Remember Sydney Shark Case?), may not remain so or may become obsolete due to changing mentality, trends, times, social beliefs and economic independence.

Now as a forensic pathologists / medico leggist neither we can be happy that we have some other features which are helpful in identifying an individual, nor can be sad that those good old useful criteria's may become useless in due course of time. Neither can we take them as boon or bane. With the passing time and in future the Forensic practice / medico legal work should shift from physical to more technical and scientific methodologies. We may have to use histology (Eg: Barr bodies), serology,

dactylography, poroscopy, DNA profiling etc. routinely, along with the practical acumen of the pathologist for fixing the identity on an individual. The tools like anthropometry, Gustafson's method and features like Scars and tattoos may become irrelevant in near future.

The extreme forms of body modifications are quite restricted in India due to existing social and moral bindings which are still respected. But in due course of time the social fabric of India may change due to globalization and urbanization. Younger population, who want something new all the time, is increasing. With that well paid jobs and increased social and financial freedom these people may opt for something that's different, for this they also look at the west. Even the criminals may take full advantage of these modifications to disguise themselves and may escape from the clutches of law. Unlicensed surgery performed outside of a medical environment can often be life-threatening, and is illegal in most countries and states.

CONCLUSION:

As forensic pathologists we should be well prepared, before this wave of extreme modifications hits Indian society like Tsunami. We must all think what can be done so that either these practices are controlled and also can be made use for forensic / police purpose. We must insist that all the body shops [place where these body modifications are carried out] & the artists must be registered and it should be made illegal to practice this without license. All the modifications done and individual's details have to be documented and made available on request. We may have to put certain age limit for these modifications and must ban certain extreme body modifications.

We enter an age in which genetic technology, digital/neuronal interfaces, advanced plastic surgery and even nanotechnology could mean that the human form

becomes more diverse than ever. As these extreme body modifications will have medico legal, legal, social and moral ramifications on the society in common and state in general, we must all be prepared to face this new challenge before it is too late.

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*In a Day, when you don't
come across any problems
- you can be sure that you are
traveling in a wrong path
-Swamy Vivekananda*

REVIEW OF HANDBOOK ON HEALTH PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

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This is a hand book on medical education meant for all the persons involved in teaching the medical Sciences. Teaching and learning is always a dynamic and complex process.

As on today the doctors who wants take up teaching as a career do not have any formal training in teaching methodologies. As such there are hardly few books which can help them to learn the art of teaching. This hand book will give them the basics of teaching for those who are interested in learning teaching & training methodologies. The concept of putting almost all the topics related to medical education in one place is to be appreciated. It is written by different authors who have special experience in the field of medical education. The editors have taken enough care to place the topics in order starting from the present medical teaching scenario, teaching learning methods, curriculum planning, scientific paper preparation and publication, P. G. Dissertation which are quite elaborate and informative. The topic on communication skills, which is very essentials for every medical teacher, has been dealt in an excellent manner. All aspiring teachers must adopt at least a few of the things mentioned there.

The topics on communication skills , art of enhancing memory and stress managements are new and added special essence to the whole book. But, lastly I feel that a section on, student's psychology and teacher student relationship in the changing trends of medical education should have been there, to make this book more interesting and a complete one.

The printing is good with very few spelling mistakes. As such there are very few books available on medical education and the editors & the authors need to be applauded for their efforts for this praise worthy contribution. We need to have more of these kinds of books in future as this hand book will be of immense help to the medical teachers, postgraduates and all other teachers involved in teaching health professional courses.