



Gestão & Regionalidade

ISSN: 1808-5792

ISSN: 2176-5308

editoria_gr@online.uscs.edu.br

Universidade Municipal de São Caetano do Sul

Brasil

de Almeida Araújo, Rafaela; Carneiro Catrib, Isabella;
Brandão Paiva, Luis Eduardo; Batista de Lima, Tereza Cristina
“Cadê o tatuador?” Construção da identidade profissional e estigma de mulheres na profissão tatuadora
Gestão & Regionalidade, vol. 38, no. 114, 2022, pp. 41-62
Universidade Municipal de São Caetano do Sul
Sao Caetano do Sul, Brasil

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=133475550022>

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"Where is the tattoo guy?" construction of professional identity and stigma of women in the tattoo profession

"Cadê o tatuador?" Construção da identidade profissional e estigma de mulheres na profissão tatuadora

Rafaela de Almeida Araújo¹ⁱ

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1828-0683>

Isabella Carneiro Catrib²ⁱⁱ

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5873-9727>

Luis Eduardo Brandão Paiva³ⁱⁱⁱ

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5036-6823>

Tereza Cristina Batista de Lima^{4iv}

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6594-4921>

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate how gender stigma interferes in the construction of the professional identity of female tattoo artists, it was based on the model of Slay and Smith (2011). This research is characterized as qualitative, conducted through semi-structured interviews with 15 Brazilian tattoo artists. The results indicate that the marginalization of the profession happens mainly because it is a profession that lacks uniformity in the learning of the craft, especially regarding biosafety. In addition, there has been a re-signification of the stigma of women due to the growth of women in the profession, mainly due to a new vision of the profession's artistic work and the possibility of marking important moments in people's skin. These results can contribute to broaden the understanding of how the woman's professional identity as a tattoo artist is re-signified, showing that what was just a marginalized activity, now has a new meaning.

Keywords: professional identity; tattoo; stigma.

Resumo

O estudo objetivou investigar como o estigma de gênero interfere na construção da identidade profissional de Tatuooists, baseado no modelo de Slay e Smith (2011). Esta pesquisa é caracterizada como qualitativa, realizada mediante entrevistas semiestruturadas com 15 Tatuooists brasileiras. Os resultados apontam que a marginalização da profissão acontece principalmente por ser uma profissão que falta uma uniformidade na aprendizagem do ofício, sobretudo quanto à biossegurança. Ademais, tem ocorrido uma ressignificação do estigma da mulher em razão do crescimento de mulheres na profissão, principalmente por conta de uma nova visão de um trabalho artístico da profissão e da possibilidade de marcar momentos importantes na pele das pessoas. Esses resultados podem contribuir para ampliar a compreensão de como acontece a ressignificação da identidade profissional da mulher como Tatuooist, mostrando que o que antes era apenas uma atividade marginalizada, passa a ter um novo sentido.

Palavras-chave: identidade profissional; tatuagem; estigma.

¹ Universidade Federal do Ceará/Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria, Brasil. E-mail: rafaela.aa@gmail.com

² Universidade Federal do Ceará/Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria – Brasil. E-mail: isabellac.catrib@gmail.com

³ Universidade Federal do Ceará/Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria – Brasil. E-mail: edubrandas@gmail.com

⁴ Universidade Federal do Ceará/Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria – Brasil. E-mail: tcblima@uol.com.br

1 INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to define precisely when the practice of tattooing has started; although, by the end of the 20th century, tattoos achieved a new form of acknowledgment and social practice, in which it was no longer largely associated to marginality, as well as rebellion and unruliness, but represented a process of acquiring a new, personal meaning (FARLEY; VAN HOOVER; RADEMEYER, 2019; THOMPSON, 2019a) often based on market appropriation (SCHLÖSSER et al., 2020). Thus, obtaining a tattoo can be part of an identity transformation process (LANE, 2014).

Empirical evidence suggests that tattoos are no longer associated to anti-social groups or marginality. However, it does not mean that body art has does not currently carry negative concepts or associations, especially for women (SCHLÖSSER et al., 2020; SWAMI; FURNHAM, 2007). Despite of that, the rise in popularity and larger regulation for the tattooing business has contributed to diminish some of the negative, cultural evaluations (SIMPSON; PULLEN, 2018).

Even with significant changes when it comes to tattoos, it is noticeable that when men have tattoos, it often reinforces their masculinity; whereas for women it is quite the contrary, the practice can even diminish their feminine identity, although it can be less harmful when they choose tattoos that are considered to be feminine, which are more delicate, discrete and small (KLUGER, 2015; THOMPSON, 2015; 2019b). The work identity has peculiarities other than the simple achievement of a task; besides, individual identity in the workplace is broadly connected to the influence of social groups on the construction of identity (PRATT; ROCKMANN; KAUFMANN, 2006). On that account, the impact of stigma on the construction of professional identity is relevant to this knowledge field, since the process of professional identity construction process for contemporary

careers may be distinct or at least capable of change, especially for members of groups which are considered stigmatized (SLAY; SMITH, 2011), such as female tattoo artists.

Stigmatized professionals believe that their clients' perceptions on them depreciate their careers, more evidently in the context of female tattoo artists, since tattooing has been historically associated to heavily masculinized cultures (VOUGH et al., 2012; THOMPSON, 2015). The harassment towards women in these environments is relatively common, in which it is seen as a way of testing their resilience in a masculinized, hostile environment (OLIVEIRA; MOURA, 2021). Furthermore, it is known that, over the last few years, women are consistently getting more tattoos rather than men (FARLEY et al., 2019).

In the model proposed by Slay and Smith (2011), the professional identity construction in stigmatized groups brings a need for redefinition tasks instead of adaptation, as it occurs in other groups. Hence, this model seeks to analyze four different perspectives: (i) identifying early influences that made the individual initiate in their career; (ii) professional experiences related to stigma and to the individual differentiation as an "outsider"; (iii) repertoires of selves available to use when redefining their own experiences; and (iv) redefining tasks, specifically redefining themselves, redefining the profession and redefining stigma.

Given the previously mentioned approaches, the following question arises for the development of this research: how does gender stigma interfere in the professional identity construction of female tattoo artists? Accordingly, the objective was to investigate how gender stigma interferes in the professional identity construction of female artists, based on the model proposed by Slay and Smith (2011).

The field on scientific investigations on professional identity remains limited and somewhat difficult to map. Recent researches suggest that, not only are the

individuals more predisposed to choose occupations that correspond to their innate characteristics, but occupation environments also play a role in motivating changes in both identity and personal characteristics (WILLE; DE FRUYT, 2014). Therefore, this study provides tools for researches in contemporary careers. As for sexual segregation, it is apparent that gender plays an important role in the subculture with representation on the tattoo community, since it has historically associated to masculine subcultures and male artists (THOMPSON, 2019b).

This research is justified due to the fact that the roles which are involved within a profession often bring prestige, however, when stigmatized people play these roles, they receive little to no social acknowledgment, since their identities are associated to negative practices (SLAY; SMITH, 2011). In regards to women working in non-traditional job fields, Thompson (2015) explains that, when comparing the tattoo industry with other qualified activities, it is possible to find similarities and significant differences for women to understand when they choose to engage in working as a tattoo artist. This paper seeks to broaden the understanding of how the redefining of professional identity takes place within stigmatized groups, allowing for new perspectives to appear on tattooing. That itself has an impact on the scientific knowledge field on gender studies, mainly on the barriers which women face in environments which are predominantly male-dominated.

Aside from this introduction, this paper presents five other sections. In the second section, women, tattooing and stigma will be explained as they are all correlated. In the third section, a theoretical base will be presented regarding professional identity and their stigmas, which then will be applied in the model here presented. In the fourth section, the methodological procedures will be approached. Then, the results of the

research will be presented and analyzed. Finally, the sixth section will bring the final considerations, as well as the contributions for academia and inspiration for future researches on the area.

2 WOMEN, TATTOOS AND THEIR STIGMAS

It is worth mentioning that, although women have accomplishments from the constant struggle of equality and belonging, the gender division in the workplace stills results in discrimination, differentiation and prejudice for them to obtain their spot on the work market (SIQUEIRA; SAMPARO, 2017). Furthermore, dividing themselves between professional and family lives is a condition which makes it more complex for women to maintain their place in the work field, as women often take a second or third work shift, adapting to both domestic tasks and childcare (CAPPELLE; MELO, 2010).

Historically, the tattoo artist profession has been associated to masculine subcultures such as military men and motorcyclists, as well as civil construction workers. From the decade of 1970 up until 1990, a redefining of tattoos occurred, which brought body art to different demographic groups, which as women and the middle class (KLUGER, 2015; THOMPSON, 2019a). Although there have been several advances in tattooing, such as the development of electrical tattooing machines and safety regulations, women and their involvement as tattoo artists are still very much seen as "new" in the business, which in turn makes them seek acknowledgment and space in this area (OLIVEIRA; MOURA, 2021).

Body appearances have been used as a way of determining one's character (ADAMS, 2012). Tattoos are filled with cultural as personal meanings. In spite of the fact that body art has been consistently growing in popularity, individuals with tattoos may experience stigma, stereotypes and discrimination, both on their work and personal lives (DANN; CALLAGHAN,

2019; DELUCA; GRISCI; LAZZAROTTO, 2018; FARLEY et al., 2019), since tattoos are often associated to risky behavior in adults (SCHLÖSSER et al., 2020).

Tattooed women have been classified as less physically attractive, sexually promiscuous and more likely to abuse alcohol when compared to non-tattooed women – with more negative evaluations when they had a larger number of tattoos (BROUSSARD; HARTON, 2017; SWAMI; FURNHAM, 2007). Besides that, for these women, the resistance and conformity practices constitute social, historical and cultural contexts, which have normative values on either “good” or “bad” tattoos. That indicates that, when tattoos in a context of personal meaning, they become more acceptable, especially in regards to women (DANN; CALLAGHAN, 2019). Contrastingly, Schlösser et al. (2020) analyzed a sample of 316 Brazilian women in their study, where 50% of them had tattoos, and came to the conclusion that tattooed women are more pleased with their appearance, although getting tattoos and risky behavior are still largely associated, such as drug consumption.

According to Kluger (2015), tattoos have always been connected to the male population. The number of women with tattoos is smaller than men in many studies, especially in older ages. However, from the decade of 1990, half of all tattoos were reportedly belonging to women. Broussard e Harton (2017) add that, regarding the work market, most managers have explicitly confirmed that they would not hire a visibly tattooed candidate, as it would harm the company’s image, causing personal prejudice on tattoos. In regard of potential customers, they also tend to perceive tattooed employees as less capable of performing.

As stated by Adams (2012), the tattoo industry is considered a type of “dirty work”, as it allows for the tattoo artist to be

stigmatized over the course of several aspects of what would be a job with “dirty” characteristics, making it necessary for professionals to actively redefine and legitimate their activities. Moreover, although in regulated professions sexual harassment is fought against, the same is not true for the tattoo industry (THOMPSON, 2015). DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016) state that, starting from the decade of 2000, there was an enormous raise of tattooing practices, which in turn contributed to a larger regulation of the field, mainly for tools and work norms.

The act of becoming “heavily tattooed” and its historical association to deviant subcultures has continued to maintain social stigma and evoke negative feelings on the observers. That is true also for the women who have to deal with gender norms in this subculture, which has been associated to other male groups (THOMPSON, 2019a). Tattoos themselves and tattoo practices, which are connected to cultural values within the tattoo industry, can also be seen as representations of a desire of authenticity and representing one’s self, as well as adding some characteristics, such as creativity, rebellion and challenge (SIMPSON; PULLEN, 2018).

Social psychologists have developed several scientific researches on stigma and, by using their insights on social cognitive approaches, it has helped them comprehend how individuals construct categories and connect them to stereotyped beliefs (LINK; PHELAN, 2001). As stated by Goffman (1988), stigma may be understood as bodily signs with which one seeks to show something extraordinary or bad about the moral status of those who present it. Link and Phelan (2001) state that people are stigmatized when they are labeled, isolated and associated to undesirable characteristics, which in turn results in loss of status.

Most definitions on stigma come to the conclusion that stigmatized individuals

carry an attribute or characteristic which makes them different from others, and therefore judged as less appreciated or valued. Such attributes may be controlled or uncontrolled, visible or not, connected to appearances, behavior or members of a specific group. It should be noted that the stigma is not necessarily part of one's self but a social context (MAJOR; O'BRIEN, 2005).

Physical stigma is what the individual is born with; while behavioral stigma is according to one's responsibilities and choices, which influences on others' views on stigmatized people. For instance, an individual with a stigmatized characteristic such as a tattoo may not receive the same level of empathy as would one with a physical condition (LARSEN; PATTERSON; MARKHAM, 2014). Tattooing goes in the opposite direction ephemerality in the context of the current, liquid society, as it appears as a form of expression and resistance, due to the fact that tattoos are permanent marks on one's body (DELUCA; GRISCI; LAZZAROTTO, 2018).

Given the above, it is noticeable that, in spite of the redefining tattooing has undergone in the recent years, it remains quite stigmatized to those who belong to this subculture. Moreover, concepts and approaches on professional identity and stigma are highlighted.

3 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND STIGMA

The construction of one's identity, including professional identity, is a narrative construction, in which one would tell themselves and others who they are, revising over time, especially in response to internal and external influences (DELUCA; ROCHA-DE-OLIVEIRA, 2016; BROWN, 2014). Professional identity is a complex phenomenon, which contemplates awareness and connection to skills, qualities, behaviors, values and patterns in their chose profession, as well as the

comprehension of the professional self and the broader self (JACKSON, 2017).

According to Kira and Balkin (2014), identity is capable of influencing one's work environment, for instance, a lack of alignment between the preferred professional identity and the work situation may influence attempts of changing the environment. The forms of work identity are related to role transitions, especially when individuals experience changes in the workplace or roles (IBARRA; BARBULESCU, 2010). Rossi and Hunger (2020) state that comprehending social identities construction is a *sine qua non* condition to the study of professional identity. A stigmatized identity results in the power of marginalizing an individual, which then causes their disqualification rather than total acceptance from society. Stigmatized groups and individuals are often capable of cultivating alternate positive conceptions about themselves, besides presenting self-esteem and impression management tactics (TOYOKI; BROWN, 2013).

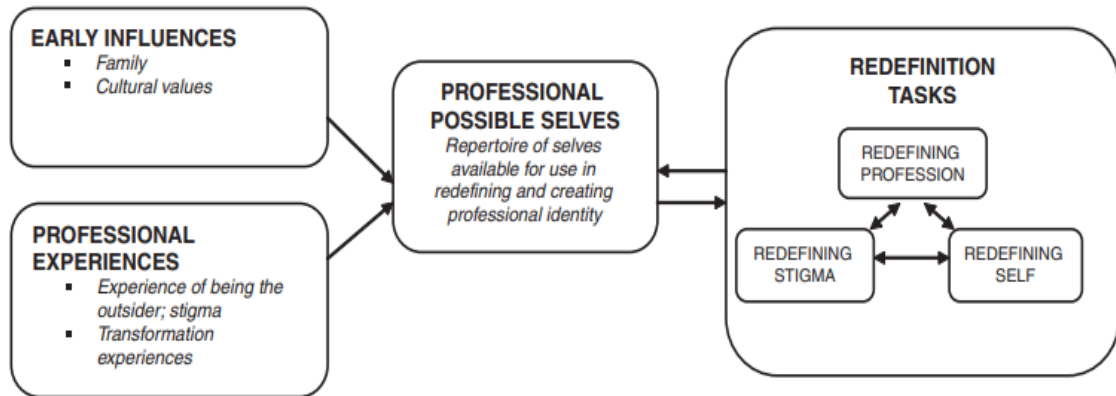
As maintained by Rossit et al. (2018), when a professional undergoes experiences, they result in their knowledge being internalized, as a way of comprehending and reorganizing it. Slay and Smith (2011) state that it is necessary for the professional identity to be redefined rather than adapted; which then becomes a central task for members of stigmatized social groups. In their study, the authors found that being stigmatized and also an outsider have an influence on the construction of a professional identity. Therefore, when members of a stigmatized minority are in a society which perceives them as limited and less capable, they tend to have a narrow view of their professional opportunities and possibilities.

The model of professional identity by Slay and Smith (2011) introduces how professional experiences and both family and cultural values help define the repertoire of possible professional selves.

Next comes redefining the central task for members of stigmatized groups, as in redefining the occupational rhetoric, stigma, and the self (FIGURE 1). Thus, as mentioned by Rossi and Hunger (2020),

tension occurs when there is not confluence between what others wish the individual to be and the individual's desire to incorporate a certain identity, therefore causing the feeling of being an outsider.

Figure 1 – Professional identity process of redefinition



Source: Slay and Smith (2011).

Initially, the influence of one's life context is highly emphasized for the construction of possible professional selves. For instance, when creating or defining one's professional identity, family or early life experiences help create repertoires of selves, with skills, attitudes and necessary behavior in order to achieve success in a certain career. Furthermore, the existence of stigma and the feeling of being an outsider influence on who the individual may become. That being said, one's transformational experiences could expand their repertoires of selves, as well as influences from others belonging in the same stigmatized group, due to shared history (SLAY; SMITH, 2011).

Next, the model presents a point of redefining rather than adapting to the profession. In this context, an important antecedent for redefinition is the experience of being stigmatized or belonging to a culturally stigmatized group. Therefore, it becomes crucial to create professional rhetoric, as well as seeking new value in the stigmatized identity and still finding balancing between both the stigmatized and professional identities (IBARRA, 1999; SLAY; SMITH, 2011).

The first redefining task, as stated by Slay and Smith (2011), refers to occupational and professional repertoires and how important they are for the comprehension of constructing one's professional identity, as it allows individuals to explain to others the significance of their work. Collective representations are shared beliefs on groups' stereotypes. In this context, individuals start to try to dispel stereotypes and show people who are outside the stigmatized group a side previously not seen by them.

The task of redefining stigma has both negative and positive connotations. As most of the individuals are strongly aware of the stereotypes which their groups are associated to, they tend to redefine stigma in a positive manner, often perceiving their group and the respective cultural identity in a different and unique perspective (SLAY; SMITH, 2011).

Finally, the task of defining themselves refers to the ways of achieving a balance between their cultural and professional identities, understanding which one should come first. The individuals who choose their professional identity primarily, may experience feelings

of loneliness – due to the abandonment of their external and internal group. Nonetheless, in most cases, it is mandatory that there is a redefinition in both personal and professional identities (SLAY; SMITH, 2011).

Professional identity is narrative which is in constant construction of itself. The process involves several stages, which start at learning function tasks until interacting with others. For stigmatized groups, this process is particularly distinct as they are perceived as outsiders, such as women who work and develop projects in the tattooing business. Based on the above and the theoretical study by Slay and Smith (2011), the methodological procedures will be presented for the analysis of the results of this research, with the objective of broadening discussion and reflection on how gender stigma interferes with the construction of the professional identities of female tattoo artists.

4 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study is characterized by its qualitative approach, as it seeks to deepen information on professional identity and stigma of female tattoo artists (COLLIS;

HUSSEY, 2005). This is also a descriptive research, as it seeks to measure the characteristics described in the questions proposed in the adopted script. Semi-structured interviews were carried out, as this method allows researchers to be free to exercise their initiatives, and this allows for unexpected and clarifying information to rise, which brings reflections and findings about the investigated phenomenon.

The sample of this research is composed of women who work professionally as tattooists. The choice of participants was carried out by convenience samples, since in this method, the participants are chosen due to the fact that they are more accessible and available to the researchers (COLLIS; HUSSEY, 2005). They are identified here in the study under the title of "Tattooist", following the order in which the interviews were carried out, between the numbers 1 and 15. The interviews lasted an average time of 24 minutes and 13 seconds, with a standard deviation of 4.58. Moreover, Table 1 presents a general view of the profile of the interviewees, which takes into account their age, marital status, education and working time as a tattoo artist.

Table 1 – Profile of the tattoo artists

Interviewee	Age	Marital Status	Education	Working time
Tattooist 1	30	Single	PhD in vegetable biology	8 months
Tattooist 2	30	Married	Fashion designer	3 years
Tattooist 3	33	Common-law marriage	Fashion designer	2 years
Tattooist 4	19	Single	-	1 year and 6 months
Tattooist 5	32	Married	Fashion designer	3 years
Tattooist 6	24	Single	Undergraduate/Architecture	2 years
Tattooist 7	27	Single	-	5 years
Tattooist 8	20	Single	-	5 months
Tattooist 9	21	Single	Fashion designer	2 years
Tattooist 10	23	Single	-	3 years
Tattooist 11	27	Single	-	1 year
Tattooist 12	24	Single	-	1 year and 10 months
Tattooist 13	29	Single	Social communication/Architecture	3 years
Tattooist 14	39	Single	Fashion designer	3 years
Tattooist 15	33	Single	Physical educator	3 years

Source: research data.

As observable on Table 1, the interviewees are aged between 19 and 39 years old and have been working in the industry for between 5 months and 5 years. They are mostly single and six of them have not either started or finished an undergraduate course. Tattooist 1 was completing her PhD in vegetable biology and worked with botanical technical drawing and design. It is Worth mentioning, that apart for the physical educator, according to the interviewees, every academic course is in some way connected to technical drawing.

The model by Slay and Smith (2011) was used for carrying out the interviews, which seeks to evaluate the identity construction of stigmatized groups. The early experience and professional experiences will be analyzed, the available repertoires for creating or redefining one’s professional identity, and, lastly, the redefining tasks will be used on an individual level, as well as professional and of stigma.

The analysis was carried out through content analysis (BARDIN, 2011), on three phases: (1) pre-analysis, with the organization and systematization of the available materials for the research and that collaborate with the final interpretation; (2) exploration of the material, seeking to understand the meaning given by those involved in the study to the research corpus; and (3) treatment of results, inference and interpretation, which would mean

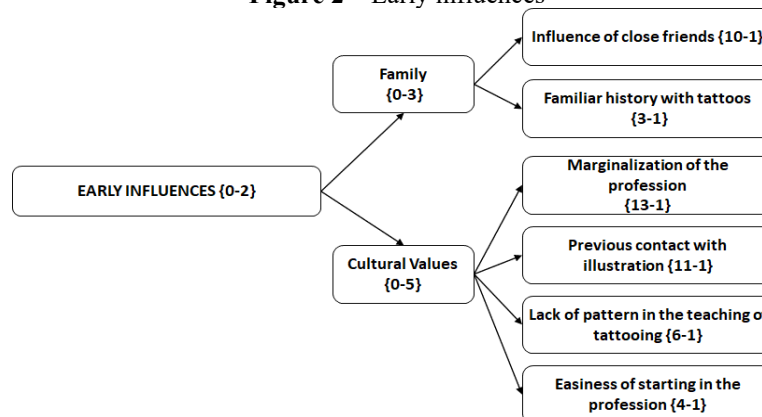
categorization. Therefore, through the analysis of the model by Slay and Smith (2011), four categories of analysis were established: initial influences, work experiences, possible professional selves, and the redefinition tasks, which include the redefinition of stigma, redefinition of self and redefining the profession. For data processing, the Atlas.ti software (version 7) was adopted as it is a tool that helps in qualitative analysis, coding the data, pointing out trends and patterns and optimizing the time devoted to analyzing the results. Thus, the analysis categories and context units are related to them by use of arrows in an ordered pair {x, y}, where each code is indicated with an ordered pair of two numbers, where the first represents the frequency with what the code appears, that is, the number of citations to which the code was related to the other; and the second number represents the number of context units it is associated with.

5 ANALYSIS AND RESULT DISCUSSION

5.1 The process of choosing a profession: becoming a tattoo artist

Initially, the early influences of the tattooists were identified, which englobe family values and life experiences. These influences also contribute to the creation of repertoires of selves, with skills, attitudes and necessary behavior to be successful in a career (BROWN, 2014) (FIGURE 2).

Figure 2 – Early influences



Source: Research data.

The early influences originated from the families of the interviewees, as well as their cultural values which made them start in the profession. The most common factor that was mentioned by the interviewees was the reason why they decided to learn their work, for instance "influence of close friends" and even relatives, such as a brother and husband which incentivized them. This result was similarly found on the study by DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016), on which the analyzed tattoo artist started the art of drawing during his childhood due to the influence of his grandmother.

In addition, three of the interviewees mentioned that they have "familiar history with tattoos" and due to that, they did not see an issue in starting to work as a tattoo artist. This may also serve as a facilitator for women to enter in the profession, because their family values regarding tattoos and tattooing do not carry marginalized connotations. Tattooist 11 works in a study along with her two brothers, which may have facilitated her beginning and the development of her career. Besides that, eleven out of the fifteen interviewees mentioned that they had "previous contact with illustration" before becoming tattooists, which was itself another factor for facilitating the beginning of their work; hence, similarly as the study by DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016), the participants had already had contact with illustration before actually becoming tattoo artists.

The cultural values which are related to tattooing and tattoos themselves are another important factor for the early influences when they have a negative connotation. The "marginalization of the profession" was the most mentioned factor. According to the interviewees, this marginalization is due to the fact that tattoos are seeing as "something secondary" (Tattooist 3), but ultimately due to lack of control over the practice of the profession. This lack of control is mentioned in several studies on the practice of tattooing,

including the study by DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016).

It is also noted that: "nowadays, there are plenty of tattooing courses all over Brazil. Outside of Brazil it is required that people that that course, and if I am not mistaken, here in Fortaleza you need to prove you have taken a biosafety course" (Tattooist 1). This finding contradicts the "lack of pattern in the teaching of tattooing". Despite of that, Tattooist 6 states that "some people I know are starting to get into tattooing, they expressed an interest and they are people who are already artists or illustrators and they started tattooing. The issue is that, from what I observe, they do not have the same level of responsibility that you need have, you now?". Contrasting from what was presented in the studies by DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira, in 2016, although there are not currently higher education or university courses for tattooing, it is still feasible to pursue professionalizing courses on tattooing.

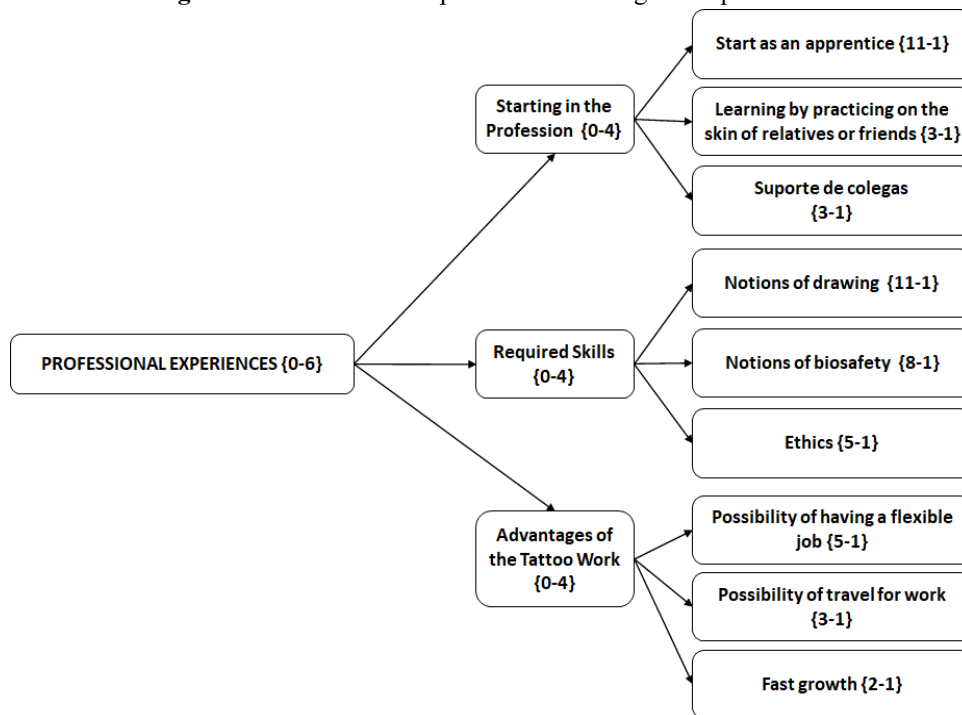
Further in addition, the "easiness of starting in the profession" is a factor which reinforces marginality among the profession. This issue is stated by the following Tattooist: "so, nowadays, since it is not yet completely regulated, a lot of people join in this type of work, and the biggest issue here is when people start tattooing but they are not really aware of biosafety, contamination or inflammatory processes" (Tattooist 1). All of the aspects which were presented by the interviewees reinforced the previously stated idea by Adams (2012), which compares working with tattoos as a type of "dirty work", as the lack of formal regulation may result in biosafety problems and contamination, which has already been observed by both tattoo artists and clients, according to Oliveira and Moura (2021).

After the early influences have been identified, this research sought to understand which skills, attitudes and behaviors were necessary for a successful career as a tattoo artist (SLAY; SMITH,

2011). As for professional experiences, the results were split into two figures for better comprehension and visualizing. Figure 3 refers to technical aspects of getting

involved in the profession, while Figure 4 refers to difficulties and stigma the tattoo artists struggled with.

Figure 3 – Professional experiences – starting in the profession



Source: research data.

Referring to the forms of starting in the profession, eleven of the interviewees stated that they had a “start as an apprentice”, in which they were invited by owners of tattoo studios or would seek a studio that would accept them as an apprentice. As for the start in the profession, eleven of the interviewees stated that they had their “start as an apprentice”, in which they were either invited to tattoo studios by owners or simply acted on their own interest and sought a studio that would accept them as apprentices. The interviewees who considered themselves to be self-taught stated that “learning by practicing on the skin of relatives or friends” was the way they learned how to perform the art of tattooing, which was also seen on DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016).

In order to comprehend which skills are necessary to become a proper tattoo artist, the interviewees mentioned that: Notions of drawing, Notions of biosafety

and ethics are all crucial. For notions of biosafety, Tattooist 1 affirmed that: “the materials are disposable, but some people start tattooing and will use the same needle multiple times. And that is a problem because it takes away the credibility from people who have notions, especially because there is no regulation. We have health surveillance, but not really... That is why tattoos are seen as marginalized, because there is not really any kind of control”. This reality is also confirmed on Vough et al. (2012), as the profession stigma is often unleashed from tattoo studios that do not follow any regulation norms, which leads to the clients and the deprecation of the profession. Although DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016) have state there is partly a standardization of the profession.

Lastly, “ethics” in the profession was highly mentioned, especially referring to working on one’s skin. Tattooist 10

affirmed that: "I think I would say the main thing is to be ethical. Because you are dealing with someone's skin, it is something that will stay forever with that person, so I think the most important thing is to be ethical and also dedicated".

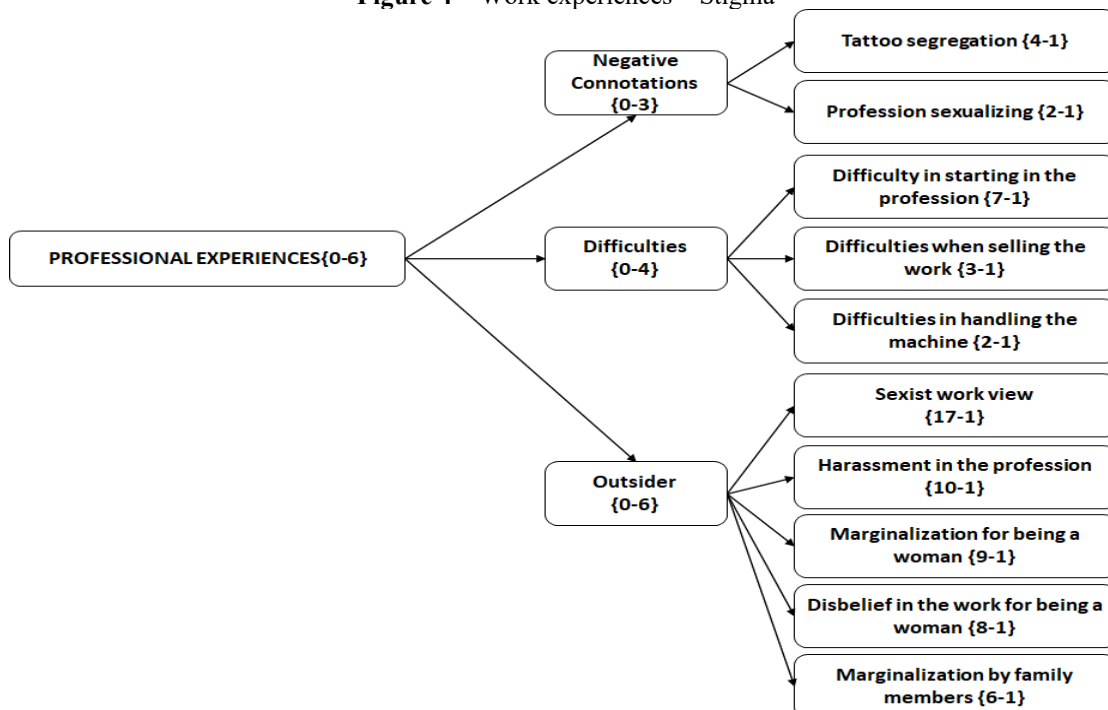
The "possibility of having a flexible job" was mentioned by five interviewees as one of the advantages of working in the profession. Tattooist 5 mentioned that "it is a kind of job, profession which allows me to be a mother, to practice in other areas besides tattooing, due to scheduling and the time availability. You make your own schedule". This statement highlights motherhood and working, especially that for this interviewee, the fact flexible hours were an option made her opt out of her job as a fashion designer, which is her degree of education; and dedicated herself fully to tattooing. This finding relates to the stated by Cappelle and Melo (2010) as professional tattooing jobs made possible

that the interviewee had a double shift as a mother and a tattoo artist.

Moreover, the interviewees also mentioned that the "possibility of travel for work", as Tattooist 1 stated: "I started eight months ago, and by three months I had plenty of customers already and was quite recognized, people would come talk to me in the street which is weird to me. Then I came here, now I'm going to São Paulo. The acknowledgment has been incredible". Thus, it is possible to conclude that the job allows for a fast growth, as she had "plenty of customers" by three months, having her work acknowledged, which corroborates with what has been emphasized by DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016).

The interviewee's experiences, which illustrate the existence of stigma, were also analyzed as they influence the definition of a stigmatized identity (SLAY; SMITH, 2011), according to Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Work experiences – Stigma



Source: Research data.

The "negative connotations" of the profession itself and tattooed people are highlighted in the professional experiences related to stigma. The interviewees affirm

that, although there is a certain evolution in society's general views, "tattoo segregation" still continues in specific situations, as in the statement: "and yes,

there is prejudice in the police force when it comes to tattooed people, depending on where the tattoo is... Hand, face and neck tattoos... The tattoo placement kind of isolate you in our society, so there is still prejudice, the aspect of it has just shifted” (Tattooist 5). That confirms what has been presented by Link and Phelan (2001), as these people are labeled and discriminated against due to the area of their bodies which they decided to tattoo.

The “tattoo segregation” is verified in the study of Schlösser et al. (2020), as tattoos may be seen as a sign of risky behavior in adults. Besides that, it also corroborates with the idea of Toyoki and Brown (2013), as the stigma associated to tattoos marginalizes the members of this community, which results in the disqualification of a person or people of society’s complete approval. Furthermore, it also agrees with the study by Adams (2012), where it is stated that tattooed people end up having their character associated to their body appearance.

Two of the interviewees even alluded to “profession sexualizing”, as noticeable in the following statement: “women suffer a lot with constantly being hit on, and even having men ask that they go out during the job rather than tattooing, quite hardcore stuff” (Tattooist 4). That may happen as, according to Thompson (2015), the fact that working with tattoos is not completely regulated yet makes sexual discrimination occur in a more explicit manner.

When referring to difficulties, seven of the interviewees stated they had “difficulty in starting in the profession”, due to the obstacles in getting into the tattoo market, as stated by Tattooist 9: “it’s just a bit of a difficult area, not everybody makes themselves available for teaching...”. That prejudice in starting in the job market, as emphasized by Siqueira and Samparo (2017), may be seen not only by tattooists, but all women, which configures as

symbolic violence, a reflex of sexual division in work.

As for “difficulties when selling the work”, the interviewees mentioned the hardship of work instability, as it is a “highly oscillating market” and a “non-essential product” (Tattooist 15). This difficulty is emphasized in the service sector entrepreneurship. Two of the interviewees stated they had difficulties when first handling the machine, due to nervousness and lack of practice.

In addition, the fact of being an outsider and not belonging in a certain group is another part of stigmatized professional experiences, due to the “sexist work view”, referring to the gender stereotypes in the profession. Tattooist 15 affirmed that: “95% of all tattoo artists are men, it is hard for people to even trust women, you know? It is quite hard”. Besides that, tattooist 5 emphasized that: “we are still discriminated, there is still discrimination, sexism in tattooing. For instance, whenever I go out with my husband, people often ask whether he is the tattoo artist rather than me”. That is closely related to the study of Slay and Smith (2011) when they affirm that society tends to see the tattooists as people of limited capacity and potential; although that does not seem to be a factor that makes them feel limited in their professional capabilities and possibilities.

Furthermore, 10 statements were identified as “harassment in the profession”, highlighting the fact that women often choose to get tattooed by other women: “a lot of men will tattoo women, but a lot of women choose to get tattooed by women, because tons of men are abusive. There was that Belo Horizonte case...” (Tattooist 1). However, Tattooist 5 shows that harassment may come in two forms: “because there is a lot of harassment cases, we see out there, right? We have seen female tattoo artists getting harassed as well as male tattoo artists doing the harassing, but to customers”. In this sense, Tattooist 14

advocates for the regulation in the profession, especially as she believes it would make a difference in harassment: "it would improve mainly for us. Of course, being a doctor is a heavily regulated profession and there are still doctors who are abusers, that will never stop happening. There is that tattooist guy who abused women... That is horrible". That corroborates with Thompson (2015), as harassment is often related to the male dominated, hostile environment which tattoo studios are often associated to.

As far as "marginalization for being a woman", the different manner in which women are treated in the profession, Tattooist 13 has felt judged when she heard the phrase "but do you actually tattoo here?", similarly, Tattooist 15 has heard "are you actually going to do the tattoo?", besides emphasizing that "door clients", an expression used for clients who arrive at the tattoo studios without previous contact, also "tend to pick a male tattoo artist". These affirmatives confirm that these women experienced their professional identity construction under the stigmatized condition and suffer from the fact that they were not welcomed in that particular work environment, which has also been evidenced in the research by Slay and Smith (2011). In that perspective, Vough et al. (2012) consider that customers often do not

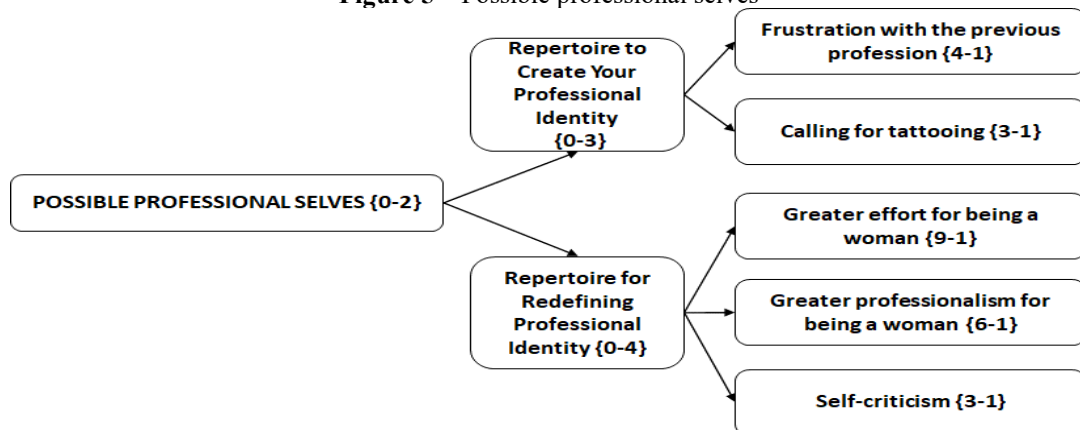
value certain jobs due to the fact that the professional in question is a woman.

When referring to "disbelief in the work for being a woman", Tattooist 2 states that, in her previous studio: "some customers or people that visited did not have the same view of me as they had with the guys I worked with", emphasizing the lack of appreciation of a woman's work. Within the outsider aspect, 6 statements were found which referred to "marginalization by family members", who often may not acknowledge the profession, as stated here: "my Family does not acknowledge this is my job, they are always on my case about getting a degree in, like, esthetics, to do micro blading, because it is related to tattooing, just so that I have some sort of degree..." (Tattooist 4). That experience is also confirmed in the work by (2012), as the cosmetics industry has gone through the transition of a bad reputation, deviant industry into a larger degree of acceptance and commercial success.

The units "marginalization for being a woman" and "disbelief in the work for being a woman" corroborate with what has been emphasized by Thompson (2015), due to the fact that there are difficulties in fighting against sexual discrimination in tattoo studios.

Figure 5 represents the construction of the repertoires of possible professional selves of the interviewed tattoo artists.

Figure 5 – Possible professional selves



Source: Research data.

From that point, the repertoire of creating one’s professional identity was sought to comprehending. A partir disso, buscou-se compreender o repertório para criar sua identidade profissional. The “frustration with the previous profession” occurred from lack of financial incentive as well as the disappointment from the previous job. In addition, three of the interviewees stated they felt a “calling for tattooing”.

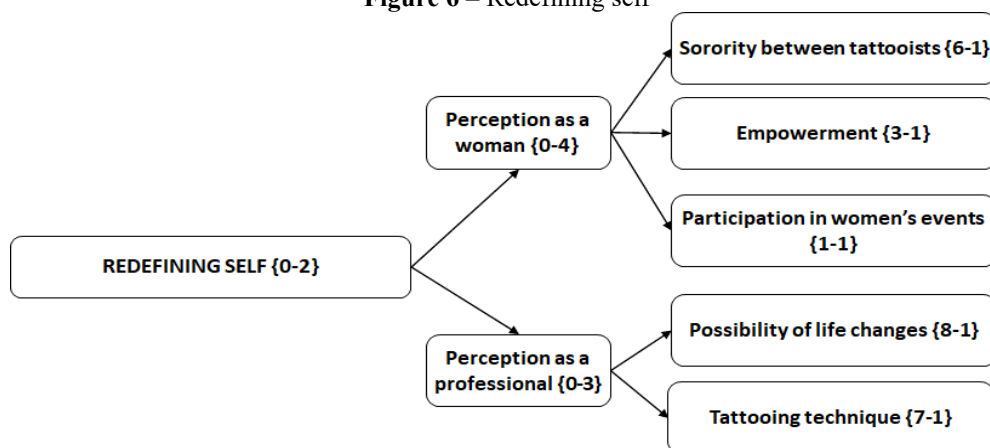
As a repertoire for redefining one’s professional identity, the most expressive unit in the statements of the interviewees was the “greater effort for being a woman”. That unit refers to the fact that, due to the sexist perspective the profession carries, it is necessary for them to prove their competence. Next, the unit “greater professionalism for being a woman”, as a consequence of the necessity of proving they are as capable of doing a job as men. From the necessity of proving themselves, “self-criticism” is originated from their work, which reinforces once again the matter of gender in organizations and how present it is even in professions which are

seen as less formal. The necessity of a greater effort and professionalism from the female tattoo artists reinforces that even in the tattoo industry, there is sexual division in work (CAPPELLE; MELO, 2010; SIQUEIRA; SAMPARO, 2017), in which the woman has to prove her capacity of performing the same job as a man.

5.2 The woman as a tattoo artist

The model which was used by this research shows there is a redefinition rather than a process of adapting to the profession (SLAY; SMITH, 2011). The task of redefining one’s self, professional and work identity, discusses the need to greater weight should be given (SLAY; SMITH, 2011). Therefore, this research sought to comprehend what it means to be a woman who works with tattooing for the participants of this study, thus redefining their perceptions of what it is to be stigmatized. In that sense, a division was made between “perception as a woman” and “perception was a professional”, as shown on Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Redefining self



Source: Research data.

Initially, for “perception as a woman”, the “sorority between tattooists” is highlighted, which is a feeling of unity between women between women, based on empathy, and was mentioned 6 times during the interviews, as exemplified by Tattooist 6, when describing that: “some female

tattoo artists have a community, like when we see each other regularly to discuss these points”. This feeling of empathy is probably seen between women due to the difficulties they find when starting in a particular job field (CAPPELLE; MELO, 2010).

For Tattooist 10, “empowerment” is an important way of establishing herself as a tattoo artist, as it worked as a form of incentive in the start of her profession, as observable in the following: “these days, I was thinking about how important this whole representation thing is, because I have seen women tattooing, and it just sank in, like ‘oh, I can too’” (Tattooist 10). That statement corroborates with Toyoki e Brown (2013), as, although tattoos are a differentiation for stigmatized groups, they cultivate positive perceptions of themselves, as well as self-esteem and strategies of self-management.

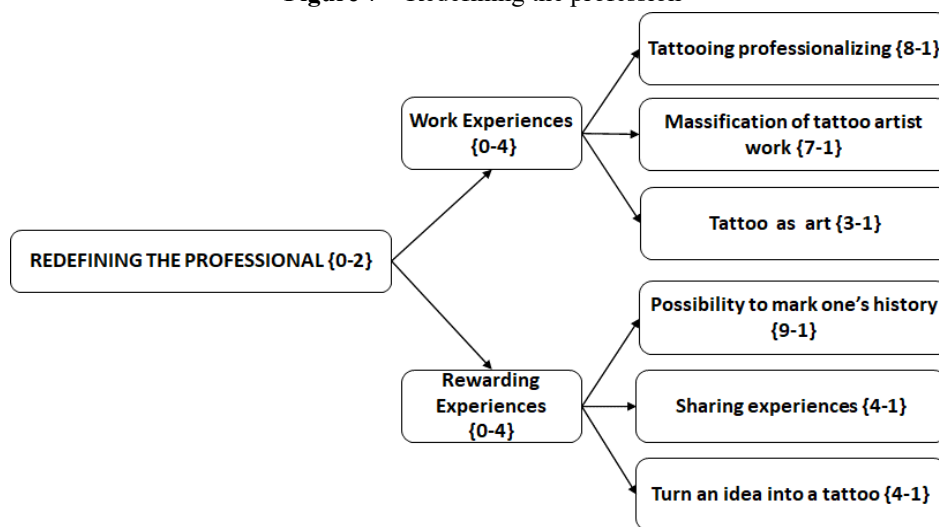
In its turn, “perception as a professional” englobes the “possibility of life changes”, with 8 mentions. “Tattooing technique” also presents 7 mentions.

Moreover, it is noticeable that there is a new relationship of the tattoo artists with themselves and the profession which they have chosen. That relation of women and their careers has been seen in several scientific researches, such as Siqueira and Samparo (2017).

5.3 Meanings of living in the tattooist profession

As stated by Slay and Smith (2011), redefining one’s professional identity is crucial for members of stigmatized groups, under the influence of stigma and being an outsider. Therefore, “work experiences” and “rewarding experiences” were divided as shown on Figure 7.

Figure 7 – Redefining the profession



Source: Research data.

In addition, for “tattooing professionalizing”, Tattooist 12 stated that: “it is like any other job, you always have to try to understand what it is that you are doing, as well as finding other professionals like you and learn what they are doing, do that or even improve”, which also agrees with the findings from DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016).

Furthermore, 7 mentions were found about the about the “popularization of tattoos”, which was mentioned by Tattooist 15 “I did a lot of commercial work, a lot of

drawings taken out of the internet, until I have come to the point of saying ‘this is my identity as an artist’ and people start to seek me due to that particular identity”, which exemplifies the process of doing generic tattoos until finally choosing their own identity as a tattoo artist. This popularization may be seen up until the decade of 1990, as emphasized by Kluger (2015) and DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016).

“Tattoos as art” was mentioned 3 times, especially referring to personalized

and unique art, as stated by Tattooist 7: “...in the studio, we will talk, and from there I will create an exclusive piece of art for you”. The idea of having a unique tattoo may serve as incentive for women to engage in tattooing more (KLUGER, 2015), due to the fact that choosing an art work makes it possible for small, delicate tattoos to be done, which are more socially accepted (DANN; CALLAGHAN, 2019).

Moreover, for “rewarding experiences”, the first is the “possibility to mark one’s history”, for instance: “so, I have met a lot of people, women, who have come to show homage to people and there is a whole story behind the tattoo” (Tattooist 12). In this manner, acquiring a tattoo often means an act of resistance for those who choose to do so (DANN; CALLAGHAN, 2019).

As for “transforming an idea into a tattoo”, Tattooist 6 affirms that; “what makes me comfortable about tattooing is the sensibility of working with a human being, having the patience to listen to their story and try to translate it, try to get inside

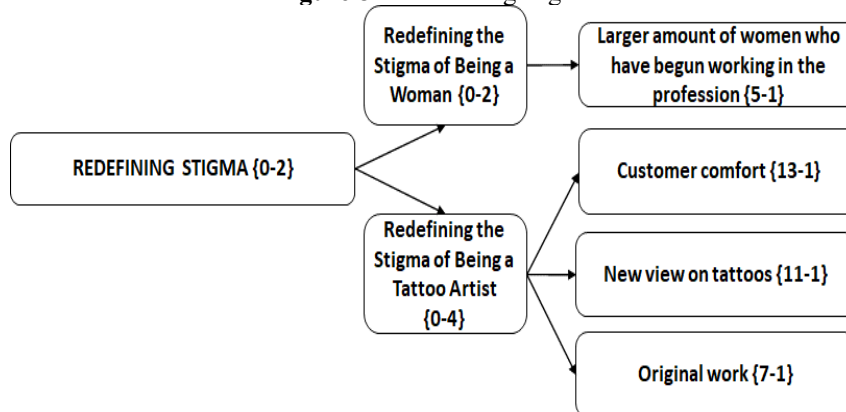
their minds and see what they are seeing, and translate that into a drawing”. Thus, according to DeLuca, Grisci and Lazzarotto (2018), tattoos are a body mark which may be seen as a form of reflexing, expression, and resistance.

Lastly, 4 mentions were found for “sharing experiences”, as Tattooist 10 indicates is “the best in our profession”, and compared to “psychological work” (Tattooist 14). It all confirms what has been presented by Simpson and Pullen (2018), as tattoos may be seen as representations of a desire of authenticity, as well as confirming the work seen as creative, rebellious and challenging.

5.4 Stigma of female tattoo artists

Finally, the negative connotations are redefined in the task of redefining stigma. Stigma is seen in a positive manner by the group and their cultural identity then carries a unique, different perspective (SLAY; SMITH, 2011). The tasks of redefining stigma are identified in Figure 8.

Figure 8 – Redefining stigma



Source: Research data.

The first form was redefining the analyzed stigma was the stigmatized cultural identity for being a woman. As a way of acquiring a new meaning, 5 tattoo artists mentioned the larger amount of women who have begun working in the profession. That had already been mentioned in DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016); however, in that paper, it is

noticeable that also occurred with women in the occupation.

When referring to the stigma of being a tattoo artist, the most mentioned unit by the interviewees as the “customer comfort”. That unit represents mainly the fact that women are more comfortable with acquiring tattoos with other women, due to fear of harassment and being more

comfortable when exposing their ideas for tattoos. That finding was also highlighted in the study by Oliveira and Moura (2021).

The "new view on tattoos" refers to people beginning to see tattoos as an artistic embellishment which empowers those who carry them and no longer something marginalized. In that context, it is directly related to the perception of performing "original work". Tattooist 14 also adds that: "after the person gets tattooed, it often changes the way they see themselves. Like their self-esteem, sometimes they think of themselves as more badass, let's say that". That corroborates with the idea of Schlösser et al. (2020), as tattooed women feel better about their appearances.

It is noticeable that the tattooists began to see a new meaning for themselves,

as well as their occupation. That reaffirms what Ibarra (1999) and Slay and Smith (2011) have stated, as a new rhetoric results in a new value of the stigmatized identity, making it possible for the individuals to find a balance between their professional identity and the stigmatized identity.

Given what was addressed in the results of this research, Table 2 is presented with a synthesis of the main findings, taking into account the model by Slay and Smith (2011), which considers the following categories of analysis: early influences, professional influences, possible professional selves and the tasks of redefinition (redefining self, redefining the professions and redefining stigma).

Table 2 – Summary of the main results of the research

Analysis Category		Unit of Context	Main results
Early influences		Family	Family history with tattoos and Influence of close people that facilitate starting in the profession.
		Cultural values	Previous contact with illustration facilitated the development of the activities; Marginalization of the profession as something secondary.
Professional experiences		Start in the profession	The start in the occupation as an apprentice; with learning through the skins of friends and family members.
		Necessary skills	Notions of biosafety, notions of drawing and ethics.
		Difficulties	Difficulties in the beginning; selling the work; handling the machine.
		Advantages of the profession	Possibility of work trips; having a flexible job and quick growth.
		Outsider	Harassment, marginalization for being a woman, gender view of work and marginalization by family members.
Possible professional selves		Negative connotations	Sexualizing the profession and segregation due to tattoo placements.
		Repertoires to create the professional identity	Calling for tattooing and frustration with the previous occupation.
		Repertoires to redefine the professional identity	Self-criticism, greater effort and professionalism for being a woman.
Redefining tasks	Redefining self	Perception as a woman	Empowerment, participation in feminist events and feeling of sorority among the female tattoo artists.
		Perception as a professional	Unique tattooing technique and possibility of life changes.
	Redefining the profession	Rewarding experiences	Exchange of experiences, possibility of transforming an idea into a tattoo, marking customers' histories.

		Work experiences	Professionalizing of tattooing, which resulted in popularizing tattoos as well as them being seen as art.
	Redefining stigma	Redefining the stigma of being a woman	Larger number of female tattoo artists.
		Redefining the stigma of being a tattooist	Original work and customers being more comfortable.

Source: Research data.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to investigate how gender stigma interferes with the construction of professional identity of female tattoo artists, based on the model by Slay and Smith (2011). Thus, it was possible to verify that the redefinition of professional identities for stigmatized groups acquired a new meaning after being seen as a marginalized activity, especially for female tattoo. Furthermore, the study has brought a new view on the necessity for tattooists to be professionalized, bringing safety not only for the professionals but also to the clients, who may have access to these institutionalized practices.

Referring to the early influences of the tattoo artists, the findings in this study showed that the main influence of the tattooists to initiate in the profession was the fact that they had a previous contact with illustration. However, the greatest issue presented refers to the cultural values which marginalize the profession. That view existed due to the lack of standardization, as well as the easiness of starting in the occupation, as according to the interviewees, “buying the machine” would be enough to start.

As for professional experiences, the importance of biosafety is emphasized as the work is performed with needles, which may present risk of contamination. The tattooists also stated they had difficulties when first starting in the profession. The feeling of being outsiders was verified due to the view that only men would be able to perform a job well done, which may often result in harassment to customers and fellow tattoo artists, as well as marginalizing these professionals. That

context itself leads to a greater effort by the female tattoo artists, especially due to the fact they are women.

In the task of redefining self, the sorority between the interviewees and feeling of empowerment they felt after their start in the profession are the most evident aspects. It is noticeable that a woman who is performing the work of tattooing may provide greater comfort to her customers, as well as the possibility of marking their history through transforming what was previously an idea of the customer and then becomes a tattoo. Redefining the stigma of the profession has been occurring through a new view on tattoos, which has gradually brought empowerment to those associated to it, as tattoos are now seen as a form of art and no longer only a stigmatized aspect. Given that, it was found that, as a consequence of the redefinition of the stigma of being a woman in tattooing, there is a significant increase in female tattoo artists.

As for scientific contribution, this study has sought to amplify discussion and bring reflection on women in the context of creative occupations, once it has been observed there was greater effort for the performed work, with the possibility of doing original work, making them feel more confident and accomplished with their current profession. As a social contribution, it is possible to emphasize that the profession of tattooist is a way of starting for many illustrators, who previously did not have their work acknowledged. In a general manner, this research contributes by bringing a new view on the necessity of the professionalizing of tattoo related activities, bringing safety not only for the tattooists,

but also to customers, having access to regulated practices.

Faced with some limitations naturally emerge in the development of the research, it may be seen that, despite the increase of women in the profession of tattoo artist in recent years, there is still difficulty in finding women in this profession who worked in a professionalized manner, which was a necessary requirement for their participation in the interviews carried out in this study.

Given that, for future researches on this theme it is suggested that there are new investigations on the masculine perspective on the profession, as a way of enriching the perception the professional identity among tattoo artists, as well as comparing the results which were found in this study and in other studies in this field of scientific knowledge. The main focus of this panoram is comprehending even further the construction of professional identity for tattoo artists.

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ⁱ Doutoranda em Administração e Controladoria pelo Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria da Universidade Federal do Ceará -Brasil.

ⁱⁱ Mestranda em Administração e Controladoria pelo Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria da Universidade Federal do Ceará.

ⁱⁱⁱ Doutor em Administração e Controladoria pelo Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria da Universidade Federal do Ceará.

^{iv} Doutora em Educação pela Universidade Federal do Ceará. Professora do Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e Controladoria da Universidade Federal do Ceará.