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If they can see themselves flying, they are already there: An ethnography of contemporary body suspension

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Universiteit Leiden

If they can see themselves flying, they are already there:

An ethnography of contemporary body suspension

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Master's Thesis

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*Special thanks to Ana Laco for
allowing me to have a glimpse into
her beautiful life.*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Personal motivation

My interest in body modification, in general, started when I got my first piercing at 16 years old; I was fascinated by the whole process of piercing. Since then, I have had multiple body piercings and tattoos as I saw beauty in seeing my body change with different jewelry and drawings. Besides that, I have seen freedom in modifying my body on my own terms. For every piercing I got, I went to the same boutique in my hometown Rijeka, Croatia. In a way, that space became a safe zone for me, where I could educate myself and ask questions that I often could not find online or did not know how to search for. Later, in my university education, as a student of Sociology and Cultural anthropology, I often found myself gravitating toward topics that contextualize the human body in society, especially from a postmodern approach.

Before I started writing this thesis about body suspension, I just knew I wanted to cover topics of voluntary pain and the passion of people for modifying their bodies. Eventually, in a very long casual conversation with the person that turned out to be my gatekeeper for this research, the doors to exploring body suspension slowly opened, and I saw what an excellent opportunity for me is to research this topic, both for educational value and to satisfy my own curiosity.

1.2 Literature and academia

Regarding academia, why I think that this topic needs more attention and has much social significance because articles regarding body modification, in general, are often limited and concentrated on the negative aspects of body modification, such as the relationship or correlation between modified individuals and criminal record, troubled lifestyle or stigma during employment. While literature focusing on body suspension is valuable, it is not significant in number and usually limited to one aspect of body suspension.

One may question that because there are no articles or academic interest in this topic, maybe that would mean that the topic itself is not significant enough to be researched. To answer that, before starting to write my thesis, I firmly believed that the body suspension (and body modification) community has been ostracized, marginalized, and often fetishized for a really long time in the

academy, but also in every day (and Internet) life and therefore there has not been (much) in-depth research on different aspects of body suspension and body modification from perspectives that are not critiquing body modifications or people practicing them. Growing up in Croatia, that is still a conservative country, the public notion of modified individual is still negative and the ones that are modified in any way, are subjected to harsh stereotypes. After finishing my thesis, I still stand by my beliefs and they are confirmed, the community of body suspension and body modification needs to be recovered in academia. That is the reason why my goal was not to add to this toxic part of academia but to create new research that gives justice to my participants and the body suspension community in general.

People have always been interested in describing the body, and records of that can be found long before the birth of anthropology as a discipline, but I find that there is a reason why academia today is leaning towards one side in research of body modification. Research that got stuck with society about body modification dates from criminologists that focused on people with criminal records, prisoners, and even sailors (associated with a particular lifestyle) as primary carriers of body art. Also, keeping in mind anthropology's colonial background, the studies done decades ago and brought much attention in reference to body modification were reserved for "exotic" and "the other," not the contemporary body modification spread all over the world.

To sum up, there are various body modification articles and researches, and I would divide them into a few groups. First, we have classical old-school anthropology studies about indigenous communities and body modification and rituals they perform. Literature is often outdated and would sometimes fall into colonial anthropology. Second, we have a lot of contemporary research about the relationship between having body modification/performing extreme body modification and, for example, the use of harmful substances, troubled youth, and problems with the law. Even though literature like this can be helpful too, in my opinion, it puts much harm to body modification practitioners because it creates a stigma in the academic environment towards body modification. Especially if the carriers of this point of views are reputable enough to translate their knowledge to common people through public channels. Lastly, there is, of course, literature that fits my research the best. That literature concerns modern (and extreme) body modification that does not stigmatize subjects of their research. Instead, it educates on different spheres and layers in the body modification world.

I find my research differs from other research because my thesis is well-rounded research about one part of extreme body modification – body suspension. That includes historical/theoretical framework, motivations, pain-pleasure relationship, the building of community, the community's view on labor and the aspect of performance of body suspension. That kind of research is lacking in academics. Furthermore, I find these types of research important since there is a rising trend in body modification in general and their aesthetic aspect. Of course, it is not unknown that people always felt the need to decorate their bodies, but I find it interesting how the wheel of social perception of body modification often changes and is dependent on social structures in different surroundings.

1.3 Methodology

There is something sensitive in research of the body in any way. The body is often an extension of our mind and ways of living and can heavily depend on societal rules. When doing my research about body modification, all of my participants were comfortable sharing their private information, name, age, job, and similar information. I find that that is because they are established in the community and comfortable with their actions. They do not hide practice from their friends and family and are very proud of their work. Also, their skin would often be heavily tattooed, pierced, or branded, which makes a difference because it is clear to the public that they practice something not normative. In that way, I do not have concerns with sharing their identity because they did not only say yes but were very proud of their name and influence in the industry.

Even though this is the case, I always ensure they know my topic and how it will be used. During interviews, I never wanted to assume that they had negative experiences during their body modification journey because I think that can also harm participants and make them rethink their answers. Also, I think it is essential that I always have individual experience in my mind. Some commonalities in body suspension experience can be pointed out, but it is vital to know that every individual has an experience that is only their own. That is what is essential.

When I think about the field theoretically, my research fits into the theory of body modification sociology of embodiment. It also includes a historical framework and how certain rituals/practices spread over the world. The object/focus of my research is specific questions about body suspension I asked my participants, such as connection to pain/pleasure/sense of community/performance. Context of my research includes personal and intimate life stories of my participants and how their

childhood and life circumstances influenced them to become extreme body modification practitioners.

This research aimed to get an insight into how people inside the body suspension community create values and meanings towards their personal experience of body suspension and the community in general rather than focusing on how outside perspective reacts to it. I cover multiple topics starting from historical development of body suspension that covers the body suspension from its indigenous beginnings to contemporary sphere, then I write about personal motivations and experiences of body suspension before focusing on the chapter regarding pain. Next, I write about body suspension community and sense of belonging that I connect to the idea of what labor means to the facilitators of body suspension. I finish the thesis with chapter about performing body suspension.

The primary criteria for selecting participants were their experience in body suspension. In addition, the condition was that the participants are part of the body suspension community and see the discipline itself as valuable in their lives.

The form of an interview conducted with participants is a semi-structured interview, meaning that the questions asked were not strictly defined, but the interview was conducted through predetermined critical points of the interview. This interview form is the most suitable because it gives the best insight into individual perceptions. The primary topics of discussion were related to the presentation of the participants' experiences and their attitudes and opinions. The time of the interviews lasted anywhere from 25 minutes to 2.5 hours. Conversations were recorded in order to facilitate referencing when analyzing the content of the information obtained.

The essential points around which the semi-structured interview was conducted are personal experience with suspension, motivations, and reasoning of each individual, and explanation of the process of body suspension and the values behind it. Furthermore, the importance of the relationship between the facilitator of the suspension and the person suspending, comparing the experience of body suspension to some other experience (if possible), what is their view on body suspension community, their relationship with pain in body suspension and lastly, explaining the difference (if there is one) between performing body suspension and doing body suspension in an intimate environment.

Interviews were conducted individually because I found the interviewees must discuss the topic based on their own points of view, without external influences, and with their own linguistic oeuvre. Participants were selected using the snow-balling method, and the total number of participants was ten people, of which 9 were men. Their age range was anywhere between 25-50 years old, and they are residents of different countries: Croatia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and Italy. I am aware that women in this research are under-represented, but I found that the topic of gender did not have any relevance in this specific research.

Nevertheless, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews, and that decision allowed me and my participants to talk about topics that I could maybe not decide about myself if the interviews were completely structured. Also, after each interview, I could add something more to ask the next participant (if the topic applied to them). Interviews are perfect for the topic of body suspension because they allow participants to have freedom in their expression and be creative in how they describe the experience of being suspended.

Even though the interview is an excellent method that shaped my research with complete freedom for my participants to say whatever they wanted and, in that way, help me write a better thesis, interviews lack participant observation. One thing is talking about the experience of body suspension in retrospect, and the other would be if I could witness my participants being suspended. I would get the whole experience and could analyze what is untold. When you love what you do and are passionate about your practice (as my participants are about body suspension), it is easy to forget some downsides or reflect on the uncertainty that body suspension can provide. I also talked with my participants about that, but I think it would be different in real-time during a body suspension.

Overall, I think I chose the suitable method, but in an ideal world, I would definitely participate in a body suspension event in real life. I would ask my participants some of the extra information, document some of the photographs myself, or ask them about their experience before, during, immediately after, and sometime after the suspension I witnessed.

1.4 Ethical considerations

I think that the most harmful in my thesis would be if I took the position of stigma or did not give justice to the passion, love, and labor my participants put in their practice because not only would

I have lost the trust of my participants but I would also add to the stigma of heavily modified people as ostracized from the community. Therefore, I remained respectful, curious, and open-minded throughout my research because I think that is very important when dealing with alternative communities. I respected their body, their time, and the information they chose to have given me, and I will try to use it in the best way possible. My positionality of never experiencing body suspension was not a problem for my participants because one of their goals is to educate on any curious individual and to keep the practice clean and safe.

Except for that, the conversations were recorded, and the recordings were used for further reference during the analysis of the obtained information. At the end of the research, the recordings will be archived. The participants of the conversation did not remain anonymous due to the fact that they were comfortable with their identities being known.

1.5 Covid - 19 and research

In the interviews that I had in real life, I felt more comfortable in a way that I could move around the space we were in (a piercing studio), and I could overhear conversations between clients and how my participant talked about body suspension when there are other people around, not just me, a researcher. Also, it gave me more time to observe, feel the atmosphere, and not be in a hurry or force conversation that is only about my research topic. Online interviews were better in a way that when the conversation is over, you have personal time to "switch off" and are not observed by your surroundings. Therefore, I would conclude that doing research online (which also includes differences between regular calls, video chat, messaging, etc.) results in different outcomes than doing fieldwork in "real" life.

1.6 Theoretical framework and concepts

Since the topic of body suspension is relatively unresearched I had the freedom to explore different concepts. This process was not easy as I lacked academic discourse that would specify in this kind of body practice. Nevertheless, I chose some of the theoretical concepts that I found fitting in different contexts of body suspension. There is several concepts I use in this thesis, but I want to

accentuate these: in chapter about the community of body suspension and forming relationships inside it, I used the concept of Habitus by Pierre Bourdieu. This concept explains internalized structures and perceptual schemas introduced by Bourdieu and are applied to the structural worldview of all subjects involved in the group. In this case, the body suspension community. The habits shared by body modification performers are deeply rooted in the unspoken conventions, rules and values shared by the group, creating a common space.

Next I discuss the performative body, a concept by Judith Butler that connects to the habitus concept and building a community. The performative body uncovers an office fortification for those not absorbed by standards or recognized as substantial or "proper" human lives and still requests the correct to be as they are without being subjected to separation and viciousness. Even though people inside the body modification community share connectives and habitus, it is still a community that opposes social norms, meaning that body suspension is not a normative experience anyone goes through. Political performativity is affirmed and empowered in gathering in open space where, embodying as it were with their bodies, individuals endeavor for the correct to their ways of life and a future, caught on here not as it were individualistic terms but too in making the conditions for a common world to persevere. I solidify this concepts with the quotes from the participants.

Lastly, I problematize anthropological notion of labor and differentiate the terms "work" and labor" defining labor as an activity of humans that relates to capitalistic relations of production. On the other hand, work is the remainder of humans' energy to complete the tasks in the non-capitalistic spheres. (Narotzky, 2018). I put the terms of work and labor into the context of body suspension community and offer the views of facilitators of body suspension community on work and labor.

1.7 Research questions

The goal of this research was aimed to get an insight into how people inside the body suspension community create values and meanings towards their personal experience of body suspension and the community in general rather than focusing on how outsider perspective reacts to the community and individual's itself. In other words, I want to present an ethnography of contemporary body suspension.

My main research question was then: How the practitioners of body suspension community evaluate their beliefs and values regarding themselves and the community as a whole? I was lead by focal points of personal motivation, pain, community, labor and performance. I find that I answered the main research questions with the help of these spheres. Hopefully, I managed to conduct a well thought research that brings something new to the academic research and opens new questions.

1.7 On technicalities...

In the broadest sense, body suspension is the hanging of the human body with the help of hooks pierced into the skin in different places. Some of the most common suspension positions or the ones my participants mostly talk about are: suicide suspension, where a person is hung vertically with hooks in the upper back, a vertical chest suspension, also sometimes called O-Kee-Pa, and Coma, a horizontal suspension with a person facing up. There are many more body suspension positions and points on which the human body can be hung up. Besides that, two main types of rigging are static and dynamic rigging. As the words themselves describe, dynamic one uses ropes and one long piece that is used to connect the person suspending to the apparatus. Static rigging is when each hook is attached to the apparatus separately.

2. From Mandan to Fakir Musafar

Throughout history, many communities practiced some version of body/flesh pulling practices. The most commonly mentioned in literature and among body suspension practitioners is the Mandan tribe that was located along the Missouri river, where North Dakota is now. Mandan tribe belonged to Plains Indians, which is an umbrella term for any member of Native American people that populated the Great Plains of the United States and Canada (Brittanica).

Plains Indians of North America performed a Sun Dance, a religious ceremony, the most sacred ritual. Ritual took time in late spring or early summer and differs from one community to another. However, to be concise, it usually consisted of men gathered around the center pole. Their chest or back would be pierced by a small needle and then connected with thread to the central pole. Rituals would last for four to eight days until the skin finally cracked. Through the ritual, the community grew closer together, their sacrifice was made, and spiritual beliefs were anchored and renewed.

As I mentioned, Sun Dance has many versions and many meanings that can include special attention towards fertility. (Brittanica) The ritual could be a rite of passage for young men to adulthood or make them warriors. It was an ultimate test of self-sacrifice, resilience, and a way to tribute to nature.

With Sun Dance being the most common and known ritual among Plain Indians, the Mandan tribe had their own ceremony called Okita. George Catlin was the first person to describe it. He witnessed the ceremony in July 1832 and published it in "Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians" in 1841. (Plains Anthropologist, Vol. 43, No. 165 (August 1998). He wrote it down like O-kee-pa and in many articles after, that name record stuck. Finally, Caitlin himself published the most entire description of Okipa, where he illustrated detailed depictions of the ceremony, including the sexual aspects.

Like the Sun Dance, the ceremony was performed during the summertime, telling the complex story of the creation of earth and all life. The ceremony structure consisted of Okipa maker, also known as the Lone man, who created the tribe. Other characters were Hoita, the creator of animals, and Oxinhede, an antagonist that discredited Okipa's power and was expelled from the village. Characters are accompanied by tribe members impersonating buffalo, bald eagles, holy women,

swans, snakes, grizzly bears, night, day, wolves, coyotes, meadowlarks, and antelopes and supported by drummers (encyclopedia of the Great Plains). Younger men had a long piece of wood pierced through the skin of their backs or chest and then hung by ropes that were connected to the beam. Their bodies hang in the air as they demonstrated their bravery in withstanding the pain. The most resilient ones would become Mandan leaders. Except for the ritual itself, participants had a period of food and sleep deprivation. Women were not allowed to participate in the ceremony. Later, the Mandan tribe was suppressed by the United States, but the descendants of the Mandan tribe performed some modern varieties.

Body suspension has been rooted in many communities worldwide in different forms. On the other side of the globe, it has been documented in various parts of India that J.H. Powell called "hook swinging. "In Powell's article (1914), he engages us with a thick description of the practice performed in several parts of India. Powell mentions that the earliest reference to hook swinging he could trace is the one from Duarte Barbosa, where he described marriage customs among the people of Malabar Coast at the very beginning of the sixteenth century (pg.156).

While there might be many reasonings for the rite of flesh pulling, in many descriptions of body suspension practices that were deducted from research before, in every community, body suspension was a sacred event that involved the spiritual world and was happening during special times. Often, it led to some form of catharsis, spiritual and emotional relief.

There are many names for body suspension; depending on the source, it can be called flesh pulling, energy pulling, flesh hook suspension, or any derivative of these numbered terms. I choose to refer to it as body suspension because I find it the most neutral term.

Naturally, contemporary body suspension differentiates greatly from the ones performed by indigenous societies. The equipment developed massively as today there is much more options to ensure that the body suspension is performed safely, including different hygienic standards and knowledge minimums that were set by the community itself. Rightfully, the main difference would be that the body suspension is not a rite of passage anymore, at least not in the way that it was for its indigenous practitioners, but is an option that any individual can decide for themselves.

The rising question is how did body suspension kept its value for so many centuries and eventually became to what it is today? To find an answer to my question, I asked my participants to describe me when did they first find out about body suspension and what that meant to them.

One of my participants, Andrew, was raised by a cultural anthropologist father which enabled him to grow up surrounded by picture books about different communities worldwide. As a result, he became aware of different cultures and cultural rites at a very young age. One time he stumbled upon one of the issues that featured indigenous people practicing body suspension. His initial thought was that he wanted to do that, followed by "can I do that?"

"I never thought I would be able to hang because it was someone else's culture, just admire it from afar, appreciate it, because it is never going to happen to me because, you know, I am not a part of that culture and then fast forward to being 17, and I saw the back of the magazine, a guy singing in a concert, front man of the band and he was swinging around, and I am like oh that is really cool you know he is in a jacket swinging around, and then I look, and there is no... that is his skin, oh shit, that's somebody that looks like me that is hanging by hooks maybe I will get a chance to hang, then I found out that body suspension community started picking it up, and so now it is available to anybody who wants to do it." Andrew

Even though the man singing in Andrew's story wasn't Fakir Musafar, to many other participants he was the "front man of the band" and the first exposure to body suspension. With this introduction the story of Fakir Musafar needs to be mentioned, a person who had a crucial role in spreading body modification (rites) worldwide. Not one of my interviews went without mention of Fakir, and he has a personal significance to every one of the persons I talked to – whether that means that Fakir mentored them or that the image and works of Fakir Musafar brought them comfort that they will eventually find their community.

Fakir Musafar was born in South Dakota, and his real name was Roland Loomis. In his book called "Spirit + Flesh," which came out in 2002. he provides us with an extensive biography of his life, his connection to body modification, and how he imprinted himself in the history of contemporary body modification and body art. The book also has numerous photographs taken by him that offer a broad spectrum of extreme body modification and body art. Fakir Musafar coined the term "body play" to explain his artistic need to modify his body along with the term "modern primitive," which I will reflect on later. In an interview for Inkspired magazine, Fakir was asked about the

meaning of his new name; he replied that he honored a 12th-century Sufi that was original Fakir Musafar and who claimed that by piercing yourself, you get close to the divine. He adopted the name for a show he was participating in, and the name got remembered after.

In his early teenage years, seduced by National Geographic magazines, he experimented with his body secretly in his parent's attic. It is essential to mention that Fakir Musafar was born in 1930. Furthermore, his passions were not considered ordinary by his surroundings. It was until decades later that he found understanding and comfort in BDSM and the fetish community and eventually pointed to West Hollywood as the place where contemporary piercing started in the 1970s.

Fakir Musafar did everything he could with his body, claiming there was no pain in control, only intense sensation that led him to an out-of-body experience. There are many articles about Fakir Musafar's life and many more that he written by himself, dedicating a space for body modification enthusiasts on the Internet and in the magazines that were popular decades ago and that covered topics of body modification. With these articles, Fakir educated whole community of aspiring body artists offering a safe space to explore their curiosity. He provided them with safety that he could not have for himself in his early life that helped many body artists to connect today.

What I want to accentuate is that many of my participants shared the same sense of not belonging to their communities, whether they were religious or not familiar with body modifications, so when they eventually stumbled upon Fakir Musafar's work, they felt understood, at least by someone, somewhere. This is how body suspensions were introduced to wider audience and what enabled the growth of the community was the modern primitive movement.

The modern primitive movement started with Fakir Musafar, who is also responsible for the term. This subculture is supposed to represent people in western nations that engage in body modification practices that reference the ones from indigenous communities. The term became extremely popular when V. Vale and A. Juno published the book with the same name.

"I read the book (Modern Primitive) when I was thirteen years old, and on vacation some Scottish guy did my first piercing. I didn't know better; I didn't know about the Internet." Tam

The book itself became extremely popular and one of the most influencing books of this thematic still to this day. Even though the value of the book is greatly recognized, there happened to be some backlash that criticized the authors of not representing the indigenous communities that

enabled many of the body modification to be performed, along with lack of respect towards its founders and claiming many of the rituals as “white and western” while they were not any of that.

2.1 "Borrowing a custom"

Fakir Musafar often talked about this discourse of cultural appropriation and did not hesitate to explain his point of view regarding the issue. This is the excerpt from one of his interviews I found online:

"I feel very strongly that if one borrows a custom from another culture, it is your obligation to respect and understand, as best possible, the significance and mystery of the practice. Otherwise, it can easily fall into darkness or misuse, and undesirable consequences or spiritual degradation can result."

Fakir, 2003.

While doing my research online, I came across some of the articles that criticize Fakir Musafar as being insensitive and appropriating indigenous people. For example, the focal point in many of the online resources was that the whole "modern primitive" movement was predominately white, and its practitioners sought individual meaning for practices such as scaring, tattoos or piercing that they could not find in their own culture. Even though no one really questions the impact, Fakir Musafar made on contemporary body modifications and body art practices. The leading judgment consists of acknowledgment on "whose backs it was built," alluding that there were simply not enough confirmations from western practitioners towards indigenous practice.

Cultural appropriation happens when "members of a majority group adopt cultural elements of a minority group in an exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical way" (Brittanica). To connect this with the point that if the beginnings of contemporary body modification are based on the exploitation of cultural elements of indigenous people, the first western practitioners were still on the margins of society because of their interests in changing their body. Fetish, queer and BDSM communities that played a key role in contemporary body modification in San Francisco in the 1970s still had to perform anything that did not go along with mainstream body in secret.

Furthermore, I include a quote from Fakir Musafar's column "Fakir rants and raves" in 2003:

"However, some of these explorers seem to think they have just invented the wheel and want some kind of patent on it to claim ownership. So now we have got "Superman" and "Coma" suspensions

and other new names that just did not exist in the world of the people who originated these rituals. However, that is OK as long as some credit and honor are paid to the people who came before and showed the way — as long as the inner "magic" and "sacred space" belonging to these rituals is not forgotten or ignored."

In this quote, I find interesting that he criticizes the modern names of body suspension that some of my participants in the interviews use to describe different positions.

To add to the cultural appropriation problematics, I would also like to point out poor linguistic choices in the late 1980s and their usage of the term "primitive," which indeed has negative connotations when misused, and today no researcher should make that mistake. Besides, there should also be taken into account that Fakir Musafar was born in the 1930s in a very religious and oppressed community. In contrast, not even a decade before, many colonial anthropological works were famous and considered an academic success. To add to that, in 2018, National Geographic, came out with an issue that dealt with National Geographic's racist past where they took accountability for their actions in the past.

What makes me wonder is when (if even) body experimentations are allowed in cultural borders, and if they are, how would one perform them? If I focus exclusively on the link between piercing in the 1970s as a means of rebellion against the ruling social structures, piercings did make a complete turnaround today when it is widespread to see a person with a piercing and not find it as an act of defiance. The idea that the whole-body modification culture today committed cultural appropriation is unpleasant because it could result in an identity crisis and insecurity in one's own representation and to which I am not one to escape. Therefore, I do not find myself competent enough to get to the bottom of this complex issue, but I wanted to address it.

2.2 Body suspension communities now

To continue on the topic of development of body suspension community in western society, I must mention the teams that developed modeled on the works of Fakir Musafar. The first suspension team was established in 1992 and was called TSD or Traumatic Stress Discipline. It was founded by Allen Falkner, Steve Joyner, Oliver Gilson, Mark Rose, Tom Moore and Ron Garza. They did much for the recognition of the community worldwide, from entering Ripley to breaking the

Guinness record, but today body suspension practitioners are grateful to them because they made all the technical questions easier.

In 2002, Havve Fjell and Christiane Loftblad founded Wings of Desire, a Norwegian suspension team that is today the most influential team in the world. In the same year, they organized the first SusCon (Suspension Convention) in Oslo. Nowadays it is probably the most important suspension convention in the world. With these founding groups being made, enthusiasts from different parts of the world decided to create their own teams with their own values and to give context, I will use the story of Ana Laco and the development of body suspension community in Croatia.

“After I went through their training (she refers to the training provided by Wings of Desire) and returned to Rijeka all smart to train the people who applied to be members of the team, they (Wings of Desire) came to visit us several times and help us until they finally trained us to be able to practice our knowledge independently and safely. In 2009, the Badaku team for suspensions was created, the first and only one of its kind in Croatia and in the territory of the former state of Yugoslavia in general. Trough out the years, team members have been traveling around the world to various events and conventions related to suspensions for the purpose of additional education. Later, In December 2012, I dissolved the Rijeka team due to personal reasons and lack of time to deal with it to the extent that I felt I should. No one followed in my footsteps, so I still decided to hold events and seminars at least four times a year, in addition to the countless private suspensions that I do in the circle of friends. I felt it was my duty to pass on the knowledge that my friends from abroad have so generously passed on to me for the past few years. As I said earlier, this is a practice in which it is extremely important not to repeat other people's mistakes. That's why I think it's my duty to pass on knowledge while I think there's something I can teach them.”

Even though Ana’s team did not last until today, many of the other teams that were created after being taught by Havve Fjell and Wings of Desire are still practicing and connections made in that time lasted until today and were confirmed during my interviews with the participants.

2.3 Conclusion

The body suspension as a practice has a rich history that comes from different parts of the world and the evaluability and benefits to its practitioners has proven by the longevity and number of people that educate and dedicate themselves to the discipline. In this chapter I summarized and

unwrapped the beginnings, the middle and current situation of body suspension community. I introduced the problematics of cultural appropriation and throughout this thesis readers can determine if the discipline today pays respect to its native beginnings. Finally, the community keeps growing and more information is being available online which greatly helps young enthusiast to get in touch with experts that want to share their knowledge and keep the practice developing.

3. Wanna hang?

When I started doing this research, and I was explaining to my friends, family, or even peers what is it exactly that I am researching, the most common question after explaining what body suspension is, is why would someone do that to themselves? Indeed, body suspension looks very intense, and to someone that has never heard of it or had any curiosity about this kind of body practice, it may be surprising that there are people who not only practice it, but also enjoy it. There are many motivations to do body suspension, and not one is worth more than the other. They can vary from religious or spiritual beliefs to challenging your body or simply just wanting to have fun and try something new. My participants opened the gates showing me kindness, safety, and vulnerability while I was trying to understand and respect the openness this community gives to anyone that shows interest in body suspension.

In this chapter, I will write about the reasoning and motivations to do body suspension, what attracted my participants to it, what exactly is happening during and after it, and who is it available to perform and witness body suspension.

3.1 When you see it, you know it

Most of my participants are people that adopted the lifestyle of living in a modified body. They start off with dissatisfaction with their surroundings and community, often battling conservative upbringing. The first touch with body modifications for many occurs in early adolescence when they see a person with a piercing or tattoo in a magazine, on TV, or in real life. After that, there is some kind of a switch that happens and illuminates the path to the world of body modifications, progressively getting more extreme. Finally, seeing someone who dares to challenge the norms in

their appearance and behavior makes them realize that this is what they have been looking for and longed for all this time.

For example, Tam called himself one of the "friendly old guards" of body suspension practitioners. He is 44 years old and is one of the rare ones that do not work in the body modification industry. He informed me that the community now has a massive growth through the accessibility of information online and the ability to easily connect with people that share your interest through social media, but when he started, there was only suspension.org, a website throughout which they learned and educated themselves. At that point he said that suspension has changed and that he is only a facilitator, the experience of suspension is what changes you. Therefore, he only knows how to provide it.

"I grew up in South Africa, and I had friends that had coming of age rituals, but as a white person in South Africa, I did not have any rituals. I grew up in a conservative place. When I was 12 years old, I watched a video of Fakir Musafar and found a book "Modern Primitive" so I stole it. Something in my brain said that I need to do that. There has to be something more than just hanging from the hooks."

Tam

This curiosity to try body suspension in search of something more is what many practitioners have. Pomo, a young Brazilian man, also explained this process to him. He started to engage in body modification when he was 18 years old, with his friend and a tattoo machine. They got their first tattoos together and got familiar with how it is done. After some years, he started going to another friend's shop and dated a girl who used to do tattoos, and through them, he learned *more and eventually had his first suspension.*

"I didn't know what it was, but in a tattoo convention, I saw unknown name suspending and I looked at his face and his expression and I was like oh he's having like a blast; sure, it can hurt a little bit but it's definitely something really strong and powerful to do. Then I said OK Carlos, let's do the suspension, you can set things up. Then it took almost three months, in December 2016, he said let's do it on a Sunday. And the funny thing is we had like a lot of winds where I was living and a lot of trees (...) when it came, I couldn't sleep I had a lot of anxiety it was very, very nice. We go to the beach near Carlos' house, the rigging is set. Carlos first, me second and Carlo's wife last. I did a suicide. And the moment I put my feet on the ground I said I need to understand how

this is done so I can do it to myself and my friends. This is so fucking special. I need to learn this.
“

Pomo

Even though there are similarities in entering the body modification world, I emphasize that every person has their individual path of how they become interested in body modification and eventually suspension. However, the patterns of curiosity and openness to new experiences are something that has been repeated with all my participants.

"For me it was a way to challenge my limits, my body limits, and try to overcome them."

Luca

The interest to body suspension within my participants started with initial interest to body piercing and tattoo. To understand the demographic and personality traits of individuals with body modifications of piercing and tattoos, Wolhrab (2007), compared them with a group of individuals without any body modification and analyzed them using a scale of five personalities. Even though there were no relevant differences concerning demographic variables, in personality traits, they found that individuals with body modification are more prominent sensation seekers that follow more unrestricted mating strategies. I recognize that my participants come from different parts of the world but have similar values that are represented in the community. Moreover, they were comfortable sharing and understanding different phases of their body and matched them to their sensations and environment. Keeping that in mind, I will add that my participants have in common is the importance of curiosity within experimenting with the body. It is vital to remember that the people I interviewed are practicing body suspension regularly and it was not a “one time thing”. So, when the curiosity is satisfied there has to be something that keeps them wanting more. Except for the emotional or psychological reasoning in the next subchapter I focus on bodily experience of performing body suspensions.

3.2 Happy Chemicals

What happens in your body during the suspension is that it releases "happy chemicals" (Graziano Breuning, 2012), which are dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphin. Each of these chemicals has a purpose in producing happiness. I find that each of these hormones corresponds to the different phases of doing body suspension by how my participants described it.

I summarized the experiences and connected them to the article by Breuning. In short, this is how the chemicals effect the body and the mind of the practitioners of body suspension; The feeling of anticipation before being suspended and then after some time letting go, allowing yourself to hang from the hooks results in release of dopamine, you finally get what you want- your feet off the floor. In body modification, the word pain is often replaced with "extreme sensation", replacing the pain as we commonly refer to and know it, as something not desired and uncontrolled with the sensation of euphoria. This is when endorphin is being released. It produces the feeling suspenders seek for, what makes them come back for more.

After the suspension, self-empowerment and a sense of pride kick in when one is aware of what just happened. Serotonin is making you feel respected. Finally, with the community being one of the crucial topics in the body suspension world can also be at least a bit explained by your body producing oxytocin which enables you to connect with people around you and makes you feel safe with others.

When I was talking to Andrew, I felt this immense passion bursting through the screen while he carefully chose his words and gave himself time to think. Then, finally, he gives the perfect response corresponding to the fragment above.

"The empowerment that you get of the I can do the thing that is extremely difficult, extremely painful, and you get the adrenaline, the endorphins, and all the other good stuff is part of the therapy. The other thing is having an extreme experience breaks you out of your cycles. You know that you're going up, even though you don't have to, you're in a lot of pain and you don't have to be, and all your friends are cheering you along. That's something not normal, you know what I mean? So, when you see a friend or somebody you just met going up for their first time and it's not easy for them and they are working through it and they need a drink of water. They need to hold somebody's hand and they're trying and they're going through all these emotions. And then when you finally see them get off the ground like they've been trying for 20 minutes or something like that, the whole room just explodes, and you can see the person change on the inside." Andrew

To achieve the full effect of the body suspension, many practitioners get ready for the experience by meditating or restricting from certain things, like alcohol or different foods. Meditation helps eliminate anxiety and allows practitioners to be mentally and physically aware of their surroundings. Moreover, the restriction can also have spiritual value; not consummating alcohol

is also a way to minimize bleeding. Accordingly, there is aftercare when a person is done being suspended, it consists of removing the hooks and cleaning the area where hooks have been through. Then, it is essential to massage the body part where suspensions have been done because there can be air trapped underneath the skin, causing air bubbles that can lead to infection. This part allows the tension to leave the body, letting the person to feel the aftermath.

While all of this is happening is there is another engaging experience that occurs. Reportedly, many of the suspended people report that time passes differently while being up in the air.

3.3 Time distortion

While suspended, feet off the ground, hooks through your skin, one would assume that is certainly not a position that could last a person long. Indeed, some of the positions are harder to maintain. For example, one point hook through the middle of the chest could only last for a few minutes because of how sensitive the skin is and how intense it feels. However, on the other side, two points back suspension, or a suspension with multiple hooks throughout the body can last a few hours because of the position's dispersion of weight and comfortability.

One interesting phenomenon that happens during the suspension is that the person being suspended cannot tell how much time has passed while they were in the air.

"You can be there for ten minutes, two hours. You don't know how much time you were there. They (suspended person) don't have a clue. We (public) have a clue. It can seem like forever. It can seem like 10 minutes. But a friend of ours, she did this crazy coma - like suspension with lots of hooks on face, resurrection hooks and hooks on legs. She was there, for, I think, 2 hours, crazy, crazy! Shaking and swinging and like really, really enjoying. When she got down, she said, OK, I was there for like 20 minutes and then I said no, you were like 2 hours there. She said to her it was like up 20-30 minutes. No more than that. Yeah. Because you, you are someplace else." Pomo

Judgments of passing time can be inherently emotional. Subjective passage of time can vary from a different situation. For example, in unpleasant situations or in situations of anticipation of something happening, the time will pass by slower, whereas in situations of entertainment or where

we get some kind of a reward for the activity we have been practicing, time passage will seem quicker. That means perceptual time does not correspond to psychical time (Wittman 2009).

Since all of my participants reported that the time goes faster to them while they are being suspended and have witnessed many suspensions where suspenders completely lost track of time, it seems that suspension brings feelings of joy and reward, which can also be connected to the release of the chemicals in the subchapter above. This phenomenon is a positive experience and it builds up to the notion that body suspension is an action that objectively does not leave participants indifferent. The mix of emotion before, during and after suspension culminate.

3.4 Emotional release

Since most of my participants have been suspended for years and have lost count of how many body suspensions they have performed, it made me wonder what it is that always makes them return to the practice. Of course, the need to explore their body and limits is a prevalent factor the first time suspending, but the question is, why is there a need to repeat it? Undoubtedly, they reported a large number of benefits that come after hanging from the hooks that I will dive into in this part.

"First time I did body suspension, it was at the event in Rijeka, there was a Norway suspension team called Wings of Desire and they are a big influence in this world. They set up a lot of hygienic standards. My first suspension was a crucifix, two hooks in the back and two in each arm, like Jesus Christ but without any religious connotations, I don't really care about that, but this is how it looks. And then after suspension, I realized that no one can get on my nerves for like a month! Ha-ha literally, this was my only revelation then. And then I decided that I want to engage in body suspension."

Dino

My key informant, Ana, is the woman that introduced me to this world and helped me to understand and unwrap why this practice is essential. She was taught by Fakir Musafar and has a distinctive way of guiding people through their suspension. One of the other participants told me that when he met Ana, the question was not anymore "will I do suspension?" but "when will I do suspension?" I assume that it is because of the honesty and emotion that transfer to people when she talks about body suspension. She shared with me that one time during a convention she asked

to be hanged by two points beneath her chest, along the ribcage. This suspension is called resurrection.

According to Ana, when someone asks for this type of suspension, it means that they are going through a hard time in their life and need to find a way to survive it. While describing the experience, her eyes filled with tears and I could clearly see the emotional impact of the body suspension she feels even when just talking about it. She once said to me, "you deserve this, you've been studying body modification for quite a time now, I would like to gift this experience to you". At that moment, I trusted Ana entirely and it felt like if, given the opportunity, I would suspend right there to feel all of that. And that is the power that this experience holds over its practitioners. To many, it is an opportunity to overcome life challenges, mourn the loss of loved ones, and release the buildup of emotion that would not be released in any other way.

"I've suspended because family members have died and I just needed a quiet place to myself. There was about 15 years of my life I could not cry unless I was really drunk or hanging on hooks. That has changed in the last two years because I've been doing some other stuff, but the only place I felt safe enough and comfortable to cry was while I was on hooks for about ten years. And that was nice. I was like, I need to cry, I need to suspend. No, you need to learn how to cry, you know, suspensions are teaching you how to cry. Now go learn how to cry without hanging on hooks."

Andrew

Andrew told me that suspension is a teacher that shows you how to resolve your problems after the hooks. Hanging on the hooks alone can make you recognize the feeling within yourself and give you direction to capture it in everyday life. Sometimes, they do not heal, but help you heal yourself by showing what is possible by overcoming your limits. Every suspension is different, but there is a feeling that never changes, the feeling that makes practitioners come back is often that emotional release they find during the suspension. After that, curiosity is a factor.

"It's interesting, you start to see things differently, you are watching how other people's bodies react and you just want to know what is it like in some other position."

Ana

To many, the suspension is an exploration of their consciousness, an opportunity to face the things they do not want to deal with in everyday life, and it is enabling them to improve themselves physically and emotionally. However, it can also be presented as a liminal experience because one

can step through their own limit of preconception about what they are brave enough to do. To different people, these states can be achieved by alternating between two main approaches to body suspend. These approaches are heavily dependent on the practitioner and sometimes provide with different outcome. I explain them next.

While practicing body suspension, two of the most common ways are static or dynamic body suspension. Static body suspension means that your body will be relaxed and there will be no moving involved. That can be achieved either by the personal choice of the suspended person or by the number of hooks that restrict the person from moving. For example, the lotus position is very static because there are two to four hooks in the person's back and two to four hooks in their calves, enabling the cross-legged sitting position. However, after some time has passed in the position, a person can decide that they want to have ropes that are attached to legs cut, so they remain only on their back hooks. It depends on the suspendees to find the one that works for them in the moment and will enable them to achieve the goal they want. I read many of the body suspension experience and static body suspension are commonly known as the ones where one can dive dip into themselves and possibly have spiritual experience, while in many cases dynamic suspension is more fun and engaging, both to the public and to the performer.

At this point, the question left to aim the readers is: *Are you ready to fly?* So, who is exactly the target group to body suspension and is anyone suitable to live the experience? To sum up, in the next subchapter, I asked my participants about the type of people that perform body suspension. One of the participants shortly answered to this question with the headline of the next subchapter meaning that the only limit to the body suspension is the headspace the person is in.

3.5 If they can see themselves flying, they are already there

While meeting my participants and learning about what they do and how they got involved in modification, most of them are involved in the body modification industry. For example, some are full-time body piercers and do body scarification, some are tattoo artists, and some perform at different conventions and happenings involving body play and performing different acts, like sword swallowing or have acts that test their bodies' limits. Because of that, I wanted to know if body suspension is limited to people in the industry or is an experience that everyone can try.

In a physical sense, body suspension can do anyone that does not have a health problem because a healthy body can handle the stress well. By healthy body, it means mostly that person should not have any underlying medical conditions such as problems with blood clotting or anemia. What also can be a problem is that sometimes during suspension, skin can break, affecting the experience of suspension or making it impossible to perform. My participant, Ana, said that it is also essential to have a healthy lifestyle because she witnessed skin breaks on people who smoke many cigarettes and consume alcohol excessively.

One of the other limiting factors to do suspension, according to my participants, is the state of mental health. A few participants agreed that if you are not mentally stable at the time, suspension can be something traumatic and they do not want to provide someone with trauma.

"I can put a bandage on the wound, but the problem should be fixed before" Tam

According to my participants, the only other limiting factor is the individual's desire to do it. Rolf is a person that is very known in the body modification industry because of his dedication and unique looks. When I asked him about the limitations of body suspension, he firmly said:

"I think everybody can do it. Suspension is not the problem. I think the problem is us. People seek apologies."

Participants also felt strongly about consent. This is tied to abuse of substances, and they find that if a person is under the influence, they cannot consent, which they explain that body suspension without consent becomes torture and violence. Tam explained that you could not suspend a person that sees "horror" in the hooks. Even though he finds that his partner would benefit from suspensions, he would never pressure her.

"Suspension is both, very beautiful and very dark, it becomes dark if it is not something for you."
Tam

Body suspension should be done in the conditions of the persons that wants to perform them and it is the facilitator's duty is to make sure that body suspensions are done by the rules of the community. All my participants who also suspend other people have in common that they practice suspension in a safe and clean environment and educate themselves as much as possible to create

a welcoming and warm space for people that can see themselves flying which ensures that the individual can get the most of the experience.

After initial decision to the body suspension, what can go through one's mind is the reaction they can get when proposing the idea hang from the hooks to their close circle of people. Without a doubt, when describing what body suspension is, it can sound quite frightening to the people used to the social norms.

3.6 Outsider's reactions

Choosing to live in a body that is different from the norm has some consequences to the individual that has to perform in that body. Horton in her article, uses Becker's definition of deviance that and states that deviance is a product and a process of "right" and "wrong" done by social definition, and therefore, it is not a quality of the act that individual commits (2010).

When considering what deviance in terms of body suspension means to outsiders, I find this definition fitting. Even when I would explain my research topic to someone to who does not know what body suspension is I would get reactions that show signs of misunderstanding and judgments towards the practice.

While having a conversation with participants, the topic of public suspension often popped up. Even though body suspension is not illegal, it can be considered a violation of public spaces. One of my participants compared it to public nudity, he said that it is not illegal to be nude in public, but if someone tells you to cover up, you have to. When performing in public, my participants do it in secret and often very fast to avoid any possible legal trouble. However, they have encountered random people witnessing suspension with negative reactions.

As opposed to that, Horton uses Kitsuse's (1980) position stating that deviant identity does not have to be interpreted negatively or stigmatized by the person accused as deviant. Many practitioners of body suspension are aware that body suspension is not something common and that is not something everyone can see themselves doing, but throughout interviews, I found that they do not see their practice negatively in any way. Body suspension to them is simply a part of their daily lives.

What I also find essential is the positionality of my participants. They all have their unique approach to the practice of body suspension and were extremely open to sharing their knowledge with me, an outsider, a student who wants to learn something new. Through that, I find that stigma is being minimized by opening body suspension to a broad audience and representing it as something that is available to a variety of people not just a tiny part of people that society finds "deviant".

3.7 conclusion

In this chapter, I explained an initial attraction to the suspension and my motivations for it. Then, I introduced my participants through their entrance to the body suspension world and presented their insider perspectives on doing and witnessing body suspension. After that, I wrote about chemicals the body releases during a suspension, explaining why suspenders are unaware of the time during suspension and why the emotional dimension is vital in body suspension. Then I discussed the availability of body suspension, and finally, I wrote about suspension from the outsider's point of view. My goal for this chapter was to present body suspension as an experience that can positively impact some people and to recover the stigma that hooks from the back are violent when in the right perspective can be beautiful. I argue that body suspension can be a positive experience to open-minded individuals that seek additional thrill to their lives and by being done in the right conditions, considering the communities norms, it can be beneficial to explore their bodies and their minds.

In the next chapter, I focus on the experience of voluntarily pain in body suspension and how the experience forms individuals and is valued by them.

4. "That looks painful."

If you are aware of the history, value, and benefits of body suspension, how do you describe it simply to someone that has never heard of it? Personally, I would start my sentence with "there are hooks that are being pierced through a person's skin, and then you hang from them." Most of the time, people react with shock or confusion, which is understandable because, in essence, body suspension is precisely that. So, doesn't it hurt?

Conversations I had with my participants often accentuated that people would ask them if it hurt. "Of course, it hurts!" They would often say, "can you not see that I am literally hanging from the hooks?". Essentially, that is the answer. Body suspensions hurt and are painful, but there is so much more behind what meets the ordinary eye. Pain has many meanings and expressions, and in practices like this, it is crucial to deconstruct pain and unwrap the meanings it has to some people.

In this chapter, I write about the meanings and perceptions of pain among body suspension practitioners. First, I analyze the language they use to describe body suspension sensation and if body suspension can be used as a therapy for some people. Later, I explain what happens when they overcome pain and if different body suspensions feel differently. Finally, to contextualize suspension relating to different body modification practices, I asked my participants if they could compare body suspension with some other practices.

In the first subchapter I focus on the sensation itself.

4.1 *The sensation*

Intentionally submitting yourself to a painful experience can have many benefits, according to my participants. I write about some of these benefits in the "wanna hang?" chapter, but in this chapter, I want to focus on experiences directly connected to pain. In this quote from Pomo, it is noticeable how pain is a part of the body suspension experience that cannot be ignored but it also should not be ignored. Pomo describes it beautifully, especially in the last two sentences:

"Some people do not like the pain and feel the pleasure of suspending. So, it also comes from another fact that is not fake. I think that it is a very personal experience for everyone. Nevertheless, I think pain is a step in the process. The pain and the fear and the pre-fear and the doubt. I think that is something that gives the experience so much power. It is so, so, so powerful and so, so strong because you prove to yourself that your mind tricks you, and you are stronger than that. And then the reward, chemical reward, spiritual reward. When you are in the air, it is like you are in this state where so much happens, and you go to other places. It makes the experience so fucking strong that it leaves a mark. It does leave the marks of the hooks, of course, but more importantly, it leaves a mark inside." Pomo

When asking my participants what they expected and felt about pain before trying body suspension, the typical answer was that it was more about testing limits than experiencing pain.

For some, it is a personal quest of being able to go through the experience. Even though Stefano never did body suspension, he is a photographer that dedicated a part of his career to studying it in detail. Conversation with him went smoothly, and he was very informative.

"It changes your life. I think that the first time you suspend, you go in there saying to yourself, oh, no, I am not able to just go through this and not strong enough. I am not resilient enough. Actually, you are. Furthermore, your skin is another thing that mechanically tells you that your body can sustain that kind of experience. Moreover, from that point of view, it changes because it gives you another kind of perspective on your body and your pain threshold, your reaction interaction with pain."

Stefano

This is not an individual experience, but it is something that was repeated in the interviews I did. Rolf is a German man that is very known in the body modification world. He told me that he never really thought about pain in the body suspensions. He instead thought about his ability to do it.

"I would say it is not pain, you can say it is a pain, but it is not pain what people think. It is a different pain, not a pain that really hurts. I would say pain is not pain, and it is a different pain."

Rolf

This sentence can initially sound confusing, but I find that it perfectly sums up the experience of pain in body modification. Even though none of my participants neglected the objectivity of the pain in doing body suspension, they differed it to the everyday experience of pain. The main difference between the types of pain my participants explained is that the pain in body suspension is controlled rather than accidental or purposely hurtful, which makes all the difference.

Because of this control over individuals' bodies and knowing what is about to happen next, my participants agreed that pain is something that can definitely be resisted in favor of what is about to come. One of my participants, Tam, said that for him pain is a "necessary evil" that brings him discomfort which is the critical part. He also accentuated that the point is that during body suspension person needs to be aware of surroundings and know that everything is planned and in order.

Regarding control of pain and surroundings in body suspension, the moment's importance was often mentioned. An individual can often escape to body suspension as a way to break their daily routines and try to find spiritual relief in experiencing the present fully. In the context of body

suspension, pain is reconstructed as a positive experience with the potential for self-exploration. In the community, pain is constructed as "a transcendent, personal, and spiritual experience that can offer possibilities for enlightenment, journey, and self-transformation" (Horton 2013).

"Pain keeps you at the moment... Pain is something that is designed not to be ignored, and so it keeps you there. Many of my experiences with pain revolve around that, so that I can relate to that quite a lot. Moreover, pain is something that anchors you to the moment. It is the same kind of thing as meditation. Nevertheless, in a forced way. And in a very restricted kind of environment."

Stefano

Relating to that, Bruno, one of the pioneers of contemporary body modification and leading influences in body suspensions, explained it in a way that after doing body suspension, the person feels safer and more self-confident to face daily reality and difficulties that can be a form of therapy. The question that emerged was if body suspension can really be used as a therapy and while I do not give an absolute answer nor it is my intention to, in the next subchapter I discuss the relevance of body suspension in therapeutical form.

4.2 So, can body suspension be used as a form of therapy?

I found that the question of using body suspension as a form of therapy is complex and that there is no one answer. One part of my participants said that suspension could be used as a form of therapy, while the other part was not exactly sure.

One of the most common mentions during my interviews is that body suspension has been of great help to people that engaged in self-harm/self-destructive behaviors. I find that it is very connected to the sense of control mentioned earlier.

"The moment I sat down to get my back pierced for a suspension, that destructive behavior of being a cutter or all that stuff that I got from my teens just kind of went away the moment I got down to have more of an intentional experience with pain rather than just frustration, a focus, you know?"

Andrew

Luca believes body suspension can be used as a form of therapy because it turns pain into pleasure. He also compares it to some BDSM practices, saying that having pain in control is an easy way to control your "instinct." Accordingly, Pomo finds suspensions healing, allowing one to let go of

built-up emotions because he says that during body suspension, *"you are in your most vulnerable place."*

On the other side, Tam felt very strongly about how suspension cannot be used as a form of therapy. He said he would never do body suspension if his head were a "mess" because he wants a positive experience.

"It is not a mental health fix. You have to be in the right state to get the most. Otherwise, you are in complete pain and no enjoyment." Tam

To conclude, it is not my attention to discuss therapeutical benefits of body suspension, if there are any, but it can be a question that can lead furthermore research. It is evident that body suspension can have a healing effect to bodies or minds of its' practitioners, but without theoretical background and extensive research I can not support neither hypothesis.

In terms of pain experience, reportedly my participants informed me that pain elevation is dependent on the type of body suspension that is being performed. Furthermore, according to the participants of body suspension, different suspension spots have different pain levels. The most common first suspension is a coma, where there are two to four hooks pierced through the person's back. This suspension is found to be in perfect balance between being painful but not too extreme for beginners. I asked one of my participants, that also performs body suspension on different shows, if he had done everybody suspension position since he had tried many, and he answered that he had not done everything. The reason for that is that there needs to be practice when wanting to try a new position, and also, new positions are being invented. So, I asked him if he could explain to me how different positions feel:

"You know, you can almost tell in the texture of the skin when you have done it a while, you can go, okay, this place is going to be more painful than this place. Moreover, it is just purely from the texture of the skin, you know? Even with the upper back, moving just a few centimeters away will give you a drastically different response. The chest and stomach are the first ones where you go out that are going to pinch. Places that hurt the most, the chest, was a real bad chest. Chest, for me, was the actual skin pulling. I mean, that was a lot. However, it was not unbearable. What was weird about the chest is that the rest of my body, from my head to my toes, felt like it was on fire."

Andrew

Pomo continues:

"You feel so many things in suspension, sometimes depending on the position, it is hard to breathe in some positions. They can be really just uncomfortable. They can be really painful. When I do suicide, I can normally stay as long as I want, as long as I am not bored, and play and enjoy it because at some at some point, I do not feel pain anymore I just feel like this sensation of being pulled. And it is like lots of adrenaline and lots of, I do not know, just this the hook high and you are playing, that is really fun, it is really good. It is very relaxing. You can meditate." Pomo

While heavily dependent on the individual's experience, there are some common understandings of what parts of the body that hurt more. Next, I wanted to find out if my participants have ever experienced something similar to body suspension and if they did, what was it?

4.3 Is there anything similar to body suspension?

It is it is going to be an experience that is totally different from anything you'll ever have. Whether you have had tattoos, whether you are you've been to the military or you work out or you do really crazy, hard stuff all the time. It's its own thing. Mm-hmm. You know, I've had people who are like, you know, I'm a you know, I'm really big into S&M community. I'm like, I don't care. And then other people, like, I've got really heavy tattoos and big piercings and like, don't matter. You know? And then another person's like, I've had natural childbirth and I'm like, Awesome, can you hang by? Looks like a different thing altogether, you know? So, it's a beautiful challenge. Suspension is a beautiful challenge.

Andrew

While some of the participants stated that body suspension is completely unique experiences, other ones did not agree. Dino explained that he would get the same intense feeling while doing extremely long and painful tattoo sessions. During them he would concentrate on the pain rather than ignoring them and stated that he would project the same feeling that body suspension provides.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced voluntarily pain of body suspension as an extreme sensation that my participants accept and welcome to have. Pain is an important part of the body experience that

enables them to get benefits they expected. Voluntarily pain of being suspended is also a way of testing one's limits and dependent on the person's individual desires. What makes the context of pain different is the context in which pain is occurred and that happened to be the most distinctive point in comparing the voluntarily and involuntarily pain. Next, I argued if body suspension can be used as a form of therapy and instead of giving a conclusion, I decided to presented different views on the topic. Lastly, to some practitioners the experience of body suspension is unique, while to others the same sensation can be achieved by some other form of extreme body modification.

In the next chapter, I go beyond personal experiences and focus on the body suspension community as a whole. I unravel the values by which community stand by and put it in the context of society.

5. Longing for connection

When thinking about personal life, it is often hard to dissociate oneself from the influence of other people in our lives and the society we live in. One can often be unhappy with their surroundings or extremely satisfied with their social circle. For most, living in an understanding environment that can fulfill individual needs is crucial. Nevertheless, what happens when the case is that people around you do not share your needs, and you need to seek them elsewhere?

In this chapter, I share how my participants got involved in body modification, eventually leading them to body suspension. Finally, I write about the beginnings of contemporary body suspension that formed a community worldwide and connected people that found mutual satisfaction in suspending their bodies. For these individuals, body suspension presented a safe space that brought them closer together and allowed their personal growth and a sense of belonging that produced a shared identity.

5.1 Beginnings...

Few of my participants are considered "the old guard" of contemporary body suspension, and those are the people that started to get involved in body modification in the 1990s by experimenting with piercing and eventually doing it professionally. Path to professional body piercing then was undoubtedly more challenging than today because of the lack of connection and education that

social media provides today. If you wanted to become a professional body piercer, it was a system of success and failure, along with reaching out to a few respectable people in the industry that wanted to share their knowledge and educate the younger generation.

Bruno is one of those people. He is a professional body piercer from Italy that has been involved in professional body piercing since 1994. He explained that they were only a few magazines that intrigued him enough to start practicing with himself and his friends. At the time, there was only one company selling needles and specific kinds of jewelry that Bruno could use. Eventually, his passion grew more substantial, and he decided it was the right thing to dedicate himself to. With time he got the chance to do his apprentice in London back in the middle of the nineties, for which he says, at the time, it was the best thing to do in Europe.

Similarly, there is an anecdote that Ana told me about. In her beginnings of body piercing, she said that she was fascinated by individuality and wanted to stand out when a "brilliant" idea came to her mind, which was to pierce her elbow. Of course, the piercing was rejected and she learned a lesson that not everything that can be pierced should be pierced, but for a very brief moment, her new accessory made her unique.

Little by little, most of these people connected through different body modification conventions held in Europe and got the opportunity to meet each other and share their passions. What connects these two stories and most of my participants is that they were entirely ready to follow their passions, even if that meant leaving their birth towns and countries in need of finding ways to meet their curiosity and passion somewhere in between education and giving importance to their work.

5.2 Establishment of the community

I wrote already about individual introduction to body suspension in chapter 4. So now, I will concentrate on how the community built itself and what ensured its longevity.

Have Fjell is a Norwegian fakir and artist who explores the body's limitations in relation to pain. I contacted him through social media, and while he did not have time to be my participant, he was kind enough to gift me three books published by Pain Solution media that encapture the journey to contemporary body suspension, among other things. Similar to my participants, his introduction

to body suspension started with the book *Modern primitives*, photographs of Fakir Musafar and sealed with *Traumatic Stress Discipline (TSD)*, and Allan Falkner. Allan Falkner, also known as Lizard Man, is the founder of *Traumatic Stress Discipline*, the first (contemporary) body suspension group formed worldwide and founded in Dallas, United States. He has a long and established history as being of the first apprentices of Fakir Musafar and is considered to bring body suspension to the mainstream. Modeled by that, Have Fjell formed his body suspension group called *Wings of Desire*, and at about the same time, there were other suspension groups in England.

This is important because all of the participants accentuated the importance of the existence of these groups early in the making of contemporary body suspension, and with conversations I had with each of them, I realized that my participants know each other and respect each other. This is worth mentioning because my participants mentioned other participants by themselves without me saying anything about it before. Remember, my participants are from Croatia, the United States, Italy, Germany, Brazil, and England. Moreover, even with those geographical distances, there are a lot of personal relationships, friendships, and love for the discipline they share.

"Suspension means community," summarized Andrew.

5.3 A moment shared

So how does the body suspension community recognize its members and create their space? Let us discuss the body itself first. Even though the original pain of doing the suspension disappears, a permanent mark in the form of a scar is left on the body, on the place where the pain and procedure were happening. Mark left on the body can be a reminder that something "real" happened in that same space (Green 2011:385). Being left with that mark, especially if it is on a visible part of the body, can lead to people commenting, looking, or touching it. Sometimes, the reason for (unwanted) commentary is because most people do not have something like that on their body and/or because they would never have something like that. Besides that, sometimes, the reason for speaking up is that they have precisely the same thing.

If that happens and the commentator does have the same mark, a scar from performing body suspension at that same space on the body, chances are that both of you have similar experiences regarding pain and that procedure. So even though the core of body suspension experience is very individual, there are some commonalities concerning psychological pain.

The second that is recognized between people engaging in conversation they "shared movement inwards setting the stage for intimacy and community" (Green 2011:391). I assume that there is a precise understanding and bond between the people with those body marks because it sets the ground for conversation and can be a good starting point in engaging. That assumption stands correct for my participants and the conclusions I gathered for several reasons. One is an example that my participant Ana described, and that was a shared opinion between my participants:

"I do not think you can be a good provider of body suspension experience if you have never suspended yourself, I had situations where people that never suspended were providing aftercare to just suspended people, and they did not have the sensibility to them as they would have if they suspended. They were too harsh."

This can be used to justify multiple points. One is respectability in the community, which means that if you do something to another, you must do it too. Furthermore, you need to look, behave and perform as discipline orders because that brings a complete understanding of the practice and ensures trust between people in the community. Connected to that, if you fulfill this set of unsaid rules, you play your role of facilitator of body suspension well and help set community standards. Lastly, as some suspension spots on the body are more intense in sensation than others, there is an understanding in the community that a person with specific marks on the body has been through some different stages in life.

For example, resurrection suspension, that consist of two points on each side of the ribs, can indicate that person was going through some rough times and needed to process it through body suspension. Alternatively, marks from having dozens of hooks aligned can mean that person has had a performance and entertained the artistic side of body suspension. Nevertheless, body suspension marks are a conversation opener, and with people in the community, they are not just scars but more – an indicator that this person knows what they are talking about, setting the roots of the community deeper.

5.4 Habitus

In Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977), Pierre Bourdieu introduces the term habitus, which refers to a pattern of practices and ideas that each society gradually establishes in its members.

Through habitus, one can discern "structural affinities," for example, between the fields of art, science, or politics, and by that, read the overall map of the values of a particular culture.

Therefore, habitus refers to a "subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (page 86). The use of habitus in sociology and other social sciences is very versatile, and I find it fitting in the context of building community and shared sets of beliefs in the community of body suspension. These internalized structures and schemes of perceptions that Bourdieu introduces structure world views of all subject's part taking in a group, in this case, the community of body suspension.

"There is very often a social kind of element that plays a role in suspension, both in a good and in a bad way... Furthermore, definitely with the community, there is a massive element of what are the kind of people that go to a suspension event. And just by talking about suspension events, you always talk about social interaction, a social environment where there is a very deep connection that forms surrounding an event. And it's very intimate. You know, the perception of just being is something that you go through. There's no way nobody else is feeling the same thing as you are feeling in that moment. And so that's the very fascinating thing about the fact that people that underwent that suspension know about the feeling. And there's a very low threshold of empathy. I can see people experiencing something similar as the suspender." Stefano

Furthermore, individuals that share a habitus seemingly have their own individual pathways that led them to be a part of a certain group, but these still occur within the same habitus but are retold by the terms of the individual. This circles right back to the very unique but still very similar personal stories of my participants that had similar path to body suspension community.

5.5 Connection in disconnection

Many of my participants accentuated the need to "disconnect from modernity" and chose to be a part of some of the body suspension events happening in nature, without using technology. In these events, they concentrated on spirituality and building tighter bonds with other suspenders. When deconstructing these events, lack of possession of materialistic stuff or obeying the social norms can be replaced with belonging. When explaining this, a lot of my participants refer to the word

“primal” as if there was something that they wanted to escape from in their everyday lives. Being primal to some of my participants means that they are completely surrender to the community and the event they are currently being a part of and compliantly focusing their minds and their bodies to the sensation of body suspension. So even when contemporary body modification changed from the indigenous practice, this can be considered a form of “rite of passage” when an individual becomes a part of certain group that protects them and their status is not questioned anymore.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I introduce the ways in which many of the practitioners of body suspension connected and formed relationship all over the world. I separate the respect of the community as an important factor in deepening one’s status in the community. This connects to the shared sense of belonging that appears when individual has recognized the scars that are left after performing body suspension that can be used to solidify arose connection. This builds sense of belonging in the individuals and leads to forming a habitus. Habitus that the performers of body modification share is deeply rooted in the unsaid set of practices, rules and values that the group share and creates a common space. Lastly, I argue that the need to escape the modernity can be connected to the rite of passage to solidify the concept of habitus. Furthermore, individual’s demand disconnection may be the remains of the indigenous practice that also builds up to the group sharing a safe zone in a controlled environment.

In the next chapter, I bring the spotlight to the labor of body suspension. The practice itself requires a lot of the time, knowledge and patience that it’s practitioners kindly ensure. I try to research behind the scene and find sociological concepts that explains the labor of body suspension.

6. Labor of love

One of the most rewarding experiences while writing this thesis was that after each conversation/interview I had with my participants, I felt a rush of adrenaline and resulted in one of those "life is beautiful" epiphanies that, for me, usually come after indulging in conversation that is fruitful for my thoughts. Furthermore, the pure passion and commitment to the discipline of

body suspension are attractive to this group of people I had a chance to interview. So, when I heard that one of my participants called body suspension "Labor of love," I became intoxicated with the idea and wanted to dedicate a chapter to deconstructing the meaning of labor in body suspension.

In this chapter, I introduce the idea of labor, and its anthropological significance while connecting it to the emotional labor of facilitators of suspension and their relationship with the person they are suspending. Next, I introduce suspending the body in a political context to interpret the suspension experience as non-profitable in terms of money and why practitioners of the discipline think that that it is necessary.

6.1. Labor itself

Labor is typically used in conjunction with capital as a social science concept to refer to historical circumstances in which work has some relationship to the process of capital accumulation. Many different types of relationships have been investigated that unwaged link work (communal, unpaid, volunteer, affective, unregulated tasks) and even non-work (unemployment, leisure, idleness) with capitalist accumulation processes, going beyond the understanding of labor as a wage relationship with the owners of the means of production that enables workers to make a living. The numerous ways that labor is related to capital remain central to this expansion of the definition of labor. The bravery to call something labor of love must mean that there is a notion that that labor those not fit in in mentioned categories, or at least it is not considered "true" labor to my participants in the capitalistic sense that money earned by labor is covering one's living expenses (Narotzky, 2018).

"Some people think that suspension can make your money okay. Occasionally you can pay your bills by suspending other people or doing performances. I have seen maybe two people be able to survive purely on suspension, and they are a single person that travels, which means they are not paying rent, know they live out of a suitcase or they live out of a backpack and they are doing suspensions. I've seen that happen for a short period of time. Um, it's some side income, but you're not going to, you're not going to make a living off just doing suspensions. I've seen a lot of people try to do that, and it just doesn't work out for some reason. You know?" Andrew `

It is not to doubt that body suspension takes a lot of emotional and physical labor from their facilitators, mainly because an average suspension takes a few hours per person as it includes preparing the space, disinfection of the space, tools, and suspensee, piercing the skin and

eventually helping the person pull themselves up in the air. It also takes much emotional labor because it requires facilitators and suspendees to form some sort of connection. It is also worth mentioning that facilitators of suspension need to have deep knowledge about the procedure of suspension itself, human skin, and what to do in an emergency situation, all knowledge gained through labor.

In academia, the English-speaking population differentiates the terms "work" and "labor" defining labor as an activity of humans that relates to capitalistic relations of production. On the other hand, work is the remainder of humans' energy to complete the tasks in the non-capitalistic spheres. (Narotzky, 2018). Those can be tasks performed by mothers or other family-related tasks. However, the idea of work broadly covers non-market-oriented functions that are "performed in the margins and interstices of the capitalist market system or in non-capitalist historical or contemporary societies" (Narotzky, 2018).

"You don't get rich from suspension; you almost pay for suspension. The money I get from suspension I invest in suspension. It's something that people do for love; it's always developing. It's a passion. I think it was (name of the friend (that said suspension is the last anti/capitalistic weapon. You never see profit. People do it because they really love it. They want to get it done; they invest in it. I do it sometimes for the sake of doing it and I invest my money into it." POMO

In these terms of what Pomo described, is it fair to call suspension work or are is term insufficient all together? If you asked a parental figure if taking care of their child was work, rarely would you hear a yes to the question, and the reason for that could be the negative connotation of work or labor itself. In a hyper productive society like today is, there is rarely space for the passion that requires much money to perform, which body suspension is.

"It's much hard work. It's a lot of hard work and focus. And when you think about all your responsibilities of being a technician, if you are doing suspension on somebody else. It is a lot of responsibility. You know, I've had Tattoo artist friends, professional long term tattoo artist friends would go out with me to suspend them. They're like, Dude, why are you only charging this much? the amount of attention and care and you know, all the other things that are required to do a suspension. Like, if I was doing that in tattoo, it was like I'd be charging like six, \$800 for a four-hour suspension. I'm like, that's just not in the budget. You know, people can't afford a price that

high, I mean, the only that people would be hanging are, you know, the rich people, So, it's a for free. Almost everybody I know is that kind of a practitioner. It's a labor of love. "ANDREW

"If I could, I would do it completely free because I am sharing the experience that changed my life, and the lives of people I connected to. It's a shared experience that connects me to the community. I don't do suspensions to make money." Tam

I find it interesting that Andrew mentioned that if suspension were something that costed a lot of money, it would only be available to “the rich”. This separation of “rich” and “everyone else” can be connected to the idea that body suspension is an experience and it allows a regular person an escape from modernity to somewhere else. Also, this classicistic divide can imply that facilitators of suspension are aware of the capitalistic notion of labor and choose to not be a part of it. After all, when was the last time you got something for free?

Either way, facilitators of body suspension are aware of the labor that is needed to conduct a successful body suspension, so in the next subchapter I focus on of the most important parts of a body suspension, and that is the relationship between the provider of suspension and suspendee.

6.2 Relationship between the facilitator and the suspendee

Regarding emotional labor that I mentioned above, the relationship between the facilitator of body suspension and the suspendee is extremely important, as my participants described.

"It's a very intimate experience, you know. Even if they're technically good at everything, if they just have a personality you don't like, you're not going to have a good experience because it's very personal, you know, and you want to share stuff like that with somebody you trust in, somebody you get along with, you know. So, I mean, that's about it, it's not really like making love to somebody, but it's very personal. You want somebody who's going to respect your space, somebody who is going to listen to you and, you know, understand where you're coming from. Those are the most important things. You know, you don't even want an asshole driving you in an Uber. Do you know what I mean? Let's say you have somebody that it is somebody that you don't agree with in life, but there are good uber driver. Okay, that's fine. You know. But with this, the connection is here so you can have a better experience if you have a better connection. That's it. "
Andrew

Many of my participants stressed the importance of having connection and trusting the person that is suspending you. Often, different facilitators have different approaches and, in the final, choosing of your facilitator, what is most important is that one is aware of what kind of experience they want and if the character of facilitator responds to their own.

"Yeah, it is definitely very important because you basically give your body to them. So, it's definitely important that you trust them, that you know who they are. "Luca

Here is how Tam described himself as a facilitator of the body suspension and how we adjust his character to different personalities:

"When I am doing body suspension, I am making a decision to be your best friend, flirt or something else. I need to decide who you are as a person and I only have a half an hour to do so. I need to read you and lead you. I cannot teach anyone to learn how to read people and be in the right headspace. I am lucky because I have it naturally. The problem is that I tailor myself and you (suspended person) develop a bond towards me, but I do not create a bond with them because they do not get 100% of me and they do not know me. That's why there are some practitioners that say that they are counselors, I just believe I am someone good that can give you that experience. TAM

You must believe in this person, if you don't believe in this person, it's not good at all. It's suspension. I see it this way, you go to the doctor - you must be a patient. The doctor tells you to do so. Also, if you are a suspendee, your relations with people must be with respect to. Because if you don't trust the people around you will get problems. Rolf

This relationship can be seen as an emotional labor and one of my participants, Ana, described body suspension as a selfish act. She couldn't tell me how for a few hours in the process of conducting a body suspension, everything has to be completely dedicated to the person suspending to provide them with the most beneficial experience. The facilitator itself, becomes an extension of the practice and is a guide that never leaves the suspender's side consulting them with anything. The fact that some of the facilitators call themselves counselors means that they are aware of the emotional labor that is crucial to the process.

In the next subchapter, I place suspending body in a political context and explore the connection of suspended body and the pre-existent societal norms.

6.3 Body in the social context

Judith Butler investigated how etymological developments make our reality in common through the discourse acts we take part in daily. By unendingly citing the traditions and philosophies of the social world around us, we order that reality; within the performative act of talking, we "join" that reality by sanctioning it with our bodies, but that "reality" in any case remains a social construct. As mentioned, chapters above, recognizing a "marked body," meaning the body that has suspension marks, can open a conversation between people who recognize them. Opening that discourse, the social world of suspendees opens in a way that reality is being constructed towards their interests.

In this part, I argue about the performative body that connects to the habitus concept and building a community. The performative body uncovers an office fortification for those not absorbed by standards or recognized as substantial or "proper" human lives and still requests the correct to be as they are without being subjected to separation and viciousness. Even though people inside the body modification community share connectives and habitus, it is still a community that opposes social norms, meaning that body suspension is not a normative experience anyone goes through. Individuals performing body suspension is a space that is controlled in front of an audience that, for example, paid the tickets to see body suspension performance is different from performing body suspension in an open space where the public could harshly judge the act. Opening the body suspension community towards the general public could back-lash and make the member ostracized from society.

Throughout the history of political and philosophical thought, property relations have organized and worked the ethical concepts of "person," "self-belonging," "agency," and "identity," and the administration of property possession and self-sufficiency are still joined to colonialist, capitalist, patriarchal, hetero-normative, battle ready and ethno-nationalist legacies (Butler, 2018). When put in this way, my participant's statement about body suspension being one of the last anti - capitalistic weapons it may be true to this particular community because it is their way of fighting the societal norms, they find oppressive or unfitting.

In this sense, it may be by one means or another groundbreaking to take after a problematization. By uncovering ourselves to the other, we commit ourselves to a community of political resistance and transformative activity (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013) where the "I" incorporates "us" and where a collective and mortal shape of organization picks up the drive to alter the status quo and also make the community bond grow more robust.

So, when there is a body suspension event, can it be viewed as a political act? I argue that to politically assign the bunches of individuals who gotten to be differentially uncovered or labeled by society to damage, demoralization, or similar it gets to be related to the term "precarity" "‘precarity’ describes exactly the lives of those whose ‘proper place is non-being’" (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013:19).

Political performativity is affirmed and empowered in gathering in open space where, embodying as it were with their bodies, individuals endeavor for the correct to their ways of life and a future, caught on here not as it were individualistic terms but too in making the conditions for a common world to persevere.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I contextualize labor withing body suspension discipline and argue of the suitability of the term itself. I then explain the importance of money in the body suspension community and back it up with quotes from my interviewees. After that, I separate emotional work from physical work and present emotional work through the framework of the connection between the facilitator and the person who is suspended. Finally, I introduce the term performative body as a political act of the members of the body suspension community and connect it with the concept of habitus explained in the previous chapter. This results in members of the body suspension community challenging social norms and creating a safe space for individuals.

I used the concept of performative body to bridge between this and the last chapter because next, I concentrate on the performance of body suspension and the relationship between person performing body suspension and their audience.

7. It's showtime!

Body suspensions can be done in many different surroundings. They can be done indoors, outdoors, with a group of close friends or as a part of the show. Most of the participants of this study have done body suspension within different organizations or have been part of talent shows.

Until this moment, I have analyzed and described body suspension as a very intimate experience often done for the personal growth of the person suspending. However, even though that is true, body suspension can also be used as performance art, in which case it differs from suspension done in intimate surroundings.

In this chapter, I explain the difference between performing suspension and doing it in an intimate environment, and I explore the relationship between performer and audience.

7.1 To witness pain

Seeing a performance of body suspension can be an intense experience for the viewer. Jane Rada (2014) describes this as a way that an artist performing body suspension triggers a crisis in the audience, allowing critical examination of the social order by making pain visible. Indeed, there is no doubt that the performer is doing something painful. Hooks are being pierced through the skin in real-time, and the audience can see the authentic reaction of a person's face and body and witness the signs that something painful is happening. For example, there will be blood and possibly sounds of pain coming through the person's voice. This makes for an experience that cannot be fictionalized. Since suspending the body in the space follows the insertion of the hooks, performers do not just pretend to participate in such actions: they are part of them. This happens in real-time and is not a product of theatrical illusion.

When a performer puts themselves in pain willingly, in front of a relatively static audience, the performer has the agency. However, when it comes to more significant events where suspension takes place, the audience follows a set of invisible codes of behavior. Regarding of event being part of the ritual or entertainment, the sole event of the suspension makes those codes visible, therefore introducing the idea of choice to the witnessing audience (Rada, 2014.)

The audience witnessing a suffering body may cause a strong response, ranging from repulsion, confusion, comfort, panic, compassion, or some sort of combination of the mentioned.

In everyday private situations, first instinct to such happening from a different person would (probably) result in the need to provide help and proper care for the person hurting. Such situations instinctively call people to intervene. With the body suspensions, there is a different code of conduct. The whole point of witnessing body suspension is that the audience agrees to not to intervene. The pain inflicted on and endured by the suspendee is conscious and consensual. This is the main factor separating the audience's need to intervene in witnessing a person suffering. The culminating feature of suspension performance is disruption of social conduct due to the consenting nature of performer's act.

Here, the audience faces both collective and internal conflicts over how to position their presence in relation to the suspender's pain. Witnessing another person's pain is an experience of the internal conflict between the inherent impulse to help and the expectation to watch a given situation. Even though that is a passive way of intervening, it is still powerful enough to make an impact. The question of witnessing the body suffering illuminates the larger social implications of passivity, agency, and ethical behavior.

All the study participants participated in body suspension as witnesses and the suspendees. Stefano is the only exception, with witnessing and documenting many suspensions but never did one himself.

"You know, when you witness some kind of a painful event going on, a lot of our experiences are shared experience based upon the subject's reaction. So, when you see someone, people with serious injuries going through them like, no, no, it is okay, it's not serious, I experience that as a way less frightening or alarming kind of situation ... that's my biggest memory of the first experience I had with the suspension. I was expecting something like people being pierced, expressing their pain, actually, and it wasn't happening. I was there and I was like, oh, well, wait, what's going on here? They're pretty much okay with this. And when they got actually suspended with the ropes, it was so easy going. They were smiling. I remember those smiles and thinking to myself, what is going on here? And that's something that I don't get yet and didn't experience firsthand. It's very, very interesting because it deconstructs, a lot of the preconceptions you bring from home. "

Stefano

This quote shows that witnessing a body in deliberate pain can trigger a revelation and defy certain social constructs. Not only does the audience want to see a person in pain, but it chooses not to intervene with the goal of creating new social codes.

The calmness of the suspendee's face calms their audience and creates a different perspective to a wounded body.

7.2 Performer's POV

Stoddard (in Rada, 2014) proposes a postmodern approach to Aristotle's catharsis. When the audience member witnesses a performer in pain, they position themselves as the "other" and "dis/identify" with the performance, only allowing themselves to testify the performance while emphasizing. This can happen because in body suspension performances, the audience is aware that the performer is going beyond just experiencing pain and that eventually, help will be provided after the performance. Rada (2014) states that the fact that it is inherent to the performer of body suspension not to express pain within the complex dynamics of performance context, it makes body suspension "unnamable and unknowable mystery of the phenomenal world".

Next, Andrew explains this liminal experience with his own consciousness during the performance. Indeed, it seems that something unnamable but by Andrew recognized as a "beautiful mess" is happening.

"I was the head technician for the suspension, which means I have to stay conscious even if I'm the one performing. So, I started slipping out into the beautiful mess and I was like, no, come back intact. You can't go. And I'm like, Shit. " Andrew

The performer often aims to translate the exact feeling to the audience. Andrew continued to describe to me his relationship with the public, saying that by choosing a show that scares, excites, or thrills him, he hopes that the feeling will go to the audience and the fact that he enjoys doing it makes the public respond.

Even though the idea of sharing the experience of suspension with the audience can be a large aspect of the overall event, my participants conclude:

“So, performance. The performances. Like, for me, they're art. And so, what are you doing art for if you're not doing it for yourself? You know? And so, like, I enjoy my show. ... I've done suspensions where, yes, I'm performing and I'm doing a thing and I'm in a character. But then when I close my eyes. This shows for me, even though I'm doing a performance. They don't see it. But it's in there for me. “

Andrew

Even though the performance of body suspension is a less intimate experience by default, it is still extremely intense and many of my participants were able to find individuality in performance. The performances itself can be exhausting to the mind and the body and when there are many shows lined up in a short period of time, it is important for the performer to rationalize the process and find the comfort they seek in body suspension in general.

“You know, because sometimes I'll commit to doing a show. Like many years ago, I suspended every week for six weeks. I suspended every week for six weeks. My body was exhausted. I was tired. And in performance, you don't miss a show. You show up. If there's nobody to cover you, you show up sick. Sorry, everybody. You sure do the damn show. Because you got the whole production relying on you. If you don't show up, the show doesn't happen. They don't get paid. You don't get paid. You do the show. I'm sick. I'm tired. I'm on week five and I'm shaking in the back room knowing I have to get up on stage when I should be in bed sick. What are you going to do? Your back already has holes in. You are sore and you are achy. You have nothing left in you, but you got to get up and perform. And you're sick. Then you realize. Oh. This gives me adrenaline. This, if I use it properly, can actually boost my immune system, which it does. After a while, continually doing it, but that works with tattooing or piercing or branding or just tiny little cuts. If you're constantly healing, it actually elevates your immune system. “

Andrew

Luca is a performance artist based in London and except for body suspension, he has done different kinds of extreme body performances and plays. When I asked him about meaning of the performance of body suspension, he said:

“Well, to perform for my own pleasure. Like I said, it's more about controlling my body. Empower my body. Time is merely. Music is about your performance. Art is about show. You know, just your use of suspension. I mean, in my case, for example, I use suspension in performance art, and I have a concept behind it. For example, right now I am working on a piece which is about how institution's control of the body and how to produce sex prevention, not through scientific

discourses. And at a certain point of the performance, I use suspension. So, in this case, the suspension is connected to the idea of institution and the body, not the relationship between power and the body and sexuality. “

While finding intimacy within self while performing body suspension to an audience, it is still different than performing in an intimate environment. In the next chapter, I look into this difference through the perspective of my participants.

7.3 Performing vs. intimacy

Pomo continues on performing suspension with a group of close friends:

“You might be like an unusual attraction to a person passing by. But you are not performing. You are doing your thing with your friends. And it's kind of a closed cycle, almost like, I don't know, it kind of makes a little power out of energy. I don't know. It is strong. I always like this.”

As I stated before, Stefano is the only one of my participants that never performed body suspension, but attended many events documented and photographing the process about which he published a book. This is how he explained the body suspension performance from a spectator's point of view:

“The one of two friends that introduced me to the suspension, is a longtime friend of mine. And between 2011. and 2015., he was going through a peculiar experience. We were trying to express body suspension on a visual and a critical level. It was weird. Thing was a good time. And so, I'm on both sides of this [insider and outsider] because I can see the differences, the private suspension, you know, impeccable.

There was one guy we were in the in the woods and we were like on a private event with a lot of people. And there was this kind of audience that was still kind of, you know, an insider audience. It was not like in Oslo, at the public hours, people can get in the venue and just look at what's going on and take pictures and interact with people. It was very different because, you know, there was us, it was the group, a close circle of people in that specific place where nobody goes. And so, it was not really an audience, but at the same time, remarkable.

There was one guy that explicitly kind of suspended just to be seen. It was not a performance. He was not a performer, but he did that with a mask on. And he was wearing an outfit. There's a lot

of difference when you do it as a as a performance. It's just about, you know, engineering the kind of things that are displayed. And it's very different because like in Italy, we have a leader group that does this kind of things that I don't like at all, because they do it as a performance that shows off the gory kind of the shock value of it, then the very shocking side of bleeding on the stage and so on. And I found nothing, nothing at all of this kind of things in private suspension or even in in big events where people pay to be suspended to experience the suspension. So, they are entirely different worlds.”

7.4 Conclusion

With this chapter I finish of my thesis. I look into the relationship between the audience and performer of body suspension. To witness pain and choose not to intervene is a contract made by the specific atmosphere the public and the performer are in. Audience absorbs the performance as a disruption of social norms by checking the environment and believing that everything that is happening is controlled and staged. This concept can be connected to the concept of performing body from the previous chapter as it accentuates the political dimension of performing body suspension. Next, I introduced performer's point of view and their ability to switch the environment in their minds and rationalize the surrounding. The vital thing in the performance is the performer's ability to translate the feeling. Moreover, Luca discusses the importance of body suspension art as a critic of institution. Lastly, I present the differences between performance of body suspension and doing a suspension in an intimate environment.

8. Concluding remarks

To write this thesis was one of the most challenging experiences in my academic life. I would like to express my gratitude to all the people who agreed to participate in this research and whose kindness and openness contributed to the creation of this master thesis. Their knowledge is extremely valuable and I am beyond happy that I had the opportunity to enter this community as an outsider, and I hope that I have presented their work and stories in a worthy way. I find that I managed to fulfill the aim of this thesis and present the world of body modification as welcoming, warm and beautiful. I hope that this thesis can inspire some of the future students to search a little

bit more outside the box and gather courage to go step out of their comfort zone. I will briefly sum up my thesis in this last chapter and make suggestions for new research that should be done.

The body suspension as a practice has a rich history that comes from different parts of the world and the evaluability and benefits to its practitioners has proven by the longevity and number of people that educate and dedicate themselves to the discipline. I unwrapped and summarized the beginnings, the middle and current situation of body suspension community to give the reader a full picture and macro perspective so that after reading the thesis one can be able to observe the discipline from a macro perspective if wanted. I introduced the problematics of cultural appropriation and throughout this thesis readers can determine if the discipline today pays respect to its native beginnings. I concluded that the community keeps growing and more information is being available online which greatly helps young enthusiast to get in touch with experts that want to share their knowledge and keep the practice developing.

In the ethnographical chapters I explained an initial attraction to the suspension and my motivations for it. I introduced my participants through their entrance to the body suspension world and presented their insider perspectives on doing and witnessing body suspension. I wrote about chemicals the body releases during a suspension, explaining why suspenders are unaware of the time during suspension and why the emotional dimension is vital in body suspension. Then I discussed the availability of body suspension, and finally, I wrote about suspension from the outsider's point of view.

I wanted to present body suspension as an experience that can positively impact some people and to recover the stigma that hooks from the back are violent when in the right perspective can be beautiful. I argue that body suspension can be a positive experience to open-minded individuals that seek additional thrill to their lives and by being done in the right conditions, considering the communities norms, it can be beneficial to explore their bodies and their minds.

Regarding the pain, next I focused on the experience of voluntarily pain in body suspension and how the experience forms individuals and is valued by them.

Voluntarily pain of body suspension is often presented as an extreme sensation that my participants accept and welcome to have. Pain is an important part of the body experience that enables them to get benefits they expected. Voluntarily pain of being suspended is also a way of testing one's limits

and dependent on the person's individual desires. What makes the context of pain different is the context in which pain is occurred and that happened to be the most distinctive point in comparing the voluntarily and involuntarily pain. Next, I argued if body suspension can be used as a form of therapy and instead of giving a conclusion, I decided to presented different views on the topic. Lastly, to some practitioners the experience of body suspension is unique, while to others the same sensation can be achieved by some other form of extreme body modification. The aim of this chapter was to contextualize pain and give it deeper meaning so that it can be distinguished from everyday pain that occurs to most.

In the second part of my thesis, I go beyond personal experiences and focus on the body suspension community as a whole. I unravel the values by which community stand by and put it in the context of society. The second part of the thesis offers the readers to get a grasp of the whole discipline after getting familiar with the individual ones.

I introduce the ways in which many of the practitioners of body suspension connected and formed relationship all over the world. I separate the respect of the community as an important factor in deepening one's status in the community. This connects to the shared sense of belonging that appears when individual has recognized the scars that are left after performing body suspension that can be used to solidify arose connection. This builds sense of belonging in the individuals and leads to forming a habitus. Habitus that the performers of body modification share is deeply rooted in the unsaid set of practices, rules and values that the group share and creates a common space. I finish this chapter with an argument that the need to escape the modernity can be connected to the rite of passage to solidify the concept of habitus.

My most challenging chapter was the one about labor. I was very enthusiastic about how facilitators presented their work and wanted to go deeper, behind the scenes. I bring the spotlight to the labor of body suspension. The practice itself requires a lot of the time, knowledge and patience that its practitioners kindly ensure. I explained it with sociological concepts that concerns the labor of body suspension.

Later on, I contextualize labor with the discipline of physical suspension and discuss the appropriateness of the term itself. I explain the importance of money in the body suspension community and back it up with quotes from interviewees. I present the emotional work through the framework of connection between practitioners. Finally, I introduce the concept of the

performative body as a political act of the members of the body suspension community and connect it to the concept of habitus explained in the previous chapter. This leads to members of the body suspension community challenging social norms and creating a safe space for individuals.

In the last chapter of my thesis, I investigate how the audience interacts with someone performing body suspension. To watch someone in pain and not help them is a contract made between the public and the performer. The audience perceives the performance as disrupting social norms, examining the environment and believing that everything that happens is being controlled and orchestrated. This concept can be linked to the concept of the performing body Suspension. Next, I introduced the performer's point of view and their ability to change the environment in their minds and make sense of the surroundings. The most important thing in a performance is the performer's ability to express their feelings. Luca discusses the importance of body suspension art as a critic of institutions.

I believe that in the future it is necessary to look deeper into each of the topics covered in this research on a larger scale. it is necessary to have more participants of different ages and genders. What would make a bigger difference is if the researcher himself tried to be a part of the community. it would be interesting to read the autoethnography of members of the community and unpack the relationships with pain and the community itself.

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