1. Permanent body modification (in this literature) is defined as voluntary practices of piercing the body with a hollow gauge needle and inserting jewelry OR inserting permanent dyes under the skin for desired effect.

2. Current affairs television, magazines, photographic exhibitions and the general media have helped to boost permanent body modification to unprecedented popularity in the last decade.

3. Traditionally, cultural and social anthropology have included the study of ritual practices and body modification ornamentation in its domain. The great amount of research done on this subject has largely focused on traditional non-western societies; “primitive” people; simultaneously naked and adorned.

4. Sociologically, study of the body falls into two paradigms: a. the social-constructionist paradigm and b. the naturalist or reductionist paradigm. The a. paradigm informs us how society has “invaded,” “shaped,” “classified,” and made the body meaningful; the body is theoretical space and reduced to social forces. The b. paradigm assumes that social phenomena can be seen as direct and unmediated products of the body; that the complexities of social life are reduced to an unchanging pre-social body which forms the biological basis for social relationships and inequalities. In b. the social categories in life are considered natural phenomena.

5. It appears that in traditional societies, ritual body modification practices connect people and their bodies to the reproduction of long established social positions whereas in the west, body piercing seems to serve the function of individuating the self from society.

6. Research suggests that people in modern developed societies try to build and sustain a self identity. The erosion of grand religious and scientific narratives in the latter half of this century has undermined traditional meaning systems, stimulating in modern people a heightened reflexivity about life, meaning and death. Modern society (body in an enormous consumer culture) has organized the individual’s self to be reflexively understood in terms of its own embodied biography. The self and the body have become reflexively organized projects. The affluent west has established the tendency for the body to be seen as “unfinished” & “becoming.”

7. Research would indicate that the tattoo renaissance in the west was bought about by the professionalization of the practice; with increasing access to high quality tattoo resources that previously excluded groups of the middle class and women. This has helped to lessen the stigma on tattooing and broadens its appeal.

8. Much literature on piercing emphasizes the impact the practice has on an individual’s self identity and feelings of group affiliation. The individual might be able to establish a genuine mode of self-exploration which does not rely on current fashion dictates.

9. The human body, as medium, has a unique capacity for the integration of extremely individual and at the same time, extremely collective levels of experience. (See Biggs’ The Aesthetic of the Human Body)

10. Holtham pinpoints themes that emerge as her subjects were asked, “what makes you to do it?”
    a. Subjects’ relationship to their bodies.
    b. Sexual enhancement.
    c. Symbolic power.
    d. Ritual purposes and significant events
    e. Enjoying the process, liking the look: Aesthetics and Pleasure
    f. Tribalism
    g. Non-conformity