

Tattoos and piercings

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to another video for the British Council's LearnEnglish Teens website and their YouTube channel.

In today's video I wanted us to discuss the topic of tattoos and piercings, and, more specifically, whether they are seen as taboos in your society. Now, a taboo is something which usually has a negative connotation. It's sometimes even forbidden from a society or a group because of the bad associations that are connected with it.

Now, in Britain, in the 19th century, tattoos and piercings were actually seen as a taboo. A lot of the people who had these were either sailors, pirates, criminals, prisoners and people of a lower social class, so they were seen to be rebellious and going against the norms in society. But now we're living in the 21st century and that has all changed. The bad reputation that tattoos and piercings used to have no longer really exists that much in Britain. Pretty much anyone and everyone can have a tattoo, old and young, of any social class, any age, any background, really. Samantha Cameron, our ex-prime minister David Cameron's wife, actually has a tattoo on her ankle and I think that is quite unexpected for a lot of people.

I personally don't have any tattoos, but when I was a little bit younger I had quite a lot of piercings. I think I had something like fourteen or sixteen in total and those were a lot of piercings on my ears and also a couple on my body. And I remember when I was going through this phase of wanting lots of piercings, my mother, like, was completely confused. She didn't understand at all why I really liked piercings. And I think the reason why is because we come from two different cultures. So my mum was born and raised in Gambia, West Africa, and I have lived my entire life, or the majority of my life, in the UK, in Britain.

So, in Britain, like I said, in the 21st century, piercings and tattoos have become a form of self-expression. It's a way that we express our personality and our character, the same way that we use our clothes to do that. So, when I was fifteen at the time and I wanted all these piercings, I was actually trying to form an identity for myself. Perhaps even without knowing. And I think I really liked the idea of being alternative and a little bit rebellious and different, I guess. But the society that my mum comes from, their understanding and relationship with piercings and tattoos is completely different. She comes from a society and a culture that is more conservative perhaps, and also a generation that is more conservative, and their idea of identity is not related to piercings and tattoos. Identity comes from your family background, erm, which ethnic group you belong to, so it's very different from Britain, where we can use our clothes, our hairstyle, the colour of our hair, piercings, tattoos and even our car to express our identity.

I think how tattoos and piercings are perceived in different cultures and the purpose they serve in different cultures is really interesting. In some ancient cultures it was believed that tattoos actually had healing powers, so, you know, it's so interesting to see how a tattoo and piercing can be a taboo in one culture and it can be completely normal and acceptable in another. I'm very interested to hear what you all have to say on the topic. Do any of you have piercings or tattoos? Are tattoos and piercings seen as taboos in your society? And what do you personally think about piercings and tattoos? Comment below, let me know, and I'll see you in the next one.

Goodbye